Premier’s Deloitte Leadership Scholarship

To explore effective professional learning models for the mentoring of beginning principals

Vicki Treble

Balgowlah North Public School

Sponsored by



 *“The primary goal of mentoring should be to provide new principals with the knowledge, skills and courage to become leaders of change who put teaching and learning first in their schools.”*

Kenneth Leithwood

Between March 5 and April 7, 2012 I undertook a study tour of the United States and the United Kingdom as the 2011 Premiers Deloitte Leadership Scholarship awardee. The purpose of the study tour was to:

* + Explore a range of effective mentoring programs for beginning principals;
	+ Study the impact of mentoring on successful performance of beginning principals; and
	+ Understand how mentoring of beginning principals impacts on student learning.

New South Wales, as in many other parts of the country, is facing a significant educational leadership and professional learning challenge, with the imminent retirement of a large percentage of primary and secondary school principals.

It is of vital importance that school systems identify ways to support and sustain the many beginning principals who will be taking up their school leadership roles in the coming years.

The profession also has a responsibility to provide generational leadership that builds both capacity and capability in beginning principals; empowering them to challenge the status quo and lead innovation that lifts the quality of teaching and learning for all students in every school.

The aim of this study was to identify effective mentoring strategies deployed in other countries that better engage, motivate and support beginning principals to be successful educational leaders. The results of this study will inform professional learning and leadership development programs, and will have high relevance to the implementation of the National Professional Standard for Principals. Professional associations such as the Primary Principals Association (PPA), Secondary Principals Council (SPC), Association of Heads of Independent Schools (AHISA), and Australian Association of Catholic School Principals, may also choose to draw on the study’s findings as professional learning opportunities are planned.

Increasingly, states and school districts in the USA and the UK are using mentoring to help support their novice principals. With the increasing complexity and importance of the principalship, mentoring is proving to be a means by which to support beginning principals to not only manage their schools, but also lead them successfully with a focus on teaching and learning.

Mentoring takes its name from Homer’s Odyssey. Ulysses, before departing for Troy, entrusted his son to a wise friend, Mentor. Mentor served not only as a counsellor but also as a guardian and guide. Most importantly, Mentor did not replace Ulysses in a parent role, instead he helped Ulysses’ son to understand and navigate the difficulties that lie before him.

A mentor helps to improve effectiveness in a certain field of endeavour. You are guided to become an expert in a profession and are taught how to develop your specific skills. Meyer and Maboso (2007) state that a mentor’s role has two aspects. First, one is to supply career development opportunities such as coaching; second, mentors provide psychosocial support such as counselling support and role modelling. Mentoring, as a learning partnership, is one of the most effective ways to transfer skills and offer people the opportunity to learn needed skills that allow them to function at a more senior level. In the majority of places I visited on my study tour, the terms “mentoring’ and “coaching” were used interchangeably.

Through the process of mentoring, beginning principals receive support from an effective and experienced principal in the form of peer support and real-world applicability.

The best mentor displays the ability to coach, to sponsor and to serve as a role model through a trusting and respectful relationship.

Mentoring programs connect principals with people who can help them test ideas, reflect on their own practices, model effective practices, navigate difficult issues and affirm their approaches.

CASE STUDIES

Educational Leadership Development Academy

The Educational Leadership Development Academy (ELDA) is located at the University of San Diego. In 2002 an ELDA program known as The New Leaders Program began. This program resulted from a need to provide newly appointed principals with ongoing training and support so that they could earn their Professional Administrative Services Credential. Newly appointed principals undertake course work and receive professional mentoring to support them in their position and to strengthen their role as an instructional leader. Each beginning principal is assigned a mentor who supports, guides and counsels, through the critical early years in their role. Elaine Fink, retired Executive Director of ELDA spoke of mentoring as “the key element in assisting the development of high-quality principals who will lead their schools to excellence. When it comes to training principals there is really nothing better, as long as the mentor is guiding you in the right direction and has the skills to help you get where you need to go.”

Retention of quality leaders has been a goal at ELDA. After five years, 88% of graduates who were appointed as principals remain in their positions. There is also evidence of an increase in student achievement in schools led by ELDA graduates.

Rose Martinez, the current Director of ELDA has now extended the mentor program to include an international mentoring program, World Educational Leadership Link (WELL). This program provides a link between an aspiring leader and an educational leader from another part of the world. This builds professional relationships that are necessary to construct effective leadership practices and support social justice across a global community.

New Teachers Centre

The goal at the New Teachers Centre (NTC) in Santa Cruz is to develop the capacity of individual school leaders and to facilitate actions that lead to high achievement for all students, through one-on-one coaching for beginning principals.

In addition to attending professional development sessions during the course of the school year, coaches are assigned to each beginning principal for the first two years of their principalship. The coaches meet with the new principals at their schools once every two weeks, providing them with hands-on guidance and support relevant to their school’s context.

Sid Haro, Director of NTC said: “Principals work extraordinarily long hours, encounter high expectations, and face greater accountability in an era of tight budgets. In addition there are interpersonal situations, from employee and student discipline to demanding parents and local politics, and the challenges of directing changes to improve student achievement. “

"Seventy-five percent of participants say their coach influenced their decision to stay in the job," said Bloom, co-author of *Blended Coaching: Skills and Strategies to Support Principal Development*.

"The biggest asset a coach or mentor brings to a situation is a new perspective" said Bloom.

Comments from beginning principals who have mentors through the NTC:

* + It has been a great experience. My mentor was able to help me take the time to understand my strengths and weaknesses, to guide me in creating a plan for the near future and beyond, to understand what it will take to get there. I don’t think I would still be here without my mentor.
	+ It has been a life-changing experience. I gained perspective that I simply didn't have on my own. Each mentoring session gave me the strength to keep moving forward and to keep my focus on student learning! My mentor is brilliant!

My mentor helped me sort out the options, helped me see things I don't see myself, and when it was necessary, answered my questions. I have no doubt that I am a better principal for the work I have done with my mentor. I would recommend a mentor to any beginning principal.

Danforth Educational Leadership Program

The University of Washington’s Danforth Educational Leadership Program in Seattle comprises a five-quarter program including:

* + Minimum half-time release for intensive internships with mentor principals over the full academic year
	+ A residential summer Institute (6 days)
	+ An integrated curriculum
	+ Weekly reflective seminars and instructional modules (Thursday’s 1-7pm)
	+ Full day seminars are held on Saturdays
	+ Formative Program Evaluation

When asked about what helped them in their role as a beginning principal, the following responses were received:

* + Coaching saved my career as a principal (Principal for 3 years)
	+ Without him (the coach), I would have drowned! (Principal for 2 years)
	+ I could not imagine starting the principalship without the Danforth program - it focused on my strengths and leadership capabilities. I do not know how I would have coped in those initial days. In my second year I was provided with a formal mentor- she saved my career! The impact was major! (Principal for 7 years)

To be successful the principals summed up the following essential requirements:

* + 1. Leadership education
		2. Mentor /coach.... to build a relationship with built on trust, someone you can ask anything of without fear, and who knows the specific systems of your school district.
		3. A supporting cohort or network.

Principals and district supervisors stated that the cost of coaching and the Danforth program were by far "the wisest investment"!

The Council of Supervisors and Administrators (CSA)

The Council of Supervisors and Administrators in New York City is based on the premise that mentoring serves as a catalyst for school improvement. One of the founding directors, Madeline Lumachi, described the mentoring relationship as “a holistic relationship characterised by trust, confidentiality, honesty, sensitivity, shared expertise, and personal and professional growth.”

In New York City, the CSA in conjunction with the Department of Education provides a mentor for each beginning principal in their first year.

Ernest Logan, President of the CSA talked about the many benefits of the CSA mentoring program, in conjunction with the professional learning workshops available for beginning principals.

First year principals receive a mentor for one year only. This support is paid for by the New York Department of Education.

According to Nancy Westerband, Coordinator of CSA, the key elements of a successful mentoring program include:

* + Building a relationship
	+ Developing trust
	+ Ensuring confidentiality

When talking to the principals who have been mentored, the response was overwhelmingly positive. When asked what the benefits of a mentor were, comments were made such as:

* + Having someone with experience – a “walking encyclopaedia”
	+ Gives options – talks through consequences, provides another perspective.
	+ Sees things through another “lens”
	+ Validates your actions
	+ Helps take you from good to great
	+ The “trust” factor was critical – not being judged!
	+ Genuine assistance and direction
	+ Helped me learn to delegate.
	+ Kept me on track – addressing goals.
	+ A set of objective eyes!
	+ Reassured me that I wasn’t alone!

 *“My mentor helped me to survive. I don’t think I would still be here without her. I would have made too many mistakes, been misguided. The mentor acted as my guide.” Mary Nelson, Principal of a Brooklyn Public School.*

National College of School Leadership

The National College of School Leadership’s professional development program is designed for new principals in the United Kingdom. Most recently the opportunity for beginning principals to access a professional partner has been provided. A professional partner is an experienced, serving principal who will provide each beginning principal with personalised needs-based coaching and mentoring support during the first two years in the position. The professional partner’s role is to assist beginning principals to become highly effective in their new roles by developing their leadership skills and confidence, while encouraging learning, self-reflection and professional development.

Professional Partners are expected to:

* + Provide 20-30 hours of support through face-to-face meetings, telephone or email;
	+ Support one to three beginning principals at any one time, depending on capacity;
	+ Support, challenge and advise beginning principals through coaching and mentoring;
	+ Encourage beginning principals to reflect on their professional practice; and
	+ Assist beginning principals to make sense of the local and national context.

As this is a new initiative in 2012 the effectiveness of the strategy so far can only be evaluated anecdotally. Comments from beginning principals involved include:

“My mentor gives me her 16 years of principal experience and reassures me that situations can be resolved...we discuss everything openly and honestly and are developing a trusting relationship.”

“My PP acts as a sounding board, coach and source of practical guidance in specific areas. She enables me to reflect on what I am doing and assists me to set a clear course of action...she shares materials and ideas she uses at her school...the relationship is based on trust, mutual respect, and the ability to communicate openly and honestly.”

“The non-judgmental approach of my PP has been especially valued. I can talk through my thinking and gain clarity. He listens and then works with me in order to refine my thinking. He encourages me to reflect on each approach and to modify my thinking to make the most appropriate decision. The secret...confidentiality, mutual respect and a trusting relationship. I can talk openly without judgment.”

“My PP challenges while remaining supportive, this I value... My PP often comes around and offers advice or puts me in touch with someone with the technical expertise required.”

Harvard School of Education

One of the many highlights of the study tour was the time spent in Boston attending Harvard’s “New and Aspiring School Leaders” course. The course provided a range of tools, frameworks and leadership techniques focused on building and sustaining effective learning environments and improving instructional excellence to better prepare the participants to take on a leadership role.

The presentations by esteemed educators were inspirational, as were the cohort participating. Eighty-two aspiring principals, current principals and supervisors from eight different countries across the globe made up the 2012 cohort.

Daniel Goleman and Andy Hargreaves’ research on Leadership featured highly throughout the four days. The entire experience at Harvard was rigorous, invigorating and thought-provoking resulting in my leadership beliefs and practices being both challenged and validated.

It was both an honour and a privilege to participate in this course at such a prestigious educational institution.

Conclusion

Each school has a culture that is unique. The role of the school principal has changed greatly over the years with growing responsibility and accountability. Today’s principals have the responsibility of school success and individual school achievement. The challenge of building and continuing school improvement leading to improved student achievement for all students requires knowledge and skill. The first few years of the principalship are often the most challenging period of a principal’s career.

New principals need collegial support as well as the chance to network with other principals to exchange ideas, discuss the demands of the job, and share ideas on how to implement change in their schools. Mentoring programs CAN and DO provide the collegial support that beginning principals require.

Throughout the study tour I saw evidence of the support an experienced mentor principal can give to a beginning principal to effectively bring about positive change in a school.

The beginning principals who had mentors commented that the greatest benefit was having someone to talk with and consult for advice, lessening their feelings of isolation and inadequacy. Overwhelmingly, they rated their mentor as the most crucial reason for them still being in the position, and for their ongoing success as the leading learner in their schools.

All the principals and mentors that were interviewed agreed that their mentors assisted them in a range of areas, but the most valuable time was spent in relationship-building and communication. Mentors assisted beginning principals with specific school operation/management issues, such as budgeting and time and resource management. However, their advice was most sought in building and maintaining positive relationships; collaborating with teachers and staff; shaping a common vision of teaching and learning; understanding an existing culture; and building a new culture to support the school’s mission, vision and core beliefs.

Beginning principals commented on how their mentor helped them through adverse and difficult situations. They also stated that their mentor helped them to see beyond the daily management tasks and to develop effective leadership strategies. The mentors truly helped them to have the confidence they needed to not only “get through their first years”, but to improve their leadership skills, which ultimately resulted in a stronger learning environment.

In her book “Mentoring and Induction Programs that Support New Principals”, Susan Villani summarises the qualities of a good mentor as being:

* + Positively disposed to serve colleagues growth.
	+ Culturally competent and proficient.
	+ Secure enough to value the different and evolving leadership styles of new principals.
	+ Committed to promoting a new principals reflection.
	+ Generous and willing to share resources and ideas.
	+ A lifelong learner.
	+ An effective communicator.

Mentoring is support from a more experienced colleague to assist and guide someone new into a role, perform at a higher level. Mentoring has proven to enhance the learning of beginning principals. For this to happen effectively however, mentors need to be highly experienced and effective colleagues who are trained and continually coached to promote performance and self-reflection.

At a personal level, the study tour was a journey of connection, growth and validation. The scholarship provided a unique opportunity to travel to the United States and the United Kingdom; to meet people and visit organisations that are successfully utilising a variety of mentoring programs to support their beginning principals, addressing the same issues that we have here.