

**Mentoring New Principals:
Investigating the Models and Stages of
Development of the Mentoring Process
in the First Two Years of Principals'
Work**

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Abstract

Mentoring is a formal process inseparable from internship in various fields. Along the process, the mentor provides the mentee with information, counselling, support and opportunities for personal and professional development. The relationship that evolves throughout the process reflects its nature and its singularity. As mentoring has turned out to be significant in the field of education as well, devising an optimal process that would provide new school principals with appropriate tools for developing professionally and personally is vital. This study focuses on the mentoring of new school principals, zooming closely on the relationship formed between the mentor and the mentee during the first two years of principalship in the Israeli system of education. The purpose of the study is to examine the phases in the process of mentoring new school principals, and to identify highlighted aspects in the utterances made by both mentors and mentees, relating to the process and to the forming relationship. The highlighted aspects are compared to those of other models of the relationship between the mentor and the mentee along the process, such as organizational, psychosocial, practical and cognitive highlighted aspects.

The **research questions** are: 1. Does the relationship between mentor and mentee develop in phases throughout the mentoring process, and if so, what are these phases? 2. Are there special highlighted aspects in the process of mentoring principals in the system of education (such as organizational, psychological, practical and cognitive), and, if so, what are they? 3. What factors bring about contributive relations between mentees and mentors?

The **research method** applied in this longitudinal study was qualitative. The study was conducted throughout the mentoring process of new school principals over a period of two years. The study participants comprise two groups: group A, the mentees, that were school principals in their first and second year of work as principals and Group B, the mentors, that were senior, experienced school principals. Area directors of the Ministry of Education matched the pairs from the Tel Aviv and central area. The participants in the first year: mentors' group ($n = 9$), the mentees' group: ($n = 13$). The participants in the second year: mentors' group ($n = 8$), the mentees' group: ($n = 11$). There were changes in the study settings regarding the number of participants and the participants' identity. In the early stages of the study, we collected additional variables relating to gender, principalship seniority and school classification.

Data collection was performed by means of **59 semi-structured interviews** that were the main research tool. During the first year we held 35 interviews (15 with mentors and 20 with mentees), and in the second year 24 interviews (10 with mentors and 14 for mentees). There were two parts to every interview session. In the first part, the interviewee related to the process he or she had undergone, regarding various points of his or her own choice. In the second part, the interviewee responded to questions focusing more specifically on the relationship developing between the interviewee and his partner in the process – either mentor or mentee. The questions posed during the interviews were open questions, inviting a wide range of response. We presented the purpose of the study without mentioning the terms "phases" and "highlighted aspects", so as not to guide the interviewees toward using these terms. The point was to have them specify the highlighted aspects as they experienced them through the process, in order to refine the essence of the highlight and characterize it. In addition to the

interviews, there were three unintended observations in the form of telephone conversations held by three pairs.

Qualitative data analysis was initially performed vertically – for each group separately – and then comparatively-horizontally – to trace common categories and contradictory themes. In addition, a number of relationships that remained stable throughout the process were treated as pairs, regarding the utterances of the mentor versus those of the mentee. The themes were defined through an inductive process of condensing, coding, classifying into categories and generating a theory, all underpinned by various perspectives offered by the study participants. Data analysis was performed in four stages. In the first stage we condensed the findings collected from the 59 interviews and examined their relevance to the purpose of the study. The second stage was the coding. The information was divided into segments that expressed succinctly the phases of the mentoring process (the beginning of the process, the core of the process and the end of the process), the highlighted aspects in the core of the process as well as the factors that assist or inhibit the process. Later, after a certain period, we ran another coding phase, and reexamined the correlation between the two cycles of coding. The third stage involved classification. We grouped together the different codes created in the previous stage according to proximity and connection, in order to generalize their meanings into themes and sub-categories. The fourth stage comprised the construction of the theory, in order to bind the categories of the previous phase into a coherent theoretical structure. The road was a challenge and the process complex and compound. It included moving way and back between the stages and mixing them, and required a high level of generalization.

Throughout the process, we took measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. First, the participants were from two regions; secondly, data triangulation took

place twice, with time intervals, to ensure consistency; thirdly, the study participants were asked to confirm the transcribed interviews, relate to them and, if necessary, clarify their utterances, add points or change their statements (member check). Fourthly, I wrote a reflective log throughout the study, in which I described in detail doubts and uncertainties, thoughts and feelings that helped me understand the findings and how to classify them into categories, and I used them as milestones for future stages in the research as well as for realizing what else needs looking into. For ethical considerations, all the study participants were asked to express their consent to participate in the study for a period of two years, and it was made clear to them that they might leave the study at any given time. None of them left. I explained the purpose of the study to them rather roughly, so as not to influence their utterances. The participants gave their consent to have the interviews recorded, and were assured that the research findings would be published with no identifiable details, and would not be passed on to any other hands.

The research findings indicate **three main phases in the process** of school principal mentoring: the beginning of the process, the core of the process, that is, the relationship phase, and the end of the process. The findings, presented from the perspective of both the mentors and the mentees in each phase of the process, expand the overview of the phases and their highlighted aspects. At the beginning of the process, the mentors' voices stressed the importance of getting to know one another, building trust, coordinating expectations and setting goals. The mentees' voices, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of the mentor's experience and his ability to empathize as the base for trusting him and for forming a set of expectations for the process.

Three conditions were found to be important for the building of a relationship in the first phase and for the continuation of the mentoring process: getting to know each other, coordinating expectations and establishing trust. The first condition is getting to know each other, personally and professionally. The mentor needs to get to know the mentee in order to identify his principalship personality to develop it further and influence the process of establishing his status in the school vis-à-vis the parent community, the municipality and the teaching staff. Knowing the mentor is important for the mentee who needs to examine the professional capacities of the mentor, his experience and the extent to which these fit the school and its population and to respond to their needs. In addition, the need for establishing a meaningful relationship of familiarity derives from the deep loneliness that the new principals experience as they attain their wished for role, and from the feelings that accompany this loneliness.

The second condition, coordinating expectations from the process and from the mentor-mentee interaction, has three main aspects. The interpersonal aspect, session content discretion as the basis for trust in the relationship, would ensure openness and the sharing of significant events. The personal second aspect relates to success in the role, principalship development, personal empowerment and growth. The third aspect is organizational. It relates to defining meeting session framework, time and place, as part of the mutual commitment of the mentor and the mentee to the process.

The third condition is the creation of trust as the basis for establishing a promoting relationship that enables the continuation of the process. Trust allows for an open, available relationship of dialogue and sharing with no criticism or judgment. The study found that trust is the ground for the next step in the relationship. The mentor receives confirmation for his professionalism, skills, his proven experience as principal, the compatibility of his background to the mentee, the background of the school

population and the municipal ways of working, as well as for his commitment to discretion and loyalty. Only then can learning occur in the process without fear. The mentee behaves openly, shares authentic issues encountered at work and asks questions. The mentor allows the mentee to be himself, encourages him in his principal work and empowers him personally and professionally.

These three conditions at the beginning of the process had priority over issues of principalship, organization and pedagogy, all of them important for further phases in the process. The conditions are inter-dependent and proceed from one to the next gradually. In the absence of these conditions, the relationship did not develop and the mentoring process ended before it began. Mentees who had not found their wished for mentor in their first year sought for advice in different frameworks that were not part of the support and counseling they could get within the mentoring framework as part of their internship.

The second phase is the core of the process, in which the relationship and the fostering of the mentee occur. Three highlighted aspects were found in this phase, each presented in detail from the perspective of the mentors and the mentees: an emotional highlighted aspect, a professional and practical highlighted aspect and a cognitive and metacognitive one. There are four sub-categories to the emotional highlighted aspect: emotional support as the platform for building trust; support in personal issues as the base for creating the interpersonal connection; support as the base for working together; and personal and professional support as grounds for empowerment.

The first, **emotional highlighted aspect** was conveyed by most of the mentees in one statement, expressing their wish for the mentors "to be there for them". This statement relates to various aspects of the mentors support of the mentees: the deep

emotional aspect, expressed through listening and ventilation of feelings, and attention to the need of the new principals to relate to the difficulties that arise in their role. Coping with the process of settling down in a role characterized as a struggle for survival, and with the difficulties of interacting with the environment, all require support. The emotional and the professional-practical aspects involve the need for professional support along with the emotional support in the form of listening, counseling and trust on the professional and personal level, as well as acceptance and assurance on the emotional, professional and reflective level. In addition, there is nurturing and encouragement "to spread one's wings", that is, the ability of the mentor to empower the mentee to be independent in his role.

The second is the **professional-practical highlighted** aspect that presents the importance of doing in the process and the ability of the mentor to lead the mentee to deal with professional aspects as required in his developmental phase and to fulfil well the professional requirements in coordination with the organization. Doing, defining fields, focusing and gradually leading the mentee toward doing are all at the center of this highlight. It includes a dilemma raised by the mentors: should one be professional or humane at first? The experienced mentors recognize the inability of the mentees to look at their own conduct in the period of settling down in the role, a period typified as compound and dynamic. The mentors raised the need for doing – "let's do the work" – and for a variety of professional experiences: responding, availability beyond the set sessions, pedagogy and leading projects and initiatives in an advanced stage of the process. The mentees also related to the three subcategories that came out of the mentors' interviews, except for the dilemma of being professional rather humane first, and added the importance of flexibility that answers the requirement to be more attentive to the personal, emotional and professional needs of the mentee.

The third highlighted aspect in the core of the process is the **cognitive and metacognitive highlighted aspect**, based on Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) and its four stages – setting goals, planning, supervising and assessing. The idea of investigating this highlighted aspect leans on the compatibility of the four stages to the requirements from the pedagogical principal in two spheres. The first is the managerial sphere and the related necessary skills that require planning, supervising and assessing as part of the processes of learning, becoming professional and improving. The other sphere is that of pedagogical leadership and the responsibility to the professional development of the educational staff. During sessions, the mentees utilized high thinking skills more than the four SRL stages. The mentors presented to the mentees the strategy of question asking as an important reflective strategy. They suggested raising more points of view for a wider perspective that would help the mentees examine occurrences from different points of view and accept the fact that there is no one way of looking at them, and also help them take responsibility for their decisions. In addition, the need arose to develop the mentees' ability to draw conclusions, so they would be able to project from one case onto another. The mentees also mentioned the importance of being presented with different points of view by a professional such as the mentor, so as to examine them vis-à-vis the organization and expand their learning and experience. They pointed out that asking questions helps them expand their perspectives.

The last phase is **the end of the process**. This phase encompasses a number of important focuses such as developing critical thinking, reflection, empowerment, reciprocal learning and the wish of the mentors to be there for the mentees after the process is over. The mentees, however, find it important to have a reflective dialogue,

empowerment and the setting of goals. This phase is one or two sessions long, and it is important to devote a number of sessions to fulfil its objectives.

In addition to the phases, the study also investigates the assisting and the inhibiting factors in the mentoring process. The findings point out two factors that affect the quality of the relationship formed. The organization factor includes a clearly defined mentoring framework, and the mentees noted the importance of flexibility in the process. The second factor is the interpersonal one. The mentors noted the importance of open communication and the forming of trust in the relationship, and the mentees stressed the importance of relationship based on trust, discretion and faith in the mentor's ability to help in the process and the existence of mutual chemistry, professional as well as human.

The test of the importance of the interaction is in its accordance with the quality of the process and its influence on the continuation of the relationship. This holistic view has led to the development of a mentoring model for pedagogical leaders that is not "more of the same", and whose contribution to mentoring in general and to that of school principals in particular is in its innovativeness. Based on these findings, and in relation to the phases of school principalship in the Earley and Weindling model (2004), we have created a holistic mentoring model for new principals. The model leans on the research findings and relates to the complexity of the school principal's role, the characteristics of entering a new organization, the multiple demands addressed to the principal and the factors influencing the relationship and the process. The objective was to build a model for better mentoring that would be different from the one used in traditional internship, considering the emotional, professional-practical, cognitive and meta-cognitive highlighted aspects that respond to all the parameters and distinguish between the needs and demands of new principals in their first and second year in the

role. In addition, the singularity of this new holistic and dynamic model is in its compatibility with the entirety of the parameters, such as the mentor-mentee interaction, the principal's personality, his emotional, professional-practical, cognitive needs, the characteristics of the organization and the dealing with its various factors. The particular suitability to changing needs defines it as personally adjusted, thus defining the model as the personalization of mentoring.

The current study has theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the literature on mentoring of new school principals views the process of mentoring as an efficient tool for the implication of principalship theories and a source of counseling and support for the new principal. The current findings point out the difficulties facing the new principal, especially in his first year of principalship, and his needs, both from the point of view of the mentee and from the point of view of the experienced mentor. Moreover, we found that the emotional highlighted aspect is somewhat similar to the psychosocial function in Kram's mentoring model (1985). However, in the current study this highlighted aspect is more elaborate in the way it presents the roles of the mentor and the mentee, and expands our knowledge on the interaction between them and on other models of mentoring. The cognitive highlighted aspect appears in Zachary's model of mentoring (2000), but the metacognitive highlighted aspect does not appear in any of the mentoring models as presented in this study.

The significance of new principals' mentoring model application has two layers, first, the relating to the stages of principalship they undergo upon entering their role, and second, the important highlighted aspects in the interpersonal interaction of mentor and mentee, in the three phases in general and in the second phase, the core of the process in particular. The research findings and conclusions might help decision makers in the ministry of education and the institutions for principal training recognize the

unique needs and challenges new principals face upon entering their role, for the purpose of designing an internship that fits their emotional, professional-practical and cognitive and metacognitive needs according to the phases of principalship and the role requirements. They can also help in delineating an appropriate mentoring program, in developing internship theoretical and practical programs suitable for new principals, and in encouraging research in the field.

In view of the findings of the current study, we suggest that further research would focus on two topics: firstly, expanding the comparison between mentoring new school principals and mentoring in other fields, and secondly, examining more extensively the model offered in the current study. Comparisons with mentoring processes in other disciplines might encompass mentoring in different countries with different educational cultures. We also recommend checking other parameters for assessing the success of the process and focusing on significant points in time for the new principal such as the first two months in the role. Further research should relate to the effect of other role holders such as regional supervisors; examine the model and the highlighted aspects required for each year and check the compatibility of the theory learned in training courses to the conditions in the field.