

The Role of Mentoring in the Leadership Development of Pre-Service School Librarians

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how providing pre-service school librarians with mentors during their degree program impacted their level of self-perceived transformational leadership potential. The study consisted of 30 participants enrolled in a school library certification master's degree program emphasizing leadership. The findings indicated that the use of mentors had a positive impact on the leadership development of the participants. Moreover, the combination of the leadership training and the experience of having a mentor taught the participants the behaviors that are desirable in mentors and encouraged them to apply mentorship as a leadership role in their schools.

Introduction

The research reported here is a subset of a larger study. The original study was designed to examine the social contextual variables that impacted the leadership behaviors of pre-service school librarians enrolled in a master's degree program. This degree program was specifically designed to emphasize leadership development. The participants of this study were recruited into the program because of their leadership potential.

Mentorship was just one of the social contextual variables studied. The program directors wanted each participant to have a mentor who was already established in the profession. The rationale for including mentors in the program was to develop an additional support system that extended into the school district for the participants. Mentors were asked to help the participants with their coursework and to acclimate them to the profession. The directors relied on the school library media program supervisors in each partnering school district to identify suitable mentors.

Upon the conclusion of the research, it was discovered that the provision of mentors had a great influence on the students' degree program experience. This outcome was unexpected because mentorship was the least structured aspect of the program. While the directors knew it was important to pair each student with a mentor, they did not require specific tasks for each mentor. Instead, the mentors were invited to three meetings during the degree program. Otherwise, the program directors did not interfere in the development of the participants' interactions or relationships with their mentors.

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the availability of mentors on the self-perceived transformational leadership practices of the pre-service school librarians enrolled in the program. The following questions guided the investigation.

1. What were the characteristics of the participants' interactions with their mentors?
2. How did the availability of mentors facilitate the transformational leadership development of the participants?

There has been much discussion regarding how school librarians can develop leadership skills and improve the perceptions of their role in schools (Everhart & Dresang, 2007; Smith, 2010). One approach to changing the perceptions of school librarians and increasing their influence is to teach them how to be transformational leaders (Smith, 2009). The program the participants were enrolled in was an attempt to do so. For this reason, the findings of this study can help improve the understanding of how mentoring can be incorporated into school library certification programs to help school librarians learn transformational leadership skills.

Literature Review

The Connection between Mentoring and Leadership

Transformational leadership is the theoretical framework of this study. It is a bottom up leadership approach that emphasizes collaboration, harmonious relationships, and the ability of all community stakeholders to create positive shifts in organizational culture (Bass & Bass, 2008; Burns, 2003). While appointed leaders can practice transformational leadership behaviors, individuals who have not been officially assigned duties can emerge as leaders too.

The acknowledgement that anyone in an organization can be a leader makes transformational leadership particularly beneficial to schools. For example, research indicates that when transformational leadership is used to carry out educational reforms, the reforms often continue after school administrators leave due to consensus building process (Sheppard, 1996). The stability created by transformational leadership in schools also has an indirect positive effect on student achievement and progress (Griffith, 2004).

Transformational leadership focuses on the performance of organizations. Similarly, the primary purpose of mentoring is to develop the skills of an individual to improve organizations (Northouse, 2004). According to Daresh (2004) and Scandura and Williams (2004), transformational leaders serve as role models within organizations. Therefore, mentoring is an indicator of transformational leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). The positive results of leadership in the form of mentoring include career stabilization through encouragement (Kram, 1985), acclimation to organizational environments and responsibilities (Daresh, 2003), and a general sense that one is in control of their career (Scandura & Williams, 2004).

McAlearney (2005) further concludes that having a mentor can frame the future perceptions a leader has about leadership development. Leaders exposed to formal or informal mentoring are more accepting of the need for mentoring opportunities. For example, formally mentored leaders are more likely to believe in allocating organizational resources for external program attendance for leadership development. In addition, informally mentored leaders typically favor the creation of internal leadership development programs. This suggests that mentorship, whether it is formal or informal heightens a leader's awareness of the benefits of mentoring for leadership development.

Mentoring in School Librarianship

There is considerable support for establishing mentors for school librarians within the professional literature (Bicksler, 2004; Buddy & Williams, 2001; Creighton, 2007). Yet, there is very little research that relates the benefits of mentorship to school librarianship. Solomon and Rathbun-Grubb (2009), advised that ambassadors to the profession such as mentors could be useful in recruiting and retaining new school librarians. Baaden (2008) went on to write that there is a need for transition mentoring between exiting school librarians and the new school librarians that replace them. Such efforts can acquaint incoming school librarians with school cultures, procedures, and policies.

Everhart and Dresang (2007) reported that experienced school librarians rely heavily on mentors to navigate the National Board Certification process. The participants of their study revealed that they solicited assistance from mentors within and outside of the school librarianship field. All of the respondents found the support they received from school library mentors helpful. Still the 7.7% of the respondents who received assistance from outside the field did not find it helpful.

Though they are few in numbers, these studies make one crucial point. Their results convey that school librarianship is a unique profession that requires a distinctive skill set separate from those of a classroom teacher. While school librarians are part of school communities, they are in need of specific guidance that classroom teachers that serve as mentors are not able to offer (Baaden, 2008). Instead, school librarians need assistance from mentors who are from within the profession.

Research Methodology

Population

The population of this study consisted of thirty teacher-leaders from six school districts in the state of Florida. The study participants were recent graduates of a Master's degree program for school librarian certification that focused on leadership development. The program directors selected each teacher-leader by using a rigorous application process. This process required each participant to have their principal complete a leadership rubric rating their leadership abilities. Next, the participants submitted leadership essays. The participants also were allotted points for their grade point averages.

Diversity was achieved within the program by awarding additional points for each participant's gender, race, age, ethnicity, and subject taught. The applicants with the highest scores were admitted to the program. Diversity was an important part of the program for multiple reasons. First, a majority of school librarians are middle-aged Caucasian females (Everhart & Dresang, 2007). Diversifying the population of school librarians to include males, a variety of age levels, and minorities is considered to be a beneficial step towards changing the perceptions of who can be effective school librarians and recruiting new school librarians (Peresie & Alexander, 2005). Moreover, including applicants from multiple subject areas was seen as a method of encouraging the participants to serve as leaders who communicate the importance of imbedding information literacy into all subject areas. By doing so, it was hoped that the participants would make a connection between school libraries, mathematics, science, and technology.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection began approximately two months before the teacher-leaders graduated. This was the optimal time to collect data because the concepts taught during the program and the participants' experiences were still easy to recall. The participants were also eager to share their experiences.

A mixed-method concurrent triangulation design was implemented. The purpose of using this type of methodology was to "compare both forms of data to search for congruent findings" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 172). The qualitative and quantitative data were simultaneously collected using two paper-based surveys with open-ended and closed-ended questions. The quantitative results were analyzed using SPSS software. The qualitative results were coded into themes by using Nvivo. These themes were used to substantiate the findings of the statistical results.

The first survey, the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), was developed by Kouzes and Posner (2002). The LPI is a valid and reliable instrument (Brown & Posner, 2001; Fields & Herold, 1997) that has been used by numerous researchers to measure transformational leadership behaviors (Abu-Tineh, Khasawneh & A-Omari, 2008; Brown & Posner, 2001). It has also been used in variety of studies in the field of education (Joseph, 2009; Suwandee, 2009). In this study, the respondents completed the self-assessment portion of the LPI. Therefore, the results depict the respondents' self-perceived leadership potential.

The LPI characterizes transformational leadership behaviors on a 10-point Likert scale. These dimensions were aligned with the leadership behaviors emphasized in the respondents' program of study. Respondents choose their level of participation in five transformational leadership dimensions. These dimensions are *Challenging the Process*, *Inspiring a Shared Vision*, *Enabling Others to Act*, *Modeling the Way*, and *Encouraging the Heart*.

The second instrument was a supplemental survey designed by the researcher, which included closed and open-ended questions. This instrument collected demographic variables and the participants' perceptions of their experience with their mentors. The survey also asked the participants to share the skills they learned in each of the five transformational leadership dimensions.

Findings

Research Question 1: What were the characteristics of the participants' interactions with their mentors?

Several variables were investigated to determine the characteristics of each participant's interaction with their mentor. The data analysis indicated that most of the students were satisfied to some degree with the support offered by their mentor. It was also revealed that the typical mentor was assigned to a participant and worked outside of the school the participant was employed in. Mentors usually had National Board Certification. A majority of the participants also reported spending less than an hour with their mentors. Email was the most popular mode of communication. The cumulative results of the mentor variables are included in Table 1.

Table 1
Mentor Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Mentor Location	10 Within school	33.3
	20 Outside of school	66.7
National Board Certification:	24 Yes	80.0
	6 No	20.0
Mentor Selection:	8 Chosen	26.7
	18 Assigned	60.0
	4 Chosen and assigned	13.3
Satisfied with support:	12 Strongly agree	40.0
	9 Agree	30.0
	4 Neutral	13.3
	1 Disagree	3.3
	4 Strongly disagree	13.3
Type of Communication:	16 Email	53.3
	12 In person	40.0
	1 Email and in person	3.3
	1 In person and phone	3.3

N=30

Study respondents were offered the opportunity to elaborate on their experience with their mentors by answering one open-ended question. Several of the respondents, 23 (76.7%) offered comments. The question was:

- *If you had a mentor, is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with your mentor?*

When the respondents answered the question, they tended to either reflect on the benefits they experienced from having a mentor or the barriers they coped with while trying to communicate with their mentors. These responses were categorized as two major themes with subthemes. These themes were entitled barriers to mentorship and mentorship enablers. The results are expressed in Table 2.

Table 2
Themes in the Qualitative Responses About Mentors

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Total Barriers	13	43.3
Mentor left	4	13.3
Mentor unwilling to help	6	13.3
Time and distance	3	10.0
Difficult to contact	2	6.7
Lack of guidance for the mentor	2	6.7
Total Enablers	14	46.7
Offered suggestions	8	26.7
Always available	5	16.7
Offered encouragement	6	20.0
In building	3	10.0
Frequent interaction	3	10.0
Initiated contact	1	3.3
Had resource connections	1	3.3
Technological abilities	1	3.3

Research Question 2: How did the availability of mentors facilitate the leadership development of the participants?

The quantitative aspect of this question was answered in two ways. First, the relationship between the LPI national norms reported by Kouzes and Posner (2003) and the participants' mean scores on the LPI and LPI subscales were assessed. Significant differences were found in two of the LPI subscales. The participants scored significantly higher on the *Modeling the Way*, $t(47.01) = 3.865$, $p = 0.001$ (two-tailed) and *Enabling Others to Act*, $t(49.39) = 2.610$, $p = 0.014$ (two-tailed).

Next, the relationships between the mentor variables and the LPI and the LPI subscales were assessed. Table 3 summarizes the results. The results were as follows:

- A correlation was found between the respondents' satisfaction with their mentor support and the subscale for *Encouraging the Heart*, $r_s = .431$, $n = 30$, $p = .018$. The respondents' score on the LPI subscale increased as their satisfaction with their mentors increased.
- There were correlations between the respondents' contact hours with their mentors and the LPI total score, $r_s = .442$, $n = 30$, $p = .014$. There were also correlations between the respondents' contact hours and the LPI subscales for *Encouraging the Heart*, $r_s = .492$, $n = 30$, $p = .006$, *Enabling Others to Act*, $r_s = .426$, $n = 30$, $p = .019$, and *Modeling the Way*, $r_s = .508$, $n = 30$, $p = .004$. The respondents' scores on the three LPI subscales and the total LPI score increased as their time with their mentors increased.
- There was a significant relationship between the LPI subscale for *Enabling Others to Act* and the selection and assignment of mentors. Respondents who selected their mentors scored higher on the

Enabling Others to Act LPI subscale, $\chi^2 (1, N=30) = 5.792, p = .016$.

- There was no significant relationship between the locations of the mentors and the LPI or LPI subscales.

Table 3
Matrix of the Data for Statistically Significant Mentor Characteristics

	Modeling	Inspiring	Challenging	Enabling	Encouraging	Total LPI
Satisfaction with Mentor Support					.018*	
Mentor Contact Hours				.019*	.006*	.014*
Mentor Selection				.016*		
Type of Mentor Contact						
Mentor Location						

The results of the qualitative analysis provided insight into the quantitative results. The participants were given three open-ended questions reflecting each of the LPI subscales. These questions sought to ascertain the transformational leadership skills the participants learned during the program. The respondents identified mentoring or skills related to mentoring in all of the subscale areas. These results related specifically to mentoring are included in Table 4. The themes that emerged were mentoring, sharing knowledge, and modeling.

Table 4
Acquired Skills Associated with Mentoring

Subscale	Skill	Frequency	Percentage
Challenging	Sharing Knowledge	22	73.3
Inspiring	Role Modeling	12	40.0
	Sharing Knowledge	8	26.7
Encouraging	Role Modeling	9	30.0
Modeling	Role Modeling	13	43.3
	Sharing Knowledge	9	30.0
	Mentoring	7	23.3
Enabling	Sharing knowledge	14	46.7
	Mentoring	11	36.7

Discussion and Implications

Skills Acquired Associated with Mentoring

Mentoring

Mentorship was an intricate element of the participants' degree program. It cannot be concluded that the presence of mentors was exclusively responsible for the participants' leadership development. Yet, the connections between the mentor variables and the qualitative responses support the conclusion that the experiences the participants had with their mentors enhanced their leadership skill growth. For example, mentoring, sharing knowledge, and modeling emerged as themes when the participants were asked about the skills they learned during the program. Sharing knowledge and acting as a role model are components of mentoring others. As one participant communicated, "I've always been part of the beginner teacher program. This program reminded me we are mentors as part of a larger duty career, profession, organization." The availability of mentors during the program encouraged the participants to serve as mentors within their schools. This supports the research of McAlearney (2005), who proposed that being formally or informally mentored can shape a mentee's future perception of the need for mentoring.

Sharing Knowledge

According to the respondents, the program taught them how to share knowledge. This might be considered ironic because they were all teachers -- people who share knowledge by virtue of their professions. Still, even though they were knowledgeable teacher-leaders, they were not quite sure if what they wanted to share was worth sharing with their peers before they began the program. A participant wrote, "I open my mouth more because I feel more qualified and that my opinion has more credibility." Thus, the program curriculum, along with the exposure to mentors served as a type of specialized training that emphasized the value of lifelong learning and empowering others.

Modeling Behaviors

The participants specified that the program taught modeling skills by helping them to consider the needs of others. A participant wrote, "Helping and being a resource to other teachers is what I learned to do." Another stated, "I have become increasingly confident with technology and feel I can lead other teachers in using multimedia applications."

Furthermore, participants wrote statements such as, "Learning copyright laws and best practices about being a media specialist and teacher help me model high ethical standards." Another agreed with this comment by stating, "... classes emphasized that I know the rules and regulations and educate my coworkers on the importance of being helpful and following them at all times. I will model this in my new job."

The Relationship between Mentors and Leadership Development

The significant relationships between the LPI scores and the variables satisfaction with mentor support, mentor contact hours, and mentor selection support research citing the value of having good relationships with mentors (Daresh, 2004; Kram, 1985; Scandura & Williams, 2004). In particular, the mentors empowered their mentees by offering suggestions for completing assignments and understanding scenarios relevant to being a school librarian. The combination of the program assignments and the guiding hand of a mentor helped the respondents get a better understanding of what is expected of a school librarian. One participant wrote, "My mentor was outstanding. She always had time to help, share experiences, provide leadership, etc." The participant's statement illuminates why a majority of the participants were satisfied with the support they received from their mentors.

Some of the participants found difficulty in working with mentors for several reasons. The qualitative responses revealed that these people did not spend as much time with their mentors. As indicated by the quantitative analysis, they also were less satisfied with their mentors' support because they were not able to develop relationships with them. Apparently, when the participants were able to choose a mentor they liked, they were able to develop better relationships with their mentor. Overall, students with under-developed

mentor relationships scored lower on the LPI. This finding further supports Scandura and Williams' (2004) assertion that there is a link between mentoring and transformational leadership.

While this study focused on pre-service school librarians, there are implications for other fields of librarianship. For example, academic librarians are much like school librarians who must teach information literacy skills to students while exhibiting the ability to collaborate with members of the school community (Barratt, Nielsen, Desmet, & Balthazor, 2009; Besara & Kinsley, 2011). This need is further accentuated by budget cuts that demand that academic librarians indicate their impact on student success (Mezick, 2007). Including mentors in degree programs can acclimate prospective academic librarians to professional demands, exceptional teaching strategies, and key resources in order to improve the educational outcomes of students on college campuses.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that mentors are an important aspect of school librarian education that is beneficial when incorporated into degree programs. It did not matter to the participants where mentors were located or how mentors stayed in contact with them. Instead, the participants appreciated responsive mentors who were easy to contact and provided them with advice based on experience. Accordingly the results of this study provide evidence that including mentors in degree programs for librarians can be instrumental in developing leadership skills, acclimating pre-service librarians to librarianship, and encouraging them to mentor new librarians in the future. These outcomes are crucial for preparing new librarians for the challenge of being leaders who embrace change.

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