The Power of Mentoring in the Career Preparation of Special Education Administrators

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This study examines the mentoring experiences of prospective and beginning special education administrators to determine whether on the job mentoring is a viable method of equipping the prospective and beginning special education administrator with essential knowledge and skills. Three research questions were asked: What is the attainment of knowledge and skills and how does mentor support function for prospective and beginning special education administrators as a result of engagement in a mentoring relationship? Do mentors and protégés agree on the protégé's attainment of knowledge and skills and the level of the mentors' support? Do the attainment of knowledge and skills and the level of mentor support for protégés depend on whether the mentoring relationship is formal or informal? Study findings support mentoring as a critical component in the preparation of administrators in special education.

A Critical Need

The supply of educational leaders prepared to administer special education programs in the United States is inadequate to meet the demand (American Association for Employment in Education, 2008). This shortage may, in part, be related to a lack of documented research studies in the effective leadership practices of special education administrators and how special education administrators are prepared for leadership.

For example, Crockett, Becker, and Quinn (2009) conducted a search of abstracts about special education topics to identify those that would be of interest to administrators. The 474 abstracts found were dated from 1970 through the first quarter of 2009, were organized according to eight themes. One of the eight themes, "leadership preparation and development," yielded only 48 abstracts over the 38-year period; approximately half of those abstracts were classified as commentaries rather than research studies. In a 1981 literature review relating to the role and function of administrators and supervisors in special education, Finkenbinder (1981) pointed out the lack of literature related to the administration of special education programs and indicated the vital need for action research to aid in the "upgrading of the administrator's skills" (p. 488). Crockett et al. (2009) found only 19 studies that related to special education leadership and development in the nearly 30 years since Finkenbinder's call for research on the topic.

The 1970s was the decade of the enactment of federal legislation called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which later became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Interest in the preparation of leaders in special education was high during this decade as states initiated and expanded special education programming to comply with the federal mandates. Then from 1980 to 2000, interest in the topic appears to have waned based on the rate of published articles. However, recent interest in the preparation of special education administrators appears to have increased, focusing on the dispositions, knowledge, and skills required of special education administrators. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has provided the field with a set of content standards based on validated knowledge and skill sets. The CEC noted, "Advanced special education professional content standards describe the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for individuals to practice at accomplished levels of special education and in advanced special education roles" (p. 150). The CEC standards are used in the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) accreditation process for university programs preparing special education administrators.

Regardless of the standards followed, future special education administrators must possess the necessary knowledge and skills to lead school district special education programs and services in a competent and effective manner. The positive effect of skilled educational leaders has been linked to improved educational outcomes for students. For example, in a review of empirical research and related literature undertaken to better understand the links between leadership and student learning, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) concluded, "Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 5).

Although the knowledge and skills necessary for the effective administration of special education programs have been identified, the research literature has offered little focus on how they are to be attained. In *A National Study of State Credentialing Requirements for Administrators of Special Education*, Boscardin, Weir, and Kusek (2010) reported that 23 states do not require licensure/certification/endorsement as a special education administrator, and nine of the 27 states that do require licensure/certification/endorsement do not require an internship and/or practicum experience. In other words, only 18 states require an internship and/or practicum experience as a condition for receiving special education administrator licensure/certification/endorsement. Therefore, how the preparation of those assigned to manage and lead special education programming at the district level and how new special education administrators might be supported warrants exploration.

Mentoring as a Viable Method of Preparation

Mentoring is a widely accepted practice in the development of those in a number of professional fields, and the potential effect of mentoring on protégés' career development is well documented (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Dirsmith & Covaleski, 1985; Fagenson, 1989; Godshalk & Sosik, 2003; Noe, 1988). Scandura and Schriesheim (1994) spoke to the mentor's sharing of values, knowledge, and experiences with the protégé as a demonstration of the mentor's commitment to the protégé's long-term development. Eby (1997) provided a list of the support functions of a mentor in the job-related skills development of the protégé:

- Clarifies protégé's job duties
- Provides advice on how to complete assignments more quickly and efficiently
- Discusses strengths and areas for opportunities on the job
- Suggests specific strategies for advancing within the organization
- Supports or sponsors protégé's attempts to advance within the organization
- Provides advice on how to operate within the organization's political climate
- Provides information about career opportunities within the organization
- Provides challenging job assignments to enhance specific technical skills
- Shelters protégé from situations that could be detrimental to his or her career within the organization
- Increases exposure and visibility of protégé to top management
- Encourages protégé to experiment with new ways of approaching organizational tasks
- Shares job-related information or technical expertise relevant to the organization
- Discusses career options and dilemmas. (p. 128)

The traditional mentoring relationship is one where a mentor with extensive experience engages with a less experienced protégé for the purpose of enhancing the protégé's career development. Ragins and Kram (2007) offered the following description:

Although the definition of mentoring has been refined over the years, a core feature that defines mentoring relationships and distinguishes it from other types of personal relationships is that mentoring is a developmental relationship that is embedded within the career context. While learning, growth, and development may occur in many different types of work and close personal relationships, mentoring relationships are unique in that the primary focus of the relationship is on career development and growth. (p. 5)

Specific to the career development of educational administrators, Bass (1990) noted the critical need to involve currently practicing school administrators in the preparation of future school administrators. A mentoring relationship between a practicing administrator and an aspiring or beginning administrator provides the latter with "an accessible source of support and information. . .and an assurance that seeking such assistance in not an imposition. It is, in fact, an expected pattern of behavior" (p. 29). Daresh (2004) argued that the socialization and professional formation of school administrators requires mentoring as an essential element of their preparation. He suggested five major benefits for the protégé: (a) more confidence about their professional competence, (b) the translation of educational theory into daily practice, (c) an increase in communication skills, (d) opportunities to learn how to lead, and (e) gaining a sense of belonging.

Unfortunately, in a 2009 survey conducted by the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) of its members who had provided e-mail addresses, only 29% of respondents reported that they had been provided with a mentorship program as a means of support in their role. For many of those who were not provided with a mentorship program, a desire to have had a mentor was presented in additional respondent comments (Miller & Baker, 2009). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the value of mentoring to new special education administrators. The related research questions are:

1. What is the attainment of knowledge and skills and how does mentor support function for prospective and beginning special education administrators as a result of engagement in a mentoring relationship?
2. Do mentors and protégés agree on the protégés' attainment of knowledge and skills and the level of the mentors' support functions?
3. Do the attainment of knowledge and skills and the level of mentor support functions for protégés depend on whether the relationship is formal or informal?

Methods

Participants

Data for this study were collected from 118 special education administrators in Michigan who indicated they had engaged in a mentoring relationship either in their own preparation as a special education administrator (i.e., as a protégé) or as a mentor. These participants were identified from a list of 523 local education agencies (LEAs) maintained by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE); the list contains the name and e-mail address for each LEA special education contact.

Originally, a link to the electronic survey was sent to all of the 523 LEA special education contacts via the e-mail addresses listed with the MDE. Twenty-four (4.6%) of the e-mails containing the link to the survey were returned as undeliverable. Of the 499 surveys successfully delivered via e-mail, 118 surveys (23.6%) were returned with all questions answered and with the respondents indicating they had engaged in a mentoring relationship. A total of 56 respondents identified themselves as protégés and 62 self-identified as mentors. These were the participants considered in the data analysis.

Survey Design

Staff at Grand Valley State University's statistical consulting center provided assistance to the author in the construction and distribution of the electronic survey instrument. SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool, was selected as the method for distribution and data collection.

Participants were provided with the following definitions at the beginning of the survey document:

- *Mentor*: One who is experienced in their profession and who participates in a mentoring relationship with the goal of enhancing the protégé's professional growth.
- *Protégé*: One who benefits from the wisdom and experiences of a mentor for the purpose of career development and advancement.
- *Formal Mentoring*: A structured relationship in which the mentor and protégé engage in tasks and experiences prescribed for them by an outside agent, such as an employer or a university preparation program.
- *Informal Mentoring*: A naturally occurring relationship in which the mentor and the protégé voluntarily spend time sharing information, experiences, and teaching/learning opportunities.

Participants were asked three demographic questions in the survey, which included (a) current position, (b) approximate P-12 student population, and (c) approximate P-12 student population with an individualized education program. After participants indicated whether they were responding to the survey as a mentor or a protégé, they were asked whether the mentoring relationship was informal or formal. Data were also collected indicating the length of the mentoring relationship and the amount of direct contact time between the mentor and the protégé.

A set of 10 survey statements was designed to measure protégé knowledge and skill attainment in relation to the content standards descriptors developed by the Council for Exceptional Children. (CEC, 2009) Both the survey statements and the corresponding content standard descriptors appear in Table 1. Protégés were asked to rate their level of agreement with the 10 statements on a forced-choice five-point Likert scale, with response choices of "strongly disagree," "disagree," "neutral," "agree," and "strongly agree."

Table 1
Survey: 10 Statements for Participant Response, with Associated CEC Knowledge/Skill Descriptors

Statement One: As a protégé/mentor, I feel confident in my/my protégé's ability to manage the special education budget. • Local, state, and national fiscal policies and funding mechanisms in education, social, and health agencies as they apply to the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families. • Develops a budget in accordance with local, state, and national laws in education, social, and health agencies for the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
Statement Two: As a protégé/mentor, I feel confident in my/my protégé's ability to complete state reporting requirements. • Reports the assessment of individuals with exceptional learning needs' performance and evaluation of instructional programs.
Statement Three: As a protégé/mentor, I feel confident in my/my protégé's ability to complete staff performance evaluations. • Develops and implements ongoing evaluations of education programs and personnel. • Provides ongoing supervision of personnel working with individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
Statement Four: As a protégé/mentor, I feel confident in my/my protégé's ability to evaluate the effectiveness of special education programs and services. Design and use methods for assessing and evaluating programs. • Develops and implements a flexible continuum of services based on effective practices for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
Statement Five: As a protégé/mentor I feel confident in my/my protégé's ability to use data for decision making. • Engages in data-based decision-making for the administration of educational programs and services that supports exceptional individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families

Statement Six: As a protégé/mentor, I feel confident in my/my protégé's ability to oversee the use of ethical and legal student discipline.
- Human rights of individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
- Uses ethical and legal discipline strategies.

Statement Seven: As a protégé/mentor, I feel confident in my/my protégé's ability to provide/procure effective professional development for staff.
- Professional development theories and practices that improve instruction and instructional content for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
- Develops and implements professional development activities and programs that improve instructional practices and lead to improved outcomes for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

Statement Eight: As a protégé/mentor, I feel confident in my/my protégé's ability to supervise instruction.
- Theories and methodologies of teaching and learning, including adaptation and modification of curriculum.
- Developmentally appropriate strategies for modifying instructional methods and the learning environment.

Statement Nine: As a protégé/mentor, I feel confident in my/my protégé's ability to critically examine student performance data.
- Evaluate and modify instructional practices in response to ongoing assessment data.
- Evaluate a student's success in the general education curriculum

Statement Ten: As a protégé/mentor, I feel confident in my/my protégé's ability to recruit and hire special education staff.
- Engages in recruitment, hiring, and retention practices that comply with local, state, and national laws as they apply to personnel serving individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

A second set of survey statements was designed to measure the level of the mentors' support functions. Protégés were asked to rate, on the same forced-choice Likert scale, the level of their agreement with five statements exploring the support of their mentor. These statements related to the support functions of the mentor on behalf of the protégé as described by Eby (1997). Protégés were asked to respond to the following statements:

As a protégé, I was provided with:

1. Access to experiences such as district meetings and committees
2. Moral support/encouragement
3. Advice/guidance in specific situations
4. Introduction to other special education administrators and professional organizations
5. Access to professional development events.

Once again, based on their perceptions of their mentoring experience, the mentors responded to the same five statements beginning with the prompt, "As a mentor, I provided my protégé with . . ."

With this overall structure, the survey generated data from four sets of replies: one each from the protégés' and mentors' responses to the first set of 10 statements, and one each from the protégés' and mentors' responses to the second set of five statements.

Survey Reliability

The Grand Valley State University statistical consulting center also provided assistance with statistical analysis of the survey's reliability. Data were analyzed utilizing the predictive analytics software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Statistical analysis verified the reliability of the survey instrument. The reliability of the protégés' and mentors' responses to each of the two sets of statements was determined through a calculation of Cronbach's alpha statistic which "determines the internal consistency or average correlation of items in a survey instrument to gauge its reliability" (Santos, 1999, p. 1).

Overall, comparatively strong Cronbach's alpha values were calculated, with alpha statistics ranging from .868 to .947:

- "As a protégé, I was provided with": α = .868
- "As a mentor, I provided my protégé with": α = .947
- "As a result of my experience as a protégé, I feel confident in my ability to": α = .938
- "As a result of my experience as a mentor, I feel confident in my protégé's ability to": α = .911

According to Bland and Altman (1997), a correlation of .7 or greater is satisfactory, with values above .9 considered strong.

In addition, the sample size was found to be sufficient. To determine whether the sample pattern would be stable and approximate the population pattern (i.e., special education administrators in Michigan), a component analysis was completed. This resulted in a factor loading for each of the 10 statements regarding protégé knowledge and skill attainment and for each of the five statements regarding mentor support functions. These factor loadings ranged from .468 to .851 for questions pertaining to knowledge and skill attainment, with 18 of 20 loadings above .60. The factor loadings ranged from .493 to .956 for questions pertaining to mentor support functions, with eight of 10 loadings above .60. As Guadagnoli and Velicer (1988) noted, "If components possess four or more variables with loadings above .60, the pattern may be interpreted whatever the sample size used" (p. 274). Based on their theory, the survey was deemed reliable as a whole since it contained 25 loadings greater than .60 and only five loadings less than .60 (see Table 2).

Table 2
Factor Loadings for Assessment of Survey Reliability

As a result of my experience as a protégé/mentor, I feel confident in my/my protégé's ability to:	Loadings - Protégé	Loadings - Mentor
1. Manage the special education budget	.806	.491
2. Complete state reporting requirements	.844	.731
3. Complete staff performance evaluations	.836	.468
4. Evaluate effectiveness of special education programs and services	.851	.746
5. Use data for decision making	.623	.606
6. Oversee the use of ethical and legal student discipline	.723	.724
7. Provide/procure effective professional development for staff	.748	.748
8. Supervise instruction	.625	.796
9. Critically examine student performance data	.615	.595
10. Recruit and hire special education staff	.800	.779
As a protégé/mentor, I was provided with/provided:		
1. Access to experiences such as district meetings and committees	.493	.872
2. Moral support/encouragement	.833	.956
3. Advice/guidance in specific situations	.883	.956
4. Introduction to other special education administrators and professional organizations	.538	.789
5. Access to professional development events	.750	.910

Survey Results

Demographics

The respondents' school district sizes ranged from 56 to 101,000 P-12 students, and the number of P-12 students with individualized education programs ranged from four to more than 14,500. All of the respondents were currently employed as special education administrators when they completed the survey. Fourteen (25%) of the protégés were in a non-administrative special education position during the mentoring relationship, while 30 (53.6%) were in their first year as a special education administrator (see Table 3). Fifty-three (85.5%) of the mentors had more than one year of experience at the time of the mentoring relationship.

Mentoring Relationship

Protégés reported that the mentoring relationship they engaged in was more often an informal one (60%) than a formally arranged one (40%), and 48% of mentors characterized their mentoring relationship as informal rather than formal. Statistical analyses were performed to test whether a statistically significant difference existed between formal or informal relationships on the skill and knowledge attainment of the protégé or on the job-related

support functions of the mentor. Because all four score variables (i.e., protégé perceived knowledge and skill attainment, mentor perceived knowledge and skill attainment, protégé perceived job-related support functions, and mentor perceived job-related support functions) contained outliers when broken down by group (formal/informal), it was necessary to use a non-parametric test rather than a t-test. Through employment of the Mann-Whitney U Test, *p* values for each of the four score variables were calculated. The null hypothesis for the Mann-Whitney U Test is as follows: The difference between the effect of formal vs. informal relationships on the skill and knowledge attainment of protégés and the job-related support functions is due to the populations (formal vs. informal) . P-values calculated by the test are:

- Formal vs. informal on protégé knowledge and skills attainment for the protégé: *p* = .206
- Formal vs. informal on protégé knowledge and skills attainment for the mentor: *p* = .368
- Formal vs. informal on mentor job-related support functions for the protégé: *p* = .240
- Formal vs. informal on mentor job-related support functions for the mentor: *p* = .194

The null hypothesis is rejected because the p values obtained in the Mann-Whitney U Test are small and the alternate hypothesis, that the difference between the effect of formal vs. informal relationships on the skill and knowledge attainment of protégés and the job-related support functions is due to random sampling, is true. Based on the Mann-Whitney U Test, employed at the α .05 significance level, no statistically significant difference was found between formal and informal mentoring relationships regarding protégé skill and knowledge attainment or mentor job-related support functions.

Fifty percent of all respondents indicated that their mentoring relationships lasted for 12 months or more. A total of 20.3% indicated they had a one- to six-month mentoring relationship, while 29.7% indicated a six- to 12-month relationship. Of all respondents, 80.5% stated that they felt the length of the relationship was appropriate, and 19.5% indicated the length of the relationship was too short. Interestingly, no respondent indicated that the mentoring relationship was too long (see Table 3).

One to four hours per week of direct contact time between the mentor and the protégé was reported by three-quarters of the respondents, while slightly under one-quarter reported direct contact time of five or more hours per week. Seventy-eight percent of all respondents reported that the amount of contact time was appropriate, although 22% reported that they felt the direct contact time was too little. No respondent stated that the amount of direct contact time was too much (see Table 3).

Table 3
Employment Status, Relationship Length, and Contact Time

	Protégés (n= 56)		Mentors (n= 62)	
	Number	**Percentage**	**Number**	**Percentage**
Employment status during relationship				
Non-administrative position	14	25.0	5	8.0
First year	30	**53.6**	4	6.5
More than one year	12	21.4	53	**85.5**
Length of mentoring relationship				
1-6 months	12	21.4	12	19.4
6-12 months	16	28.6	19	30.6
12+ months	28	**50.0**	31	**50.0**
Consideration of length of relationship				
Too short	10	17.9	13	21.0
Appropriate	46	**82.1**	49	**79.0**
Too long	0	0	0	0
Average weekly contact time				
1-2 hours	31	**55.4**	31	**50.0**
3-4 hours	13	23.2	14	22.6
5-6 hours	5	8.9	9	14.5
7+ hours	7	12.5	8	12.9
Consideration of weekly contact time				
Too little	14	25.0	12	19.4
Appropriate	42	**75.0**	50	**80.6**
Too much	0	0	0	0

Protégé Attainment of Knowledge and Skills

The level of agreement between protégés and mentors on protégé knowledge and skills attainment was high (see Table 4). The largest difference between the protégé and mentor ratings was 17.1 percentage points in statement 8, which asked about the protégés' ability to supervise instruction. Only one other statement—number 5, the protégés' ability to use data for decision making—had a relatively high percentage point difference of 15.5. All other percentage point differences for protégé knowledge and skill attainment ranged from 1.4 to 9.4 percentage points.

Both protégés and mentors rated two statements as highest in protégé attainment level: number 6, "oversee the use of ethical and legal student discipline," and number 5, "use data for decision making." The statements ranked lowest in protégé attainment for both protégés and mentors were number 1, "manage the special education budget," and number 2, "complete state reporting requirements." It is interesting to note that mentors expressed a higher level of agreement with each of the 10 statements than did protégés.

Table 4
Protégé and Mentor Agreement with Statements Regarding Protégé Knowledge/Skills
Attainment

As a result of my experience as a protégé/mentor, I feel confident in my/my protégé's ability to:	Protégé (n= 56)	Mentor (n= 62)
1. Manage the special education budget	47.9%	50.0%
2. Complete state reporting requirements (student data, cost reports, etc.)	54.6%	59.7%
3. Complete staff performance evaluations	72.8%	74.2%
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of special education programs and services	70.9%	79.0%
5. Use data for decision making	78.1%	93.6%
6. Oversee the use of ethical and legal student discipline	85.5%	91.9%
7. Provide/procure effective professional development for staff	74.5%	83.9%
8. Supervise instruction	63.6%	80.7%
9. Critically examine student performance data	76.0%	81.7%
10. Recruit and hire special education staff	76.4%	80.6%

Mentor Support Functions

Mentor support functions are the mentor's sharing of values, knowledge, and experience with the protégé (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994). The level of agreement between protégés and mentors was very high in their rating of the five statements designed to gauge the mentors' support function (see Table 5). Percentage point differences only ranged from 0.7% to 5.7%. Both protégés and mentors indicated high agreement with the five statements related to the mentor support functions for the protégé, ranging from a low of 85.7% to a high of 96.8%. Both protégés and mentors ranked the same statements as highest: number 2, "moral support/encouragement," and number 3, "advice/guidance in specific situations." Mentors expressed a higher level of agreement than did protégés on four of the five statements.

Table 5
Protégé and Mentor Agreement with Statements Regarding Mentor Support Functions

As a protégé/mentor, I was provided with/provided:	Protégé (n=56)	Mentor (n=62)
1. Access to experiences such as district meetings and committees	89.3%	93.5%
2. Moral support/encouragement	91.1%	96.8%
3. Advice/guidance in specific situations	92.8%	96.8%
4. Introduction to other special education administrators and professional organizations	89.3%	88.6%
5. Access to professional development events	85.7%	88.7%

Study Limitations

At least two limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, the use of convenience sampling to recruit participants was useful for obtaining perceptions of participants consistent with the research questions. However, sampling by this technique ensured that some members of the population had no chance of being sampled, resulting in potential sampling bias. Also, this study considered only the mentoring experiences of a relatively small group of Michigan special education administrators. Those experiences may not adequately represent the population of all Michigan special education administrators or special education administrators in other states.

Discussion

Little research has focused on the preparation of special education administrators. Focus has primarily been on the leadership preparation of general education administrators, in particular principals and superintendents (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). The need for building principals to be knowledgeable regarding special education policy, procedures, laws and practice is well documented (Davidson & Gooden, 2001; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Goor, Schwenn, & Boyer, 1997) but the administration of special education programming continues to be the purview of special educators who have come up through the ranks, first serving as special education teachers or other special education related service providers such as psychologists, speech/language pathologists or social workers.

Indeed, most states having licensure/certification/endorsement requirements mandate that special education administrators have at least a minimal number of years of experience in a non-administrative special education position which precludes general educators from being employed in leadership positions in special education (Boscardin, Weir, & Kusek, 2010). A dream of many involved in the education of our youth with disabilities is that the total integration of special education and general education be accomplished and, consequently, no need would exist for the separateness of current educational leadership preparation programs. Until that dream is realized, however, it is critical that the demand for adequately prepared special education administrators is met.

The mentoring of future special education administrators at the district level is a viable method to ensure that an adequate supply of skilled educational leaders is prepared to fill current and future administration vacancies. Similarly, the district level mentoring of special education administrators new to the practice is likely to result in the five major benefits for the protégé as outlined by Daresh (2004): (a) more confidence about their professional competence, (b) the translation of educational theory into daily practice, (c) an increase in communication skills, (d) opportunities to learn how to lead, and (e) gaining a sense of belonging. The findings of this study support the use of mentoring as a means of knowledge and skill attainment for prospective and beginning special education administrators. In addition, this study indicates that mentoring relationships can offer protégés support as they assimilate into the profession by providing introductions to people and experiences unlikely to be available without a mentor's sponsorship. The protégés who participated in this study report experiencing high levels of moral support, encouragement, advice, and guidance as they prepared for and began practicing as special education administrators.

Of course, no assumption is made that a mentoring relationship is sufficient, in and of itself, to adequately prepare special education administrators for the demands of the position. Coursework at the university level is necessary and need for the incorporation of field based experiences into the preparation of special education administrators seems evident. But when considering that 23 states do not require a licensure/certification/endorsement and only 18 states require an internship and/or practicum experience, it seems evident that many local school districts are presently on their own to ensure adequately trained personnel are available to manage and lead special education programs. The results of this survey indicate informally and formally arranged mentoring relationships are equally beneficial for protégés. Thus, school districts may choose to create and prescribe the structure of relationships between practicing special education administrators and their staff members who aspire to those positions. In addition, practicing special education administrators may want to identify and encourage staff members who demonstrate leadership potential by offering to engage in informally arranged mentoring relationships.

Implications

All states should require a field experience, a practicum or internship, as a condition for licensure/certification/endorsement as a special education administrator. The value of a field experience guided and supported by a seasoned mentor is well established. Daresh and Playko (1990) describe two purposes of mentors in the preparation of school administrators. First, the mentor provides a role model in the field, to be consulted for guidance and advice concerning technical aspects of school administration. In *Mentoring for Effective School Administration* they stated, "Mentors, in this context, were analogous to master tradespersons to whom apprentices might be assigned to learn certain trades" (p. 48). Second, the mentor supports the protégé in their personal and professional formation as a school administrator. The authors considered this mentor function to be important to the development of school administrators as the protégé reflected on, and analyzed their commitment to administration as a career. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) considered role socialization, professional development and capacity building in the mentoring relationships of aspiring and practicing administrators and ended their closing reflections with, "When mentoring effectively engages veteran, novice, and aspiring principals in reciprocal professional development, the community of practice continuously improves, expands, and deepens leadership capacity in schools and districts" (p. 489).

University administrator preparation programs should provide mentor training for those practicing administrators who are willing to engage in a mentoring relationship with aspiring or beginning special education administrators. University administrator preparation programs could offer mentor training as an outreach activity in partnership with local school districts and/or with professional organizations for special education administrators. Professional organizations would be a likely place to recruit and train a cadre of mentors. The training should include both mentor awareness of the knowledge, skills and dispositions required by practicing special education administrators and effective mentor practices. The current common practice of pre-service educational administrators soliciting a mentor themselves for field practicums could continue with the caveat that mentors complete training before engaging in the mentoring relationship.

University administration preparation programs should provide training to students in how to effectively engage in a mentoring relationship as the protégé. In a study investigating the responsibilities of the protégé in mentoring relationships between experienced school administrators and aspiring principals, Daresh and Playko (1995) found that protégés needed to possess the following for a successful experience: (a) a basic understanding of the teaching process and the nature of leadership in general and in effective organizations, (b) good listening and communication skills, (c) openness and collegiality, (d) a commitment to mentoring.

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