

Emerging Gender Issues between Mentors and Protégés in a Principal Preparation Program

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In an effort to improve administrator mentoring programs, this study explored emerging gender issues between mentors and protégés enrolled in a university principal preparation program. Sixty-nine students (31 male and 38 female) were surveyed regarding gender considerations in selecting a preferred mentor, as well as the effect of gender on protégé discussions with mentors regarding school issues. Findings indicated that generally females preferred female mentors and males preferred male mentors. Other findings suggested that gender has an effect on educational issues that protégés discuss with their mentors.

Educational administration is a “traditionally male-identified educational domain” (Blount, 1998, p. 3). While women hold nearly 36% of elementary principal positions (Natale, 1992; Saks, 1992), only about 12% of secondary principals and superintendents are women (Futrell, 2002). Ironically, this “male-identified domain” emerges largely from the pool of classroom teachers even though over 75% are women (Shakeshaft, 1998). One might believe this occurs because men complete state certification requirements for administrative positions in greater numbers than women. This is not the case, however, as most university administrator preparation programs enroll more women than men (Shakeshaft, 1998). At the same time, a nationwide survey by Educational Research Service (ERS, 1998) indicated that school districts are experiencing difficulty finding qualified candidates to fill principal vacancies. Likewise, a study by Harris, Arnold, Lowery, and Crocker (2000) suggested that the complexities and demands of the principalship frequently influence students in principal preparation programs to not even apply for these positions. This has exacerbated the challenge for administrator preparation programs to focus not only on effectively preparing future principals, whether male or female, but also to find ways to encourage them to assume campus leadership positions (Brown, 2005; Murphy, 2002).

Thus, several organizations, including the Danforth Foundation, University Council for Educational Administration, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, have established major initiatives to support innovative principal preparation programs (Daresh, 1997) which implement models of field-based programs that emphasize the importance of university-

school partnerships (Daresh, 1997; Lashway, 1999; Murphy, 2002; Young & Petersen, 2002). In 2001, the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) guidelines incorporated the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards for accreditation and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, and specifically addressed mentoring in principal preparation programs in Standard 7 which requires that mentors be offered professional development to help guide the candidate throughout the intern experience (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2002). Responding to these national calls for mentoring programs, Texas, for example, has outlined mentoring requirements in its state standards (Texas State Board for Educator Certification, 2000).

One of the most significant field experience models has been assigning mentors to serve as guides to students in educational administration as they integrate theory and practice through the field-based learning process (Crow & Matthews, 1998; Daresh & Playko, 1992; Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000; Mullen, 2005; Mullen & Cairns, 2001; Pence, 1995). Twenty years ago, Kram (1985) outlined two basic mentoring functions: career which involves promotion, visibility, sponsorship, socialization and coaching; and psychosocial mentoring which emphasizes friendship, affirmation, modeling, counseling, and support. Mentoring was identified as critical for men's advancement in school administrative positions as early as 1978 and research is increasingly extending the critical importance of mentoring to women seeking leadership positions (Alston, 1999; Gardiner, et al, 2000). The purpose of this research study was to explore emerging gender issues between mentors and protégés enrolled in a university principal preparation program.

Benefits of Mentor Programs

Studies indicate that mentoring in leadership programs has been mutually beneficial to both the students being mentored as well as their mentors (Ellington, 2002; Gardiner, et al, 2000). Protégés develop higher levels of credibility, gain confidence, achieve greater awareness of strengths and deficits, and develop human resource skills and competence in their work. Additionally, Reyes (2003) found that students who had a direct-line administrator as a mentor were more likely to be placed as an assistant principal after one year of successfully completing principal certification requirements. At the same time, mentors identified sharing ideas, helping others grow in the profession, being inspired, and having an opportunity to analyze daily activities as benefits gained from participating in the program (Crocker & Harris, 2002). Another benefit identified by Gardiner, et al (2000) has been the opportunity to look at issues from a different perspective if, for example, a mentor and protégé experience different up-bringing, differ in racial-ethnic backgrounds, or differ in gender.

Roles and Activities of Effective Mentors

The roles and activities of mentors are varied, based primarily on the mentoring environment, as well as the needs and styles of the mentors and protégés. Lincoln (1999) suggested that mentor-protégé relationships have a wide range of roles that ultimately lead to collegiality and collaboration very much like that of a friendship. Additionally, Southworth (1995) recommended several activities for mentors to assist protégés, including considering and reconsidering recent events and issues, and facilitating the rehearsal of ideas, plans, and strategies with opportunities for protégés to try them out with a colleague whose opinion they trust. A review of the literature (Crow & Matthews, 1995; Daresh, 1995; Gardner, et al, 2000; Gordon & Moles, 1994; Head, Reiman, & Thies-Sprinthall, 1992; Lincoln; Southworth; Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2001) generated the following list of roles and activities for effective mentors. See Table 1.

Table 1. Roles and Activities of Effective Mentors

<i>Roles</i>	<i>Activities</i>
·Competent advisor	·Facilitates acquisition of new skills
·Trusted colleague	·Models continuous learning and reflection
·Listener	·Asks the right questions
·Sounding board	·Accepts new ways of doing things
·Encourager	·Facilitates development of leadership competencies
·Confidence builder	·Gives feedback
·Boss	·Provides career advice and strategies
·Gatekeeper	·Models effective performance of administrative duties
·Teacher	·Models effective communication with parents, students, teachers
·Friend	·Is available when needed

Mentoring is most effective when mentors provide a regularly scheduled time to meet, give immediate feedback, and are available to the protégé (Jones, Reid, & Bevins, 1997; Monsour, 1998). In this way, mentors emphasize that the learning process involves two-way communication, rather than the “one-way process implicit in the apprenticeship/pedagogic discourses. . .” (Jones, et al, p. 259). This two-way communication is built on a foundation of trust, a major factor in the mentor experience, so much so that trust is the pivotal concept on which the mentor/protege relationship will or will not flourish (Norris & MacGillivray, 1995).

Selection of Mentors

Matching the student with the right mentor is a critical component of a successful mentor program (Cordeiro & Smith-Sloan, 1995; Daresh, 1995; Geismar, Morris, & Lieberman, 2000; Mullen, 2005; Southworth, 1995). Factors that influence a mentor’s selection of a protégé include personality indicators, such as good interpersonal skills, confidence, and dependability; and the level of the protégé’s motivation and competence (Ellinger, 2002). However, despite the significant role played by the mentor and the characteristics needed for success, most mentors are selected either by convenience (McKerrow, 1998), happenstance, or by the protégé (Shelton & Herman, 1993). Consequently, assigned pairing of mentor and protégé does not guarantee success. Too often, a supervisor may be more than qualified, but, for a variety of reasons, may not facilitate opportunities to meet the needs of a protégé (Gardiner, Enomoto, Grogan, 2000). Southworth (1995) even suggested that the pairing of protégés and mentors is “problematic. . .hazardous and challenging. . .” (p. 22). Frequently, though, successful relationships grow out of a mutual selection process (Lagowski & Vick, 1995), but to be effective, both parties must want to participate in the mentoring program. Mentoring cannot be “legislated or forced” (Lagowski & Vick, 1995, p. 80).

Difficulties and tensions naturally occur in mentoring relationships due to differences in gender, ethnicity, leadership style, opinion, and communication style. For example, Gardiner, et al (2000) described several instances where conflicts arose due to gender differences and underscored the importance of how these occurrences are handled. They noted that males may handle issues differently than females or there may exist a feeling that a female is more sensitive and, therefore, will “handle things more thoughtfully than a man” (2000, p. 67). Wilson, Pereira, and Valentine (2002) also noted that women may prefer female mentors because they feel they can relate best to them. On the other hand, some women have reported that being paired with male mentors brings familiarity to the male power structure which may impact career success (Clark, Harden, & Johnson, 2000; Dreher & Chargois, 1998). Occasionally, men and women are perceived to have different styles in interacting with others, thus forcing the protégé to communicate in a different manner. For this reason, women often

prefer women mentors and men often prefer men, but it does not necessarily follow that same-gender matching is more effective. Similarly, the assumption that mentors should be older than the protégé does not always hold true. Often, older protégés benefit from being paired with younger mentors (Daresh, 1995; Playko, 1995).

Prior to 1988, there were few female principals available to mentor aspiring female principals because only 2% of principals were women. However, today over 40% of all principals are women, thus reflecting a major change. Many of these women are new to the principalship and have limited administrative experience, however. Consequently, many are in need of experienced mentor relationships themselves (Malone, 2001).

Typically, same-sex mentoring relationships occur more frequently than cross-gender pairings (Kalbfleisch, 2000). Hurley and Fagenson-Eland (1996) pointed out that cross-gender mentoring relationships are rare due to perceptions, as well as actual experiences, of sexual harassment. Building on the seminal work of Kram (1985) regarding cross-gender mentoring, Feist-Price (1994) and Thomas (2001) noted categories of cross-gender complexities that included being subject to greater public scrutiny and suspicion, peer resentment, and a potential lack of appropriate role modeling.

As university principal preparation programs seek better alignment with the job of the principalship through mentor programs, in order to effectively influence proteges, mentors must be proficient in much more than simply providing support to meet the needs of protégés. Crocker and Harris (2002) suggested that the mentor's personal and professional skills and knowledge impact a mentor's ability to serve effectively. Due to the diverse and complex nature of the mentor's role and the wide range of knowledge and skills needed to be effective, there is a definite need for administrator preparation programs to establish mentor programs that provide training for mentors and protégés (Harris & Crocker, 2003; Ganser, 1999; Head, et al, 1992; Mullen, 2005; Rowley, 1999).

Methodology

Research problem. In an effort to improve administrator mentor programs, this study was designed to explore emerging gender issues between mentors and protégés in a principal preparation program. Research questions explored the protégés' preferred gender for a mentor and why, and gender differences regarding issues that protégés discussed with mentors.

Population. Sixty-nine students enrolled in a cohort principal preparation program at a regional university in the South participated in this study. Twenty six percent (17) of the participants were between the ages of 22 – 30; 40% (28) of the participants were 31-39 years of age; 26% (17) were 40-45 years of age and 8% (7) were 46 and older. Forty five percent (31) were males and 55% (38) were females. At the beginning of university coursework, each student selected

an administrator on their campus to be their mentor who would also serve as the contact with the university professor assigned to the student. In all cases, the principal or assistant principal at the school where the student was teaching was selected as the mentor. In this study, this campus administrator is referred to as the “official” mentor.

Data collection. We developed a survey which asked students to identify their best mentor and the gender of this individual. The list of possible best mentors from which students could choose included the official campus mentor, a teacher at school, a family member, a principal or assistant principal at another school, or a university professor. (See Table 2). Students were also asked to indicate whether they would prefer a male or female mentor and to explain their rationale. Finally, the students were asked to identify the types of issues protégés were most likely to discuss with their “best mentor.” Surveys were completed at the end of regular class sessions during the spring semester of 2004, so the response rate was 100%.

Data analysis. Frequencies and means were developed using SPSS. Several university professors read the open-ended questions and coded them as themes emerged, thus increasing inter-rater reliability (Wiersma, 1995). Independent samples t-tests were conducted on issues to determine issue significance by gender. Since this study was exploratory in nature, a p value of $<.10$ was sufficient to suggest that a significant difference existed (McMillan, 2000).

Findings

“Best mentor.” Students were instructed to identify who had served as their “best mentor” since entering education. The “best mentor” was defined as the individual whom they perceived as providing the highest quality of assistance. Table 2 reports that 49% identified this person as a principal or assistant principal at another school. The officially selected campus mentor (generally, the campus principal) was identified by 12% of the protégés as their “best mentor.” Overall, 61% of “best mentors” selected by aspiring principal students were practicing principals or assistant principals at their school or at another campus.

Table 2. “Best mentor” as identified by protégé

Who served as your “best mentor?”	Male	Female	Total
Principal/Asst. Principal at this or another school	19 61%	15 40%	34 49%
Teacher at your school or at another school	6 20%	9 23%	15 21%
Officially-selected campus administrator	5 16%	7 19%	12 17%
University professor	1 3%	3 8%	4 6%
Family member who is also an educator		4 10%	4 6%

*note. n= 69

Gender of “best mentor.” Students were asked to identify the gender of the person they identified as their “best mentor.” Table 3 shows that 74% of males indicated that a male was their best mentor, while 84% of females indicated a female was their best mentor. Twenty six percent of the males identified a female as serving as their best mentor, while only 16% of the females named a male as their best mentor.

Table 3. Protégé mentor preference by gender

Who did you select as your “best mentor”?	Male	Female	Total
Male	23 74%	8 26%	31
Female	6 16%	32 84%	38
Do you prefer a male or female mentor?	Male	Female	No Preference
Male	16 52%	3 9%	12 39%
Female	1 3%	27 71%	10 26%

*Note. n = 69

When participants were asked if they preferred to have a mentor who was male or female, 52% of the males indicated that they preferred a male mentor, while 71% of females preferred a female mentor (see Table 3). Additionally, more males than females had no gender preference as long as, one male student noted, “they are open and willing to take the time to communicate.” The lone female who commented that she preferred to have a male mentor, did so because she “needed the opposite gender perspective.”

However, when individuals were asked why they might prefer a male or a female mentor, the most common response with both males and females was that they “would be more comfortable with” one gender or the other. For example, one female noted, “I would feel more comfortable talking to a female because I can share all issues.” Another indicated that it is “too difficult to talk to a male.” One male student said that he was around females “24/7” and “needed a man to talk to!” Another male felt that having a male mentor would allow him to have a “better understanding of situations that I can relate to.” Another male emphasized that he would “just have more in common with another male, so I would be able to build a better, stronger relationship with him, than with a woman.” Another male felt that he “wouldn’t have to be so careful about what I say and how I say it” if he had a male mentor.

The second most frequent response among males and females regarding why individuals expressed a preference for one gender over another, was the importance of a mentor being understanding. Both male and female protégés expressed the feeling that female mentors were more understanding “across the board.” One male said, “I have had both and my best help came from a female because she was caring and always understanding of my needs.” A female protégé indicated that a male mentor would “be intimidating and not understanding.”

while another indicated that males “deal with different issues, so they won’t always understand what my needs are.” One female believed that the “perspective of a female administrator is just naturally more understanding.” Even the three males who preferred a female mentor also indicated that they perceived women as more understanding. Additionally, the three men indicated that a woman would “make more time for [them].” This finding is consistent with Gardner, et al (2000) who suggested that women, especially, were likely to find a woman mentor more sensitive and thoughtful than a man.

Issues protégés discuss with mentors. The next set of questions concerned issues that protégés were most likely to discuss with their mentors. Participants responded using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very likely). Table 4 reports that male protégé responses ranged from a mean of 3.45 for discussing discipline and faculty relationships to a low of 2.77 for discussing the Examination for the Certification of Educators in Texas (TExES), the state-mandated certification examination. The top five issues that male protégés discussed with their mentors were faculty relationships, discipline, interpersonal student issues, parent relationships, and instruction. Female protégé responses ranged from a mean of 3.55 for discussing discipline issues to a low of 2.95 for discussing their own personal issues. The top five issues that females discussed with their mentors were discipline, instruction, classroom organization, faculty relationships, and parent relationships. Using $*p < .10$ to test for statistical significance, only the issues of passing the TExES, instruction, and classroom organization were significant. In each case, female protégés were significantly more apt to discuss these issues with their mentors than were male protégés.

Implications for Administrator Preparation Programs

This study suggests that gender issues between mentors and protégés must be addressed within the context of principal preparation programs. While most respondents in our study identified their “best mentor” as a practicing administrator on another campus or on their own campus, less than 20% indicated their best mentor was the opposite gender. When given the opportunity to select their own mentor, most of these students preferred to have a mentor of their own gender. This is consistent with Kalbfleisch (2000) who found that the best predictor of the gender of the protégé or mentor was the gender of the corresponding mentor or protégé. Apparently, often males and females perceive that they have specific needs or understandings based on their own gender experiences (Clark, Harden, & Johnson, 2000; Dreher & Chargois, 1998). It may also be, as Kram (1985) suggested that males and females are somewhat uncomfortable working closely with the opposite sex.

Even issues important to the practice of the principalship, such as being prepared for the state certification exam, classroom organization, and instruction seemed to be more likely to be discussed by female protégés than by males.

Table 4. Issues Discussed with Mentors

Issues	Gender	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	Sig. 2tail
University Coursework	male	31	2.87	.88	2.89
	female	38	3.11	.92	2.87
Passing the TExES	male	31	2.77	1.23	.060*
	female	38	3.29	1.01	.068*
Instruction	male	31	3.06	1.09	.072*
	female	38	3.47	.76	.084*
Discipline	male	31	3.45	.85	.596
	female	38	3.55	.72	.601
Classroom Organization	male	31	2.87	1.23	.041
	female	38	3.39	.86	.050
Parent Relationships	male	31	3.13	.92	.238
	female	38	3.37	.75	.249
Faculty Relationships	male	31	3.45	.57	.623
	female	38	3.37	.75	.612
Interpersonal Student Issues	male	31	3.26	.68	.904
	female	38	3.24	.75	.903
Own Personal Issues	male	31	2.94	1.03	.963
	female	38	2.95	1.09	.963

* Note. $p < .10$

**Note. Likert-type scale of 1 (not at all) to 4 (very likely)

Ortiz and Marshall (1988) reported that female administrators demonstrated their leadership in activities most closely associated with the role of teacher. This is an important issue for universities to consider and raises the question of why female protégés are more likely to discuss these issues than male protégés. Do females feel less competent in these issues or do they consider them more important? Is there a reason why males are less likely to discuss these issues with their mentors? Does the gender of the mentor influence the kinds of issues that are discussed? While this study did not address causality, these questions should be considered further.

When considering the larger issue of the role of an administrator, it is obvious that administrators must be able to work and communicate with both genders. With this in mind we agree with Gardiner, et al (2000) who suggested that principal preparation programs should include information for both men and women regarding how mentoring is “currently conducted, for what purposes it is practiced and what particular circumstances shape the experiences. . .” (p. 201). Additionally, educational preparation programs should encourage protégés to seek mentoring experiences from more than one venue, the formal, as well as the informal. One way to do this would be to allow opportunities in these settings for students to intermingle with other students at different levels of their program to share experiences. Collaborative group mentoring processes that include males and females will also add to this broadening of gender perspectives (Gardiner).

Another possibility to explore more fully within graduate classes is how males and females relate similarly and differently to educational issues. Additionally, open discourse within these classes about the value of informal mentoring with someone from the opposite sex would be valuable. Hurley and Fagenson-Eland (1996) suggested that establishing formal mentoring programs would legitimize cross-gender mentoring relationships and could result in alleviating rumors and inappropriate speculation that often occurs. They also recommended that all mentors and protégés receive training in how to avoid sexual harassment situations.

Mentoring programs provide an integral strategy in the process of supporting administrator preparation programs (Crow & Matthews, 1998; Daresh, 1997; Ellinger, 2000; Kram, 1985; Mullen, 2005) and, the pairing of mentor and protégé is a critical component. Certainly, there are many issues to consider in creating effective mentor/protégé relationships, from gender to communication skills and the professional knowledge of the mentor. Recognizing this, instruments are being developed to assist in the selection of mentors (Geismar, Morris & Lieberman, 2000). This study supports the need to consider the influence of gender in the relationship between the mentor and protégé. Encouraging discourse about gender issues could lead to developing programs that will allow principal preparation students to receive greater benefits and leadership direction from mentors.

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