The purpose of this study was to examine how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts school leadership. A qualitative case study was used to understand how formal assistant principal mentorship impacted each of the participants. The theoretical framework was gleaned from symbolic interactionism, as the data from each of the interviews was analyzed, coded, and categorized. The constant comparative method was used to analyze data, which was generated based on two semi-structured interviews. The trends that emerged from the cross case analysis were as follows: (1) Formal mentorship prepared assistant principals for school administration as they became more effective, having a greater sense of efficacy, for their jobs, (2) Formal mentorship provided assistant principals with a framework that they needed to become acclimated to their role as a school leader, (3) Formal mentorship gave assistant principals the knowledge and skills needed to make instinctual decisions by applying principles of job-embedded learning, or on-the-job training, and (4) Formal mentorship provided assistant principals with just-in-time training that enabled them to be successful in their first and second years as a school leader. Findings from this study indicate that formal assistant
mentorship has the potential to provide assistant principals with the support and guidance that they need to be prepared for their first and second years on the job. One of the implications for further research indicates that studies should focus on taking the findings to scale by studying a larger population of assistant principals to validate the findings of this study.

INDEX WORDS: Formal Assistant Principal Mentorship, Job-embedded Learning, Accountability Movement, Role Socialization, Principal Succession, High School Assistant Principals
FORMAL PRINCIPAL MENTORSHIP ON HIGH SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS: A CASE STUDY

by

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DEDICATION

First of all I want to dedicate this dissertation to Christ, who has been the head of my life and in whom I have faith. I prayed that God would put me in over my head so that all I could see was Him. He has answered that prayer. There have been many days when I have wanted to stay home and play football, baseball, or basketball with my two boys, or wanted to watch a movie with my wife, but I went off to either my Starbucks office or my McDonalds office to work on this dissertation. Although I have not regretted this endeavor at all, I am thrilled that the light at the end of the tunnel is as bright as it is.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to examine how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts school leadership. The study sought to understand the policies and implementation of a formal assistant principal mentorship program in an effort to gain knowledge about what aspects of mentoring were perceived as beneficial. With this information, it was hoped that assistant principals and their mentors would have a better understanding of how to use mentorship to benefit their work as leaders. The knowledge gained through studying assistant principal mentorship could have a substantial impact on both the assistant principal’s effectiveness and on school performance. Hall (2008) affirmed that intentional mentorship was needed to strengthen school leadership, sharing, “The power of an effective mentoring partnership is immense. The power of an ineffective or non-existent mentoring relationship is equally great but with destructive consequences for the new principal” (p. 452). The study of a formal assistant principal mentorship program and the studies associated with it have the potential to assist policymakers and school leaders in determining how to best use and apply formal assistant principal mentorship within their schools and districts.

A shortage of school leaders, along with the inadequate training often associated with the position, has caused a scarcity in the number of effective and experienced assistant principals (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Hall, 2008; Lee, Kwan, & Walker, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Peter, 2010; Riley, 2009; Weller & Weller, 2002; Wong, 2009). The current educational climate has created a vast number of challenges that school leaders must face. Legislative and
educational reforms, demographic changes within the student body, and pressures from parents, among others, have created an environment of urgency for school leaders (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Weller & Weller, 2002; Wong 2009).

Unlike the requirements for teachers, many districts do not mandate that assistant principals have an advanced degree in school leadership at the beginning of their careers, and because of this, assistant principals have traditionally relied on on-the-job training, which often proves to be insufficient. Assistant principals need more support and more guidance than they are often offered as they navigate through the demands of education in the 21st century (Daresh, 2007; Hall, 2008; Kottkamp, 2011; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Riley, 2009; Weller & Weller, 2002; Wong, 2009).

Effective school leaders are able to have a dramatic impact on the performance of schools (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003) and therefore, successful school leadership preparation is essential. Casavant and Cherkowski (2001) stated:

If good schools need good leaders, then effective approaches to preparing candidates to become school principals are necessary. However, many educators believe that preparation programs for new principals have in large part failed to keep pace with the current complex realities of what is expected from this vital leadership position. (p. 72)

To combat the notion that educational leadership preparation is not keeping pace with the changing times, new and innovative training and job-support methods must be put in place in school systems. Mentoring can, perhaps, fill the void in supporting assistant principals as they not only enter the position but also move throughout their careers as assistant principals.

Research shows that mentorship can result in positive outcomes for school leaders (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Harris, Ballenger, & Leonard, 2004; Mertz; 2004). Across the country, attempts have been made to implement assistant principal mentorship, and while it is generally accepted that mentorship is
beneficial to a new assistant principal, more studies are needed to identify how to support novice assistant principals during their first and second years in the position. This study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how formal assistant principal mentorship assisted novice assistant principals.

**Statement of the Problem**

The educational accountability movement has been taking hold in America over the past several decades, and national, state, and local policies are calling for school leaders to assume leadership over the curriculum and instruction within their schools. The education law *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) solidifies the national effort to hold school leaders accountable for how a school performs (Title II-A-5-2151-B). The demanding nature of the assistant principalship and the challenges associated with school leadership necessitates an understanding of what types of support assistant principals need as they begin their first- or second-year on the job (O'Mahoney, 2003). The demands of being an assistant principal are often overwhelming during the first- or second-year in the position (O'Hahoney, 2003). Yet, policymakers expect assistant principals to meet these challenges and at the same time improve student learning, as far as it can be judged through student performance measures (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004).

The common belief is that school leaders are the most important figures in a given school, having a critical role in the functioning and performance of the school (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Kottkamp, 2011; Marks & Printy, 2003; Witzers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003).

In their seminal work, Smith and O'Day (1990) positioned that educational reform needs to be accompanied by “systematic reform” at the local level to make lasting changes in education (p. 234). If school leaders are the gauge of the educational climate of the school, it would make
sense that these reforms should begin at their level, and in turn, positively affect the local school as a whole. The U.S. Department of Education holds firm that, “As schools are held accountable for increasingly higher academic standards, it is vital to have high-quality principals leading schools” (NCLB, 2002, Title II, Part A, Subpart 5, Section 2151B). As principals and assistant principals are held responsible for school performance, it is important to understand how formal mentorship can be used to impact assistant principal’s performance.

Criticism of public education, and especially of school leadership, remains high, and the need for change is continually stressed by politicians, society, and the media (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006). A review of literature shows that there are numerous research studies examining how school leaders are impacted by the accountability movement because they hold the majority of the responsibility for student performance (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Kottkamp, 2011; Shipps & White, 2009; Witzers et al., 2003).

Witzers et al. (2003) asserted the following about school leader’s impact on student performance:

Although it indicates that not more than 1% of the variation in student achievement is associated with differences in educational leadership, one should bear in mind that the measures used in the studies are far from perfectly reliable and thus may lead to an underestimation of the association. In organizational studies on the relation between leadership and student performance, one is studying how one individual affects many others. In this sense, a small effect may still be very relevant. (p. 415)

These findings suggest that an assistant principal’s effectiveness has a less direct impact, and possibly a greater indirect impact, on student performance.

Although research does not show that school leaders have a substantial direct impact on student performance, the evidence clearly suggests that they are nevertheless an important factor in the performance of schools (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Shipps & White, 2009; Witzers et al., 2003). Hoy and
Miskel (2005) relate school leader’s impact on student achievement to their ability to build “academic optimism.” Hoy and Miskel (2005) suggested that when teachers, parents and even students believe that the students can achieve, their ability to achieve increases.

Along with being accountable for student performance, assistant principals are also accountable to maintain the standards and objectives of the school and of the district. Marshall and Hooley (2006) asserted that although the assistant principal is directly under the leadership of the principal, the assistant principal still makes instructional decisions within each school. Wong (2009) supported this claim by stating that there are two formal administrative positions within a school, the principal and the vice-principal. Therefore, the way in which assistant principals lead will have direct consequences on the ways in which the school will perform.

The ability of the assistant principal to impact school performance depends on a number of factors, many of which could extend outside their direct influence. Murphy, Hallinger, and Peterson (1985) suggested that effective districts have tight coordination between the district office and the school. School leaders are being held responsible for communicating with the district so that the mission and vision of the district is carried out (Ebmeier & Nicklaus, 1999; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Kay, Hagan, & Parker, 2009). This new paradigm of educational leadership has initiated a need for heightened awareness of what training and support principals need to be successful.

From the policymakers’ and the public’s viewpoint, the ability of schools to meet the measured criteria for school improvement remains critical (Elmore, 2004). In view of this need, mentorship of school leaders is needed not only to improve the individual leader’s abilities, but also to promote better communication and understanding between district level staff and local school administrators (Kay et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 1985). Those schools which do not meet
the performance standards are subject to local or state improvement plans, in which the school leaders are held responsible (Rothstein, Jacobson, & Wilder, 2009). Local, state, and federal governments have adopted school improvement plans as a way to advance student performance (Elmore, 2004). One result of these improvement plans often is to replace the principals and assistant principals with other school leaders, adding to the pressure for school leaders to produce positive measurable results.

There have been many studies which have researched educational reform and how it relates to school leadership (Harris & Sass, 2009; Lee et al., 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Rothstein et al., 2009; Witzers et al., 2003; Wong, 2009). It has been shown that assistant principals have a crucial role within a school. The study of assistant principal mentorship may add to the understanding of what support assistant principals need to improve schools and how to equip them to do the best possible job under the pressures of the current educational climate.

Lasting change in education cannot depend solely on student performance on standardized tests. The literature shows that assistant principal supervision and evaluation are key components to improving student learning (Holland & Adams, 2002; Murphy et al., 1985; Shipps & White, 2009; Shulman, Sullivan, & Glanz, 2008). Within this context and as amplified in the literature, understanding and applying formal mentorship to assistant principals could have positive impacts on school performance (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Daresh, 2002; Erich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Grogan & Crow, 2004; Harris et al., 2004; O'Hahoney, 2003; Wong, 2009).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts school leadership. The perspectives of two assistant principals were examined. As
politicians and policymakers are revamping the structure of schools, school leaders are being held responsible for how schools perform. When schools do not meet adequate yearly progress, the responsibility generally falls ultimately to the principal, but also to the assistant principals. This reality necessitates a way to equip new assistant principals in the beginning years of their careers with leadership skills that make them, and their schools, more successful.

Mentorship can support the development of leadership skills in novice assistant principals. Hall (2008) affirmed that mentorship has the potential to improve the leadership quality within schools. Mentorship has been shown to be effective in preparing assistant principals; however, the literature on formal assistant principal mentorship is scarce. Therefore, there is a need to study the impacts of formal mentorship programs on novice assistant principals so that schools and districts are able to use formal mentorship with confidence as the means to improve the leadership quality in schools.

**Significance of the Study**

As experienced school leaders retire, school districts seem mystified as to how to prepare aspiring assistant principals to take their place (Harris et al., 2004; Kay et al., 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Wong, 2009). In fact, there is a shortage of quality school leaders which is accompanied by the inability of districts to find candidates willing to be administrators (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006). This lack of willingness is due, in part, to the increased accountability placed on school leaders for student performance and the all-but-impossible to meet standards set forth in current legislation.

Quality candidates are often deterred from entering school leadership, a job that requires an immense amount of energy and stamina. Because assistant principals are held responsible for establishing school policies and procedures, along with the principal, it only makes sense that the
quality and effectiveness of the assistant principal is crucial to a school's success. Casavant and Cherkowski (2001) affirmed, “The growing body of research on effective schools has consistently pointed to the importance of responsible, assertive, and visible in-school leadership to school success” (p. 73). Mentorship is of great value, because of its ability to shrink the gap between the skill set of novice and veteran assistant principals. Mentors benefit mentees by guiding them through difficult decisions and situations with the wisdom that only comes from years of experience. In encouraging the novice assistant principals to make intelligent decisions alongside an experienced mentor, a formal mentoring program improves the ability of novice assistant principals to impact positively the success of their schools.

The current body of literature suggests that mentorship has the potential to strengthen school leadership dramatically (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006; Daresh, 2007; Ehrich et al., 2004; Grogan & Crow, 2004; Hall, 2008; Harris et al., 2004). However, the literature on formal assistant principal mentorship programs is not as extensive. Further study could add important insights into how formal assistant principal mentorship enables assistant principals to be more prepared for the job, and the implications could impact how districts use formal mentorship to prepare their school leaders effectively.

Formal assistant principal mentorship establishes a centralized program that school districts can use to develop school leaders through the guidance of mentors. Ehrich et al. (2004) postulated, “Formal mentoring programs differ in nature, focus, and outcomes” (p. 519). The original conception of formal mentoring was established by organizations that saw the benefits that “could see the advantage of implementing formal programs because they enabled potential learning and growth for employees on the job” (Ehrich et al., 2004, p. 519). Within education, formal mentorship could, likewise, positively impact the development of quality school leaders.
One way that formal mentorship can benefit assistant principals is through professional development. Casavant and Cherkowski (2001) reported, “Improving school leadership means finding creative ways to enhance the success of aspiring school leaders and to reform the means by which they are prepared, inducted, and supported in their professional work” (p 74). Formal mentorship has the potential to provide school leaders with on the job training along, leadership preparation and role socialization. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) suggested that mentorship strengthens the ability of principals to be socialized to school leadership. Novice assistant principals can often have a steep learning curve during their first and second years, and formal mentorship can lessen the difficulties and provide a road map for school leadership. Daresh (2004) affirmed that mentorship has the potential to enhance the professional development of school leaders so that they can become successfully inducted into the role of an assistant principal. Socialization is important in adapting to being in administration. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2006), in fact, establish that mentorship could create situated learning for school leaders so that they are able to apply leadership techniques to practical situations.

Mentorship promotes key aspects of leadership development. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2006) suggested that the leader’s ability depends on several key principles that can be developed through mentorship. Encouragement and support from the mentor, opportunities to engage in authentic leadership activities, and the development of personal competence to assume leadership responsibilities all are encompassed within the mentorship model (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006). Ideally, these aspects are enhanced by the impacts of mentorship and even promote deeper professional development goals, which include being a lifelong learner, reflecting on one’s leadership ability, and using ethical and moral decision making practices. In
this way, mentorship is able to build both the practical and the theoretical aspects of school leaders.

In summary, as the accountability movement and national, state, and local laws continue to heighten pressures for assistant principals, the public demands that high-quality candidates are placed in positions of leadership. Formal mentorship provides an effective way for school leaders to be equipped to meet these demands.

**Overview of Research Methods**

The data collection methods for this study were qualitative in nature. The theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism guided the interviews, the analysis, and the interpretation of data (Blumer, 1969). Blumer (1969) viewed meaning as social products and the “defining activities of people” that are formed as they interact with each other (p. 5). Within this interpretive approach, meanings were constructed through viewing human behavior and human interaction. Data were collected through structured interviews of two assistant principals. The constant comparative method of analysis was used to construct meaning based on the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this way, the researcher can reach theoretical saturation once the data has established meaning which is continually constructed within the data and within the analysis of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The study of formal assistant principal mentorship was enhanced from using symbolic interactionism as its theoretical framework. This framework allowed the interactions of principals and their mentors to be understood and interpreted. Meanings become more apparent as codes and categories were created from the data.
Research Questions

Research questions provide a guiding framework for the study. The broad questions established the overview and direction of this study on principal mentorship; hence, the research questions were designed to investigate the impacts of formal assistant principal mentorship on novice assistant principals. The questions that guided the present study of assistant principal mentorship are:

1. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, build efficacy in assistant principals?

2. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact role socialization of assistant principals?

3. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact job-embedded professional development of assistant principals?

Background of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts leadership. Within the current educational climate in America and around the globe, leadership development remains an extremely important aspect of reforming and improving education. School leaders, specifically, are held responsible and accountable for student performance. Therefore, formal assistant principal mentorship needs to be examined as a way to both improve educational leadership and to sustain the growth of effective leadership practices.

For the past five years, the DuPage County Public Schools, a pseudonym for the system in which the study was conducted, has implemented a formal assistant principal mentorship program. The main focus of the formal program was to provide mentorship for first- or second-year assistant principals. The DuPage County Public Schools hired retired principals to act as mentors for new school assistant principals. The highest priority for the mentors is to support
assistant principals. In this way, the formal mentorship program is used largely to provide counsel and guidance for new school leaders.

The formal mentorship program within the DuPage County Public Schools is consistent with the mission of the school district. The DuPage County Public Schools establishes, “The mission of DuPage County Public Schools is to pursue excellence in academic knowledge, skills, and behavior for each student, resulting in measured improvement against local, national and world-class standards” (DuPage County Public Schools, 2011). One key aspect of the mission statement is to make measured improvement. With this mission statement as a guide, the county has established the formal assistant principal mentorship program to strengthen the leadership within the schools, which will in turn improve the performance of teachers and students. Therefore, one objective in studying formal assistant principal mentorship is to understand specifically how mentorship is able to strengthen school leadership and in turn, impact student learning.

In addition, current research shows that socialization can either positively or negatively impact novice school leaders (Browne-Ferrigno et al., 2006; Daresh, 2007; Grogan & Crow, 2004; O'Hahoney, 2003). Daresh (2007) suggested that mentorship can provide novice school leaders with a framework which could guide the development of their leadership strategies. The idea is that the mentors are not to give their protégés a checklist of competencies, but rather a “simple set of essential skills, knowledge, and values that are needed to be demonstrated by effective principals in schools” (Daresh, 2007, p. 26). In this way, assistant principals would be able to conceptualize their role as a school leader and able to act accordingly. Based on this, this study of formal assistant principal mentorship attempted to identify how mentorship would be able to provide effective role socialization to novice assistant principals.
Another aspect of formal assistant principal mentorship that was addressed through this study was identifying the role of the mentor. Weingartner (2009) affirmed that the role of the mentor was a critical aspect of effective mentoring. Key characteristics of a mentor include: ask probing questions, provide honest feedback, listen, analyze decisions, propose alternative viewpoints, encourage independence, foster lifelong learning and offer caring support (Hall, 2008). Mentors need to be studied to better understand their impact on principal mentorship. The knowledge gained from this study can be compared with that of the literature to evaluate whether the DuPage County mentors display the research-based qualities that aid in their success, and whether they are using them appropriately.

In theory, formal assistant principal mentorship should currently have a dramatic impact on the quality of leadership within the DuPage County Public Schools. The findings will hopefully add to the current body of research and be able to uncover the impact of mentoring with novice assistant principals in the DuPage County Public Schools. The hope is that this study will inform the program directors and DuPage County on how to strengthen and to improve the mentorship program, and potentially benefit other districts hoping to adopt a similar program as well.

**Definitions of Terms**

**Job-embedded Learning** - Zepeda (2008) states the following regarding job-embedded learning, “Job-embedded learning is a part of the teacher’s daily work, it is, by its very nature, relevant to the learner” (p. 143). There are three “attributes” that describes successful job-embedded learning:

1. It is relevant to the individual learner
2. Feedback is built into the process
3. It facilitates the transfer of new skills into practice (Zepeda, 2008)

Therefore, job-embedded learning consists of taking skills and concepts learned outside the classroom and applying them inside the classroom.

**Just-in-time Learning**- Professional development for school leaders that is effective and relevant to their current situation (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2010).

**Efficacy**- Efficacy was defined as the process in which assistant principals become effective in their role as a school leader and are able “to perform a task and achieve a goal” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

**Formal Assistant Principal Mentorship**- Ehrich et al. (2004) asserted, “It seems that as formal mentoring programs are planned, structured, and coordinated interventions within an organization’s human resource policies” (p. 521). Formal mentorship therefore, has a structured program to meet the organization’s goals through using mentorship.

**Accountability Movement**- The accountability movement has been established by federal, state and local policies and laws that enforce schools to meet the standards and objectives, which are measured by student achievement (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

**Role Ambiguity**- Role ambiguity was defined as not having a clear and precise job description for assistant principals. Marshall and Hooley (2006) suggested that assistant principals do not have a well-defined and clear job description, and therefore this creates ambiguity within their job.

**Principal Succession**- Bengtson (2010) states that principal succession is the process that “involves the movement of personnel into or out of positions and is more critical the more pronounced the position” (p. 15). Principal succession was defined as having a leadership development plan that prepares leaders to fill in vacant administrative roles.
Professional Development- Professional development can be seen as the policies and procedures that assist in building and creating the practices, beliefs and understandings of school leaders. Professional development is driven by the vision of the district and school, and attempts to meet the goals of the organization through improving the leaders’ skills and leadership abilities.

Role Socialization- According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), role socialization was defined as the initial period of assimilation which allows the assistant principal to become accustomed to the environment, culture and attitude of the school.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed that the assistant principals who are taking part in formal assistant principal mentorship expressed their own perspectives regarding assistant principal mentorship. The researcher also assumed that all participants honestly shared their experiences and were willing to co-construct knowledge about being a mentor or being mentored in the DuPage County Public Schools.

Limitations

The study is limited to two assistant principals who participated in a formal assistant principal mentorship program. Each of the participants participated in the formal mentorship program in their first and second year as assistant principals. The first and second year for assistant principals have proven to be the most difficult and so the mentorship program focused on providing support to the assistant principals during that time. Furthermore, the two participants worked within the same school and took part in the same program, one participating in 2008-2009 and the other participating in 2009-2010. Additionally, both rounds of interviews were conducted during the summer so each participant had time to reflect on their experiences with formal mentorship.
Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 of the dissertation begins with the statement of the problem, purpose of the study and the significance of the study. Additionally, this chapter contains sections examining the overview of the research methods, the background of the study, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 highlights the literature related to assistant mentorship including sections related to accountability and school improvement, job-embedded professional learning, the assistant principalship, and then concluding with relevant literature on mentorship and related topics.

Chapter 3 offers a description of the research methods and provides an overview of how the study was conducted and the overall scope of the study. Chapter 4 presents an in-depth look at the context of DuPage County Public High School and the individual case findings, which is then followed up by Chapter 5 which describes the cross case analysis of the participant findings. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes with a summary and discussion of the study and then ends by describing the implications for further research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts school leadership. Research clearly paints a favorable picture of mentorship as a way of developing school leaders (Ehrich et al., 2004; Grogan & Crow, 2004; Hall, 2008; Harris et al., 2004; Lindley, 2009; Weingartner, 2009). The evidence for the success of mentorship, although compelling, needs to be further investigated so that assistant principals may be better equipped to meet the challenges of school leadership. The current educational climate is putting a premium on top-quality, highly effective school leaders. The study of assistant principal mentorship is important because when used successfully, mentorship has the potential to develop and train school leaders in a way that can ultimately influence the level of student learning and achievement (Duncan & Stock, 2010; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Kay et al., 2009).

The questions that guided this study of principal mentorship were:

1. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, build efficacy in assistant principals?

2. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact role socialization of assistant principals?

3. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact job-embedded professional development of assistant principals?

The occurrence of mentorship for school leaders has become a common practice across educational settings. Both individual schools and districts have used mentorship as an effective way to develop administrative leaders.
As suggested by Zepeda (2008), “Schools that succeed are schools in which every participant is a learner” (p. 1). Assistant principals, as learners, need a mentorship model that builds their skills and competencies for them to be successful in their jobs. Current research suggests that mentorship has the potential to have a positive impact on educational leadership, while acknowledging its challenges and limitations (Ehrich et al., 2004).

Mentorship has become a way in which assistant principals can receive support and guidance for their challenging jobs. To ensure continuity and carryover of institutional knowledge, veteran principals are enlisted to mentor new school leaders (Hall, 2008; Harris et al., 2004). Hall (2008) suggested that mentorship builds bridges so that experienced principals can impart their knowledge and skills to novice assistant principals.

Mentoring has been used for centuries as a way to develop talented and successful professionals. Ehrich et al. (2004) point out the importance of mentoring this way, “Throughout history, mentors have played a significant role in teaching, inducting, and developing the skills and talents of others” (p. 519). O’Mahoney (2003) pointed to mentorship as being vital to leaders when he shared, “Of critical importance was their reliance on principal mentors to help support them as they negotiated the process of principal role socialization” (p. 15). Mentoring not only has great potential for building school leadership, but also mentoring can be an effective way to pass on successful leadership practices from one administrator to another.

The current educational climate has given school administrators the responsibility to build a positive learning environment as well as to improve student performance (Hall, 2008). These demands have intensified the pressures put on assistant principals. The assistant principalship has developed into a high-stakes position in which the administrator’s performance is highly scrutinized (Daresh, 2002; Hall, 2008; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Shipps & White,
The systematic study of assistant principal mentorship is needed to inform policy makers and educators on how to develop, train, and prepare novice assistant principals for the tough and demanding job of school leadership (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005; Lindley, 2009; Weingartner, 2009).

With this knowledge as background, school districts have been implementing formal mentorship as a way to give school leaders support. Much of the current research has focused on exclusively principal mentorship; however, there has been a movement to prepare assistant principals as well as principals (Lee et al., 2009; Thompson, 2010; Weller & Weller, 2002; Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). This research study specifically analyzes how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts leadership within a school. The sections within this chapter include: accountability and school improvement, job-embedded professional development, efficacy, the assistant principalship, mentoring, formal mentorship, role of the mentor, limitations of mentoring, positive outcomes for assistant principals, mentor-mentee relationship, and a chapter summary.

**Accountability and School Improvement**

Before examining the intricacies of mentorship, it is helpful to understand why a program for improving school leadership is so desirable. The need for mentorship is undeniable when current emphasis on accountability was recognized. Because public education by nature is so closely tied to laws and policies, looking at one without background knowledge of the other inhibits full understanding.

The accountability movement has created dynamic changes in education across America. Principals and assistant principals have had to adjust their leadership strategies to meet the criteria established by national and state standards (Shipps & White, 2009). In fact, recent
policies and laws have continued to establish accountability as a main focus within education (Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Riley, 2009; Witzers et al., 2003). Fink and Resnick (2001) affirm that the main goal of the accountability movement is student learning. Test scores will track the trend of schools that produce learners. Fink and Resnick (2001) state:

This highlighting of achievement results, in the context of collegial discussions about approaches to improving learning, is a key to keeping everyone’s attention focused on the district’s “bottom line” — student learning. The focus on results, however, is balanced by the ongoing attention, in principals’ conferences and other professional development events for principals, to the quality of instructional practice. So the message the district sends is not that it needs to meet specific test score goals but that it needs to use the test scores to guide to the effectiveness of practice. (pp. 601-602)

The accountability movement aims to create a better learning environment for students and to focus more intently on student learning. The goal is to improve student learning through tightened accountability; however, this is not always the end result.

Even when held accountable, it is not possible for even the most successful school leader to meet all the objectives of current educational policies. Rothstein et al. (2009) wrote an article called ‘Proficiency for All: An Oxymoron,’ which like the title suggests, looks at fundamental flaws in educational policies. Rothstein et al. (2009) stated, “NCLB’s requirement that all students be proficient in math and reading at the same ‘challenging’ standards ignores the reality that, even under the best of circumstances and in the best schools, children’s abilities vary widely” (p. 135). The nature of education is to create a distribution of scores. Therefore, to have all students being proficient either waters down the standards or defies the normal distribution curve. One way to view this is that “there is a considerable difference between feasible goals, which must be grounded in reality, and appropriate goals, which can mean anything the goal setters choose” (Rothstein et al., 2009, p. 135). The problem is not that there are standards and
objectives, but that these standards and objectives may not be realistic considering the reality of educational practices.

Elmore (2004) acknowledged this problem, and positioned that though the performance-based movement was aimed at closing the achievement gap, like other policies, it may not work the first time around. There is evidence from recent scores that minority groups, such as African American and Hispanic students, are improving their performance (Elmore, 2004). These positive outcomes ensure that although there are problems with the accountability movement, the evidence of some improvement may make it worthwhile. In the meantime, school leaders have to adapt their leadership strategies to navigate their schools through this movement.

Harris and Sass (2009) viewed the accountability movement differently. They examined the teacher to see what factors played into teacher performance. It was discovered that teacher performance has direct links to student achievement. Harris and Sass (2009) also found that administrators accurately knew which of their teachers were increasing student performance and which teachers were not. Research has shown that there is a direct correlation between principal evaluation and teacher effectiveness (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Kottkamp, 2011; Shulman et al., 2008).

What are school leaders doing to increase the ability of lower performing teachers? Similarly, what can school leaders do to increase the ability of the teachers who have high performance records? Harris and Sass (2009) stated, the fact that the school administrator’s “evaluations are better predictors of a teacher’s contribution to student achievement than are traditional teacher credentials does not lend support to current policies that reward teachers based on expertise and formal education” (p. 37). School leaders and policymakers should be aware of the importance of the evaluation process and make instructional supervision an important part of
their work. This body of research can inform assistant principal mentorship and point assistant principal preparation and development to fulfilling the instructional needs of the school (Duncan & Stock, 2010; Hall, 2008; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). If teachers have such a large impact on student learning, then school leaders also play an important part, as they are responsible for the instructional performance of the teachers under their authority.

In viewing the accountability design issues and the effect of accountability policies, it can be noted that both educators and policymakers desire more out of the current educational system. There are many positive aspects of the movement, but as far as the theoretical purposes of the accountability movement some of the policies are either not feasible or impractical (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006; Harris & Sass, 2009; Kottkamp, 2011; Shipps & White, 2009). School leaders should be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the current laws and policies to create the best academic environment for their students. Within mentorship, the accountability movement impacts how administrators are able to lead their schools and because of this, mentorship should address ways in which school leaders are able to meet the demands of current legislation.

**Job-embedded Professional Development**

Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) point to several important areas of professional development that promote improvements in school leadership, along with teacher development. The focus is placed on creating authentic and meaningful professional development opportunities so that school principals are able to more efficiently meet the needs of teachers, as well as students. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) affirmed this by suggesting that effective job-embedded professional learning can improve the quality of leadership and directly impact teacher’s ability to improve the quality of instruction. High-
quality professional development has the ability to create an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. Within this study, job-embedded learning was defined by the following three attributes: (1) it is relevant to the individual, (2) feedback is built into the process and (3) it facilitates the transfer of new skills into practice (Zepeda, 2008, p. 143).

Novice assistant principals benefit from professional development that focuses on intense professional practice intertwined with job-embedded learning (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). O'Mahoney (2003) suggested that job-embedded learning provides the best context for professional development and calls on educational leaders to engage in workplace learning during which their experience is based on practical applications. Job-embedded learning benefits assistant principals as they become acclimated to their new role. Zepeda (2008) supported this by stating, “When ongoing support through the tools of job-embedded professional development is linked with instructional supervision, transfer of skills into practice becomes part of the job” (p. 144). Because the nature of successful mentorship promotes job-embedded learning, mentees have the rare opportunity to acquire leadership skills through relevant and applicable on the job training.

Zepeda (2008) also suggested that effective professional development lays the foundation for school improvement. Professional development helps to establish the educational climate of the school (Zepeda, 2008). Webster-Wright (2009) suggested that for professional development to be effective it must be meaningful and authentic. To make the professional development meaningful and authentic, current research points to job-embedded learning (Fiszer, 2004). Job-embedded learning consists of taking skills and concepts learned outside the classroom and applying them inside the classroom.
One way to create job-embedded professional development is to establish learning communities. Zepeda (2008) suggested that schools would benefit greatly from being aligned with professional learning communities. Within learning communities, everyone is involved to create a successful learning environment. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) suggested that the environment established within the school is one of the best ways to establish better teaching and learning. Within the learning community administrators and teachers are able to develop ongoing reflection with others and with themselves to establish an environment devoted to teaching and learning. The effectiveness of sustained, job-embedded, collaborative strategies creates an environment where principals and assistant principals can learn how to lead effectively by meeting the needs of their teachers and community.

Effective professional development, therefore, is focused ultimately on student learning. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) showed that student learning is impacted the greatest when principals and teachers are focused on active teaching. This takes place when professional development is relevant for schools leaders, as well as teachers. Zepeda (2008) affirmed that job-embedded learning, which occurs on the “job site” (p. 143), builds a culture of instruction in which school leaders are able to establish better pedagogical skills and embrace adult learning strategies that enhances their leadership ability. Webster-Wright (2009) suggested that principals and assistant principals are able to impact student learning the best when the professional development does not “train” school leaders, but actively, continuously and practically builds instructional practices. Assistant principals, as well as principals, need to continually build their leadership skills and instructional practices so that teachers and students may benefit from their instructional leadership.
The idea of assistant principals as an adult learner is also vital in professional development. Zepea (2008) confirmed:

Generally, adults want to be successful learners who find pleasure and relevance in their learning. For adults, relevancy adds value to learning, and intrinsic motivation based on success, value and enjoyment are significant motivating factors. Job-embedded learning can be achieved more readily if learning opportunities are efficient, relevant, and yield mastery of skills and increases in knowledge that can be applied immediate to the work of teaching. (p. 142)

Relevant adult learning should be the focal point of professional development. The more able assistant principals are able to apply what they learn in professional development in schools, the better they are going to be able to meet the needs of their constituents.

Research also suggested that professional development should be focused on just-in-time training. In this study, just-in-time training was defined as professional development for school leaders that is effective and relevant to their current situation (Leithwood et al., 2010). Whitcomb, Borko, and Liston (2009) postulated, “Professional development programs should be situated in practice, focused on student learning, embedded in professional communities, sustainable and scalable, and both supported and accompanied by carefully designed research” (p. 208). Just-in-time training provides purposeful professional development at a specified time so that the learner can be prepared for what is about to happen. Fiszer (2004) found that learners are best prepared for their job when there is advanced planning. Advanced planning provides a structured plan for professional development so that the learner can learn what he or she needs to know at the time that he or she needs to know it.

This idea of just-in-time learning has been gaining momentum throughout academic circles. The research suggested that school improvement occurs when professional development is intertwined with a collegial learning environment. The Wallace Foundation has studied leadership development extensively and has conducted numerous studies “to identify the nature
of successful educational leadership and to better understand how such leadership can improve educational practices and student learning” (Leithwood et al., 2010). The findings of this elaborate study found that leadership is about organizational improvement and organizational structure. Figure 2.1 illustrates the impact of leadership on educational practices.

Figure 2.1
Leadership Influences on Student Learning

(Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 14)

This chart illustrates the power that strong professional development programs can have on school leaders and their impact on the different facets of education. Just-in-time training is one of the answers in an effort to prepare school leaders. The impact of just-in-time training can be seen by the following: (1) organizational improvement takes place when leaders are able to combine practical application with theoretical knowledge, (2) school improvement takes place when school leaders are able to maximize the abilities of the organization, and (3) school leadership becomes maximized as the leadership preparation allows the leaders to take place in
effective and relevant professional development, which in this study we have labeled as just-in-time learning.

Strong professional development and proper use of just-in-time training can yield positive results for school leaders. As today’s leaders are facing numerous challenging, their training needs to be effective and relevant. Just-in-time training and job-embedded learning are two research based strategies that are able to provide the proper training at the proper time.

**Efficacy**

Over the past several decades, researchers have pointed to increased efficacy as a way to improve performance. In fact, Dunlop, Beatty, and Beauchamp (2011) suggested that self-efficacy is “necessary for personal success” (p. 586). The current body of literature has made it clear that efficacy is “a belief about ability, not actual ability,” and is defined as “a belief about one’s own ability (self-efficacy), or the ability of one’s colleagues collectively (collective efficacy), to perform a task or achieve a goal” (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 128). Therefore, it makes sense that when considering how to improve performance in any career, self-efficacy is a key factor.

For school leaders, and especially assistant principals, improving their own efficacy, or self-efficacy, can greatly improve their ability to lead. Bandura (1997), one of the leading experts on efficacy, asserted:

> People make causal contributions to their own functioning through mechanisms of personal agency. Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than people’s beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives. (p. 118)

Bandura (1997) clearly articulated that a person’s belief about his or her abilities remains a key component, impacting the way they act and how they function. Improving self-efficacy, then,
could have dramatic impact on the development of leadership styles of assistant principals, especially in their first and second years.

Moreover, building self-efficacy enhances a leader’s ability to accomplish tasks and goals. According to McCollum and Kajs (2009), as school leaders build their own efficacy, their beliefs “determine whether or not that goal will be pursued, and then how fervently that goal will be pursed” (p. 30). Therefore, the greater the leaders’ efficacy, the more willing and able they will be to set difficult goals and the better they will be at accomplishing those goals.

In addition, efficacy has direct “effects on one’s choice of activities and settings” (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 128). A leader’s actions are directly impacted and altered by his or her beliefs. Bandura (1997) affirmed, “Given appropriate skills and adequate incentives… efficacy expectations are a major determinant of peoples’ choice of activities, how much effort they will expend and how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations” (p. 77). To improve assistant principal’s ability to handle challenging situations, there should be a mechanism in place to build their beliefs in themselves and their ability, which can be accomplished through participating in a formal mentorship program.

Not only are school leader’s actions determined by their beliefs, but their beliefs also determine how they cope with difficulties. Leithwood et al. (2010) asserted, “Such beliefs determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of failure or difficulty. The stronger the feelings of efficacy, the longer the persistence” (p. 128). For first and second year assistant principals, the implications for increasing efficacy to promote a stronger sense of perseverance and the ability to handle difficult situations, creates a sense of urgency for examining mentorship for assistant principals.
Hirschi (2012), writing from a psychological viewpoint, used the term occupational self-efficacy to describe “the competence that a person feels concerning his or her ability to successfully fulfill the tasks involved in his or her work” (p. 480). The finding of the study suggested that a “stronger presence of a calling relates to more work engagement indirectly through stronger occupational self-efficacy” (Hirschi, 2012, p. 480). Hirschi (2012) adds a twist by suggesting that the workers “presence of a calling” is also associated with their belief about their ability to perform on the job (Hirschi, 2012, p. 480). The assistant principal’s efficacy impacts their engagement in their work setting and also further cements their calling towards their occupation.

Instead of using the word calling, McCollum and Kajs (2009) used the word motivation to describe the impact of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, established by one’s ability, is also able to strengthen motivation. The self-efficacy theory indicates that one’s ability is correlated to one’s desire. In applying the self-efficacy theory to mentorship, Poon (2006) affirmed, “Self-efficacious employees look to their role as a mentor or mentee with a greater receptivity than less efficacious individuals to engage in demanding activities or learn new skills” (p. 4). In a mentor-mentee relationship, the efficacy of the mentor has the potential to transfer to the mentee so that the mentee may become more effective in his or her own right. In a mentorship program, then, choosing mentors with high levels of efficacy is critical to get the best possible results from the program, overall.

Also, self-efficacy could possibly be a predictor for recruiting future assistant principals. Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, and Cohen (2007) asserted that in leadership training programs, one important indicator of future principals were their self-perceptions. Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) affirmed, “recruiting the right people, preparing them
comprehensively, and supporting them as they lead schools is essential to improve the pool of available school leaders” (p. 5). They continued that building self-efficacy could “decrease turnover in the principalship, and foster stability and reform in schools, which, in turn, is needed to foster the development of student abilities” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007, p. 5). Self-efficacy plays an important role in the retention of school leaders and in the development of school leaders. Educators and policymakers would be wise to look into their programs and add mechanisms that build and establish self-efficacy. In this way they may increase motivation in their workforce and establish a stronger sense of occupational calling for their school leaders.

Additionally, according to the research conducted by Leithwood et al. (2010), school leader efficacy positively impacted entire schools. Their comprehensive study shows that increased leader efficacy had positive impacts on leader behavior, and on school and classroom conditions (Leithwood et al., 2010). Also, their research showed that the aggregate efficacy scores measured in the study correlated to higher student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2010). Based on these findings, the impact and importance of building efficacy in school leaders is undeniable.

Leithwood et al. (2010) found that “district conditions had a larger effect on principals’ collective efficacy than on their individual efficacy” (p. 138). The implications of the study show that the district has a role in creating and building efficacy in the principals and assistant principals. Leithwood et al. (2010) affirmed:

This expectation is based on the relatively direct influence of organizational conditions on collective efficacy, with less direct influence on individual efficacy. Common to both types of efficacy, however, is the strong influence of the district’s focus on student learning and the quality of instruction, as well as district culture. These mutually reinforcing district conditions seem likely to attract the collective attention of school leaders to the district’s central mission. (p. 139)
One of the most effective tools that districts have to increase leadership efficacy in their principals and assistant principals is a formal mentorship program. When formal mentorship programs are used effectively, districts are able to carry out their mission by equipping school leaders with the tools that they need to be successful in their job, and by establishing a system which will promote the growth and development of leader efficacy.

**The Assistant Principalship**

Assistant principals hold schools together. Their job description, assisting the principal, was rather vague, and they were left doing tasks that were overlooked and rarely valued. One anonymous assistant principal claimed:

> Sometimes, at the end of the day, I really wonder why I took this job. It seems like I only bawl out kids, pick up the jobs my principal dislikes, and tell teachers why they can’t do something they’re really excited about. (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 1)

This description, which could be a fairly common one, illustrates many tasks that the assistant principal may be involved as they accomplish their work. According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), the list of job responsibilities, from most frequent to least frequent, are as follows: discipline, campus safety, student activities, building maintenance, teacher evaluations, attend 504 meetings, textbooks, duty schedule, tutorial programs, new teacher programs, etc. These duties are none too glamorous but build the character and the environment of the school. All schools are built around the same principles, but they are managed and led in different ways, depending on the clientele and the school environment.

**Role Ambiguity**

Role ambiguity was one aspect of being an assistant principal. Marshall and Hooley (2006) asserted, “The assistant principal seldom has a consistent, well-defined job description, delineation of duties, or way of measuring outcomes from accomplishment of tasks” (p. 7). This
ill-defined role contains both positive and negative aspects. One positive aspect was viewed through the managerial side, where the assistant principal guided the overall structure of the school. The absence of specifics introduces creativity and individuality into the job and allows each principal to develop his or her own style and reputation within the school. The negative side is that some assistant principals were left to deal with problems that they often did not create. This ambiguity became a frustration and intensified the “sense of futility or ineffectiveness” (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 7).

The amount of responsibilities that the assistant principals have within high schools also adds to the ambiguity of their roles. Cranston, Tromans, and Reugebrink (2004) asserted:

The significance of the failure to examine the role is exacerbated by on-going educational reforms such as devolution and school-based management initiatives in many countries that have resulted in enhanced responsibilities and accountabilities for all school personnel, particularly those holding leadership or administrative positions. Not only is the general area of the deputy (assistant) principalship under researched, but what literature is available is typically not recent nor focused on secondary school principals. (p. 228, emphasis added)

The workload of assistant principals can be overbearing and can create a problem in that assistant principals have too much to do and not enough time to do it. The accountability movement created more focus on instructional leadership tasks for administrators, while they still have their managerial tasks to complete.

The ability of the assistant principal to deal with role ambiguity was directly related to the level of job satisfaction. The research generally showed that assistant principals have feeling of dissatisfaction with their jobs (Cranston et al., 2004; Marshall& Hooley, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002; Wong, 2009). According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), the research suggested “administrators believe that most of the assistant principals’ assignments do not give them a high level of discretionary action” (p. 9). This quandary lays the groundwork for the difficulties of
being an assistant principal; having an immense amount of responsibility with little discretion (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002).

Lee et al. (2009) asserted that out of the seven major functions of an assistant principal, only two relate to instructional leadership. Lee et al., 2009 stated:

The findings confirm the proliferation of responsibilities pertaining to VPs in the wake of educational reform. Amongst the seven dimensions only ‘quality assurance and accountability’ and ‘teaching, learning, and curriculum’ related to educational roles pertaining to school leaders, while responsibilities in ‘resource management,’ ‘staff management’ and ‘external communication and connection’ exemplified the shift towards an administrative role. (p. 194)

These findings confirm the dilemma with school leadership. Educational reforms are focusing on academic achievement, based on the accountability movement; however, the job descriptions of the assistant principals are often centered on administrative responsibilities.

This research on role ambiguity hits at the heart of struggles of school leadership. Schools and districts would be wise to address these concerns within their policies and procedures. Also, this research illustrates the need for formal mentorship in that it focuses the assistant principal on the vision and mission of the school district, while providing practical applications for the administrative portion of their job.

**Career Incentives**

The assistant principal position was considered to be one of educational leadership, which lent itself to career incentives. The education profession desires to reward those who are successful and inherently provides leadership models for principals to follow. The idea is that assistant principals who display effective leadership will be able to gain more responsibilities within the educational framework. These assistant principals will naturally progress to becoming principals (Lee et al., 2009).
Moving up the educational ladder should not be the main driving force behind assistant principals’ actions, but the reality is that to be a good principal, one would also be a good assistant principal. Marshall and Hooley (2006) stated, “there exists a real possibility that good performance as an assistant principal will directly lead to the next administrative line position, the beginning of the march up the career ladder” (p. 10). The idea of career incentives points to a larger question of succession. Principal succession should become a built in process within districts and schools (Thompson, 2010). Bengtson (2010) affirms that districts should have a developmental process in which they are actively preparing and recruiting future educational leaders.

The discussion of the “career ladder” brings up many interesting topics to study, including the way in which assistant principals are chosen for a promotion up the ladder. There are many factors in determining whether or not an assistant principal is ready for the career move: state regulations, leadership capabilities, and career record to start. Many districts even instituted their own system of policies that governs the way educational leaders’ progress in their careers. These programs consist of rules and regulations that follow the states’ requirements for certification: passing appropriate leadership exams and finishing leadership internships (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002). These state requirements make the professional “fully qualified” for the job he or she is about to undertake.

Once the district and state qualifications are fulfilled, the job of choosing a leader often becomes more difficult. Marshall and Hooley (2006) affirmed that the challenge of establishing what makes an effective assistant principal or principal by saying, “there exist very few specific, agreed on, criteria for selecting administrators” (p. 13). Much of the dilemma encircling the question of how to quantify a good administrator was found in the role of the administrator itself.
Different from the business model, where a clear profit can be made, education determines its value by the way in which it instructs its students and overall student achievement. The learning process is not easily quantified and therefore it is a challenge to evaluate not only the administrator in charge, but also the teachers as well.

This discussion brought to light the difficulties of not only choosing those who will be administrators, but also those who will move up the ladder. The complexity of education presents a complex set of answers and showed that there is no clearly defined way to choose those who will lead schools.

**Impact**

Assistant principals have the ability to make a large impact on the learning process for the students at their schools. According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), the top five duties of the assistant principal, in order from greatest to least, are discipline, campus safety, student activities, building maintenance, and teacher evaluations. The assistant principal’s method of discipline has the potential to change students’ lives for the better (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). Although the nature of discipline poses a more negative connotation, the fact remains that students will make mistakes and learning from those mistakes has the potential to be a positive transformation instead of a negative one.

The duties of campus safety and student activities require student interaction and lend themselves to potentially influencing students positively as well. The duty of building maintenance is more managerial, but does not diminish the impact that the assistant principal could have on student learning (Lee et al., 2009). The role of teacher evaluation and supervision has large ramifications on student learning and sets the expectations for teachers. High
expectations for teachers directly impact expectations for the students. All these duties have the ability to transform schools and students positively.

**Professional Socialization**

Becoming an assistant principal is not an easy task. The state regulations for becoming an administrator are rigorous and continue to become more so. Once the state requirements are fulfilled, the difficult tasks involved in being an administrator become a reality. Marshall and Hooley (2006) stated, “Universities offer few if any courses on ethics and professional standards of behavior, and there is no course on the daily work of discipline, although most assistant principals would report that it consumes much of their work life” (p. 38). The initial period of assimilation allows the assistant principal to become accustomed to the environment, culture and attitude of the school (Cranston et al., 2004; Lee et al., 2009; Weller & Weller, 2002). University programs are designed to teach the assistant principal knowledge, content and best practices, however, they are unable to prepare the assistant principal for individual problems in individual schools (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Peterson, Marshall, & Grier, 1987).

Marshall and Hooley (2006) portrayed the realities of being an assistant principal, by sharing, “During the self-selection phase, they notice that administration is not always fun” (p. 39). For the majority of assistant principals who step out of teaching and into administration, there is a line that clearly isolates one from the other. The transformation from teacher to administrator marks a beginning of new responsibilities and new challenges (Lee et al., 2009; Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). Marshall and Hooley (2006) suggested, “there’s a ‘teacher versus administrator’ phenomenon” that builds an invisible barrier between the teacher and the administrator (p. 39). This natural division adds difficulty to the assimilation process of the assistant principal, as one role of the assistant principal is to evaluate and supervise the teacher.
**Instructional Leadership**

The supervisory role may be the most difficult aspect of an assistant principal’s job, as the administrator makes important decisions regarding the evaluations of teachers (Lee et al., 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Peterson et al., 1987). These decisions impact the credibility of the teachers, as their evaluations follow them throughout their careers. The administrators also established the expectations for the level of academic rigor within the schools. These expectations build the foundation of the school as not only the teachers know what to expect of students, but the students also know what is expected of them. Marshall and Hooley (2006) asserted, “Assistant principals and principals can, however, empower the teachers, facilitate the decisions, and help devise strategic improvement and continuous improvement plans” (p. 17). The potential of the instructional leader to improve instruction is immense and has the ability to enhance teaching and learning for all students (Weller & Weller, 2002; Wong, 2009).

Assistant principals not only have the ability to improve the teaching and learning within a school; they are one of the key factors in making the school effective. Marshall and Hooley (2006) suggested, “The literature on ‘effective schools’ has emphasized the importance of the principal functioning as an instructional leader” (p. 94). Over the last century, America has seen a change in the role of administrators from being maintenance and facility driven to becoming the instructional leader who guides and shapes the learning within the school (Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). The ability of the assistant principal to acknowledge this role is vital to the school’s ability to meet the demands of the 21st century.

One important way in which assistant principals are able to impact the instruction in the school is by allowing teachers the freedom to teach creatively and effectively. The administrator has the ability to promote teachers’ ideas and to prevent them. This empowering task established
the working relationship between the administrator and the teacher; the fragile state of this relationship will, in part, define the quality of instruction in the school. Marshall and Hooley (2006) gave evidence of this when they reported that “no initiative or reform will occur without grassroots support from teachers, and the administrator has a big hand in moving that forward” (p. 17). The school’s level of instruction was directly tied to the leadership ability of the administrators and seldom will it surpass its expectations unless the administration first surpasses them.

Much of the difficulty in creating instructional leadership within the assistant principal’s role is that they have many other responsibilities that often take precedent over instructional supervision (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Peterson et al., 1987; Weller & Weller, 2002; Wong, 2009). Marshall and Hooley (2006) suggested that it is rare to have an assistant principal devoted to instructional leadership and the “ever-pressing need to manage discipline undermined these assistants in their effort to focus on curriculum and instructional issues” (p. 95). The assistant principals are caught in this crossfire between dealing with troubled youngsters and inspiring learning. Unfortunately, the effort is most often spent putting out fires, instead of firing up students to learn.

The dilemma of prioritizing the assistant principal’s duties has been a continual battle and has followed the historical trend of education over the last century (Cranston et al., 2004). The answer to this complex problem requires an equally complex answer. There is no easy fix, but addressing it requires educators to be devoted to establishing high expectations for all students and creating a focus on instructional leadership by assistant principals within a school. This is easier said than done, and should not require more work for the assistant principals. The solution calls for a system that promotes high levels of instruction accompanied by an
appropriate structure of discipline that will prevent troubled students from distracting from the learning environment (Lee et al., 2009; Weller & Weller, 2002).

Assistant principals leave a lasting impression in the lives of students. The level of leadership determines the extent of the impression on students’ lives. This can be seen through the most exciting tasks and the menial, overlooked jobs. Also, even though some aspects of being an administrator go without recognition, the tireless work of creating a positive working atmosphere will never go unnoticed. Marshall and Hooley (2006) even go as far as to assert “that at high levels of administration, flexibility, discretionary power, and ambiguity can be useful role characteristics” (p. 105). These characteristics proved to be positive in working in a school environment, and instead of becoming negative, could be seen as very productive in establishing a successful learning environment for students.

The research showed the difficulty of the job and illustrates that assistant principals are often not the main focus of schools and their outcomes (Cranston et al., 2004; Lee et al., 2009; Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). Cranston et al. (2004) stated that traditionally the position of the assistant principal has been that of following the direction of the principal and taking care of menial school matters. Although there was some truth in this, the reality was that the assistant principal’s work was crucial to the operation of the school. Marshal and Hooley (2006) appropriately concluded:

Tapping into the emotional dimensions of the daily work and original career motivations of the assistant principal is a great place to start rethinking the structure of their roles and, on a larger scale, the kinds of leadership we want in schools. (p. 110)

Examining the role of the assistant principal guided the direction of schools and provided the foundation in which students grew and learned. The leadership of the school determined the learning within the school.
**Mentoring**

Mentorship is an age-old practice in which apprentices are able to learn and grow with guidance from an experienced professional. Ehrich et al. (2004) used the idea of a ‘father-figure’ to show how mentors relate to mentees. Mentorship is more than teaching. A mentor acts as a close companion to the mentee, as a father might act toward a son. Hall (2008) used the example of a master artisan working with an unpaid apprentice. Hall (2008) explained this relationship by stating, “Craftsmen train and learn under the watchful tutelage of a master until they meet the standards of high-quality work” (Hall, 2008, p. 449). The mentor-mentee relationship should be built on the key qualities of a productive working relationship, some of the most important being trust, honesty, humility, and respect.

Mentorship provides a structured system in which assistant principals are able to receive guidance and support from someone who has experience in educational leadership (Hall, 2008; Riley, 2009). Within the current accountability movement, success is often measured through student performance. School leaders are being held accountable for academic achievement and for consistent academic growth. Policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) are mandating that schools attain certain scores to remain accredited. These factors create an intensified environment in which principals, and by extension, assistant principals, are held accountable for how well a school performs.

Because of these increasing pressures, assistant principals need support to make key instructional decisions that ultimately impact student learning. Hall (2008) stated, “Most new principals are thrown into the job to sink or swim. We must do better if our schools are going to improve, and a well-designed mentoring program is one of the best ways to ensure success” (p. 449). School administrators are expected to create an environment of learning that will, in turn,
foster student growth. Instructional leadership requires a great deal of knowledge and expertise from the principal and, as research suggests, these leadership skills are lacking in most first and second-year principals (Hall, 2008; Grogan & Crow, 2004; Riley, 2009). Mentorship, then, is important as it functions as a safety net, providing new assistant principals with an experienced advisor to guide them. In this way, new assistant principals might be better able to navigate the rough waters of school leadership and to handle the challenges associated with the accountability movements.

**Formal Mentorship For School Leaders**

Formal and in-house assistant principal mentorship programs are able to reinforce the vision and mission of the district or school (Ehrich et al., 2004; Weingartner, 2009). Mentorship is accomplished through support and guidance given to current principals by experienced current or former principals. In this way, mentorship allowed administrators to become more competent and able to meet the demands of school leadership and at the same time to become comfortable with the expectations and mission of the district.

Formal assistant principal mentorship is an important ingredient in leadership development. School leaders have benefited greatly from an efficient and productive mentor program. Ehrich et al. (2004) confirmed that each mentor program is different and has different strategies and goals. Riley (2009) explained:

The mentoring training provided to experienced principals has appeared to have been successful in building the skills and confidence to mentor. While the aims were focused on the skill development of the mentors, a surprising finding, albeit preliminary, is that there appears to have been a benefit in terms of the health and wellbeing of both mentors and protégés. By acknowledging the fundamental need for protégés’ to address the big issues confronting them as beginning school leaders in a confidential setting with an experienced school leader, the underlying message of the program was that both mentors and protégés are important people who need, and positively respond to, support. (p. 245)
As a school leader, the job of an assistant principal can appear daunting. The responsibility to provide leadership over both the managerial and the instructional aspects of the school is a large part of the difficulty of the principalship. As Riley (2009) accurately portrays, support is a key factor of not only the mentorship model, but also of the overall success and wellbeing of even an established or veteran school leader.

A formal mentorship program can also help to address common problems found within assistant principal mentorship. Ehrich et al. (2004), Riley (2009) and Hall (2008) all pointed to several obstacles that need to be overcome for mentoring to be considered a positive experience. The obstacles to effective mentorship include:

- lack of common language
- unclear roles and responsibilities
- time constraints
- mentor/protégé mismatch
- absence of clear goals (Ehrich et al., 2004; Hall, 2008; Riley, 2009)

These obstacles prohibit mentorship from being effective, as they prevent the mentor-mentee relationship from being authentic and meaningful. Hall (2008) stated, “Establishing a formal program as part of a professional development plan is crucial for the success of the mentoring process” (p. 451). Formal mentorship establishes a system which is able to combat the difficulties of school leadership and give principals support and guidance. Formal mentorship is able to eliminate some of the negative aspects of principal mentorship by:

- Using the educational dialect of the district (acronyms, programming, etc.)
- Establishing roles and responsibilities for the mentor and mentee
- Providing concentrated time for the mentoring process to take place
• Lessening the instance of mismatch through a careful mentor selection process
• Defining a clear set of goals for the mentoring process

These factors exhibit the positive impacts of formal assistant principal mentorship and make a strong case for the implementation of formal mentorship programs within districts.

Formal mentorship programs were beneficial both in theory and in practice (Ehrich et al., 2004; Mertz, 2004; Smith, 2007). Assistant principals are also called on to be the instructional leaders of their schools. This means that assistant principals are held responsible for how schools perform academically. Riley (2009) showed that a formal mentor program provides the structure needed to meet the needs of principals. Ehrich et al. (2004) affirmed:

It seems that as formal mentoring programs are planned, structured, and coordinated interventions within an organization’s human resource policies, it makes sense for those charged with the responsibility of implementing such programs to endeavor to ensure that the goals of the program are clear and known to key parties, that mentors and mentees are well matched, and that organizational support and commitment are evident. (p. 521)

Formal mentorship programs should be aligned with the goals of the school district. The structure of the program should provide support to principals while also meeting the goals and objectives of the school and district.

Formal assistant principal mentorship, though structured, should not rid the mentor-mentee relationship of genuine interaction. Instead, its goal should be to provide a framework in which authentic relationships and productivity can coexist. O'Mahoney (2003) suggested that within the mentor program there should be room for differentiation. Assistant principals need support in different areas throughout the year, and effective mentors are able to adjust their mentoring strategy to meet the changing needs of the mentee. Harris et al. (2004) reinforced this idea by recommending that administrators should focus on specific leadership qualities that will enable them to effectively lead. Harris et al. (2004) stated, “For a mentor program to be
effective, it is critical that aspiring principal students are able to recognize appropriate leader behavior” (p. 157).

The mentor program should be flexible enough to allow the mentee to learn in different ways, while also having a balance of structure and routine that promotes learning. Hall (2008) stated, “Following a formal scope and sequence, mentor participants exit with a true understanding of the process, learning goals, and relationship responsibilities of an effective mentorship. They become, in effect, *master mentors*” (p. 450, emphasis in the original). In this way, mentorship programs are able to build school leadership and to establish a consistent model for assistant principals to follow.

The success of formal mentorship depends on a variety of factors. The structure and organization of the district, as well as the personalities of the mentor and mentee, all contribute to the climate of mentorship. Ehrich et al. (2004) suggested that even though there are challenges that come with effective mentorship, the benefits were “far-reaching” for the mentor as well as the mentee (p. 531). Formal mentorship has been proven to have positive results for both the mentor and mentee (Ehrich et al., 2004).

Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) established the importance of mentoring programs in their ability to support the values and priorities of the school district and those associated with it. The idea that leadership quality makes a difference in educational outcomes reinforces the desire to have a formal mentoring program. Formal mentorship has the potential not only to equip mentee assistant principals with the skills needed to maximize the quality of education in their own schools, but also to provide a leadership framework that builds professionalism among educational leaders in the district (Ehrich et al., 2004). The benefits of a formal mentorship program for a district implementing it far outweigh the time and cost of its establishment.
The Role of the Mentor

Just as a formal mentor program is instrumental in creating a positive school environment, its success, in part, depends on the ability of the mentor to create a climate that fosters growth and learning for the mentee. Weingartner (2009) asserted that the “mentor is a critical partner in the success of the mentor-mentee relationship” (p. 19). The mentor figure plays a complicated role. The mentor is different from a coach, sponsor, or colleague; the mentor perhaps acts as all of them combined in an effort to provide an almost subconscious voice to direct and guide the beginning assistant principal. The mentor is able to support, give advice, and build a vision with the mentee (Weingartner, 2009). Lindley (2009) confirmed that the mentor’s job is to make sure that the new administrator thrives during the first year, stating, “Mentoring is about helping the beginning principal become successful, to gain confidence and perform effectively, and to learn how to anticipate and plan for the successful accomplishment of duties” (p. 142). The job of a mentor is rewarding but is also demanding work.

Hall (2008) suggested successful mentors create an open line of communication through primarily listening and providing direct instruction only when necessary. Listening establishes a supporting relationship in which the mentor listens first and then makes suggestions. Hall (2008) postulated, “Effective, positive mentors understand a key concept: the mentor’s mission is to support the protégé’s learning, not to help run the protégé’s school” (p. 451). The most effective mentors do not tell or order their mentees to do anything, but act almost as a subconscious guide and support.

Riley (2009) described the mentor as being a “secure base” for the mentee (p. 234). The mentor and mentee must have a working relationship based on trust so that there will be positive
results. Hall (2008) pointed out that the key characteristics of mentorship include one in which the mentor is able to:

- ask probing questions
- provide honest feedback
- listen
- analyze decisions
- propose alternative viewpoints
- encourage independence
- foster lifelong learning
- offer caring support (p. 450)

These characteristics are powerful as they help the principal gradually to embrace the tools and skills needed for successful educational leadership.

Obstacles can be positive, and Riley (2009) shared that, “framing obstacles to growth internally allows the protégé to identify and come to terms with the skills and attributes needed for successful leadership” (p. 234). Mentors are not to take over for the mentee. The best results occur when the mentor is able to provide guidance and support as the mentee navigates through difficult situations. O'Mahoney (2003) underscored that:

Mentors cannot save new colleagues or insulate them from the experiences and learning of these phases. However, knowing that these phases are likely to occur, and what newcomers will go through, can alert mentors to signs of stress and how best they can help newcomers through each phase. It will enable them to prepare ways of offering specific mentoring helping roles to minimize the trauma in each of the phases and support those starting out in the principal role. (p. 16)

Mentors should use obstacles as teachable moments. Though it may be tempting for a mentor principal to take over for their mentee, the best way for assistant principals to learn how to lead is by being a leader. Mentors should simply guide and support.
Mertz (2004) suggested that mentoring does not always benefit the mentor. However, there is often a sense among the mentors that they are serving others. They often have a “transcending” feeling that they are working toward something that is above their own ability (Mertz, 2004, p. 545). Daresh (2004) maintained that mentors can become rejuvenated by the experience. Mentors have the potential to thrive under the challenges of mentoring. In fact, research shows that mentors report having higher job satisfaction during their mentoring experience (Daresh, 2004). Overall, mentors typically are benefited by participating, and even if they do not feel that they have benefited personally, it is clear that they are making an important contribution to educational leadership (Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Lindley, 2009; Weingartner, 2009).

**Limitations of Mentoring**

Mentoring programs have had great success in supporting school administrators. The limitations that do exist are centered on several key deficiencies that develop within the mentoring program. Also, with any human endeavor, there will be incompatibilities that may prevent a structured program from being perfect. Ehrich et al. (2004) pointed to the following as concerns for mentorship: “lack of time for mentoring, poor planning of the mentoring process, unsuccessful matching of mentors and mentees, lack of understanding about the mentoring process, and lack of access to mentors from minority groups” (p. 520). Out of all the problems associated with mentoring, research has shown that lack of time and personality mismatches are the two most common issues, with lack of time being the most heavily cited problem (Ehrich et al., 2004). These concerns prohibit the mentor from establishing a productive relationship with the mentee and therefore the impacts of mentorship are diminished.

One of the most common issues, poor planning, was often seen as an inhibitor to the potential of mentoring. Grogan and Crow (2004) saw planning as needing to come directly from
the school district to be effective. A haphazard approach to mentoring produces marginal results compared to establishing policies that support the goals of the district. Planning is important in providing the structure needed to bring positive and lasting support for the assistant principal. Though a formal mentoring program resolves many of the negatives associated with mentoring, poor planning and unclear goals can continue to be problematic. Hall (2008) suggested, “Just because the mentor and protégé can define their roles, understand the purpose of the mentoring process, dedicate adequate time, and have a positive relationship does not ensure success” (p. 451). Even a formal mentorship program is not failsafe.

Possibly one of the hardest obstacles to plan for and prevent, personality mismatches were also frequently cited as being an issue in mentorship (Ehrich et al., 2004; Hall, 2008; Riley, 2009). According to the meta-analysis of Ehrich et al. (2004), 17% of studies cited personality mismatches as being problematic. Ehrich et al. (2004) shared that in a mis-matched relationship, “These mentors expressed anxiety about not getting along with their mentee and having to assist mentees who were working at different levels or whose teaching philosophy differed from their own” (p. 527). This problem nearly completely disrupts any productive benefits of mentoring. When mentors and mentees do not agree and do not work well with one another, their ability to be effective greatly diminishes. Hall (2008) also pointed to the importance of properly matching mentors and mentees by stating, “It is essential to coordinate authentic relationships and properly match mentors with protégés” (p. 451). Although it was nearly impossible to match all personalities successfully, selecting mentors who are able to work well with a variety of personalities should be one of the top priorities of the district.

Finally, lack of understanding and unclear communication limits the positive outcomes of mentorship. Although clear and efficient mentoring can establish productive working
relationships and often keep problems from arising, unclear communication “can damage budding administrators” (Hall, 2008, p. 451). Ehrich et al. (2004) pointed out that lack of communication remains one of the top problems for mentors and mentees. Mentors have a difficult time being clear and concise if they do not fully understand their goals and responsibilities. Similarly, mentees often have been found to have difficulty relating to their mentors. Ehrich et al. (2004) affirmed, “Mentees in some studies indicated that their mentors had been overly harsh, critical, and out-of-date in their thinking. A lack of flexibility and trust were apparent not only for mentee teachers, but also mentee principals” (p. 527). Grogan and Crow (2004) even went as far as to state explicitly that it may be better not to have mentoring at all if these problems exist. However, the limitations of mentoring can be overcome by proper planning and sufficient attention to detail.

**Positive Outcomes for Assistant Principals**

The benefits of mentoring are quite outstanding. It is difficult to put a price tag on the value of effective leadership. As part of a meta-analysis, Ehrich et al. (2004) discovered that 82.4% of mentees benefit from mentoring. This high percentage illustrates the positive outcomes of a mentor program for assistant principals. Daresh (2004) suggested that the benefits go beyond numbers and can be seen through the professional development of school leaders.

Grogan and Crow (2004) showed that mentorship has positive outcomes as administrators are better able to adjust to school leadership after having been through the mentorship process. In this adjustment or transformation stage, assistant principals are able to become socialized to the demands of the job. O'Mahoney (2003) called this phase the immersion phase, in which the school leaders were overcome by the overwhelming amount of work.
involved in being a school leader. In this case, mentors can become a lifeline where practical advice and on-the-job training supports and guides beginning administrators.

Another benefit of mentoring for the mentee is its potential to develop assistant principals into competent, established, and effective school leaders. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) suggested that the transformation of administrators is an “intricate process of learning and reflection that requires working closely with leadership mentors in authentic field-based experiences, developing confidence through engaging in leadership activities and administrative tasks, and assuming a new professional self-concept grounded in confidence about leading schools” (p. 471). In other words, mentoring has the capability of building self-confidence and professional poise in a novice assistant principal that is otherwise uncommon to a leader new to his or her position.

Not only do mentees gain confidence through a positive mentorship experience, but also mentorship is able to build the leadership capacity within those being mentored. Across educational practice, capacity building remains one of the positive attributes of any developmental program. Novice assistant principals benefit from capacity building because it allows them to be more effective and successful in their career. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) showed that building capacity in school leaders not only benefits the educational climate within the school, but also building capacity can improve the overall achievement of the school. Daresh (2004) discussed capacity building in terms of administrators having more “professional competence” (p. 503). Both descriptions point to the benefits of mentoring in establishing and forming a better, more capable leader. As a result, assistant principals will establish improved, more effective working environments for teachers and for students. Given the current trend toward accountability, increasing the educational leader’s capacity, which then benefits the
productivity of the school for which he or she is held accountable, could be mentorship’s greatest benefit for school leaders.

The Mentor-Mentee Relationship

As mentorship is a reciprocal process between the mentor and the mentee, each party has his or her own roles and responsibilities (Ehrich et al., 2004). Weingartner (2009) pointed to the mentor as the one who establishes rapport and builds the relationship with the mentee. The role of the mentee is important, but the mentor holds much of the responsibility in terms of building the relationship. The mentor’s number one priority should be establishing a positive relationship with the mentee (Lindley, 2009; O’Mahoney, 2003). Lindley (2009) stated, “Without a harmonious relationship, you and your mentee will have limited communication, and when conversations do occur, they will likely be less meaningful” (p. 140). Establishing a comfortable relationship goes a long way toward building trust, rapport, and respect between the mentor and the mentee.

Also, simplicity is always preferred (Weingartner, 2009). Complicating factors will of course arise, but when the focus of mentoring is centered on support and guidance, both the mentor and the mentee can learn and grow through the process of dealing with these issues. Weingartner (2009) asserted that “low-key” supporting relationships are able to be more effective than complicated mentoring programs.

Within the reciprocal role of mentorship, the traditional power roles between supervisor and administrator should be curtailed so that “collegial-peer” relationships may exist between the mentor and the mentee (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004, p. 470). The collegial relationship promotes the professional success of the mentee and establishes an effective and efficient partnership. Mertz (2004) shared that within collegiality, there must also be clearly defined
boundaries. Establishing boundaries builds the safety and security of the relationship by constructing guidelines and clear expectations.

Chapter Summary

The literature on mentorship always returns to the unique role that assistant principals have in school leadership. Because an assistant principal’s position and leadership capability directly impacts the climate of the school he or she leads, providing the tools necessary for success is of utmost importance. No one model can make mentorship successful; however, current research points to several recommendations for creating mentorship programs that effectively support and develop the skills of assistant principals. An understanding of how mentorship works can aid school leaders in devising a mentorship model that is able to meet the needs of the district.

Mentorship has the ability to transform school leadership, and district level support enables the progress and development of mentorship. The formal mentor system should reinforce the vision and mission of the district and enable the assistant principal to successfully perform his or her duties, as laid out in the job description. A district-established formal mentorship program enables new assistant principals to rise to the level of expectations established by the district. Well-planned mentorship is effective in building administrators’ leadership skills and practices, enabling them to achieve their full leadership potential, which in turn has a positive impact on education as a whole.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts leadership. The study gauged the effectiveness of formal mentorship by examining two assistant principal’s perspectives of an established mentorship program in a metro Atlanta school. School leaders were held accountable for student performance, and principal mentorship programs, as well as assistant principal mentorship programs, have been identified as a way to improve school leadership.

In an attempt to capture the key themes and trends associated with assistant principal mentorship, a qualitative approach was used. Various methods were employed to gather the data and to analyze it so that an understanding of principal mentorship could be established. The methods consisted of interviews, to collect the data, and the constant comparative method, which was used to interpret the data. The methodology and the research design were used to build the framework for which these themes—efficacy, role socialization, and job-embedded professional development—were studied.

This chapter includes the research questions, the theoretical framework, the research design, the data sources, an overview of data analysis, and a description of the trustworthiness.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study are:

1. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, build efficacy in assistant principals?
2. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact role socialization of assistant principals?

3. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact job-embedded professional development of assistant principals?

**Theoretical Framework**

Qualitative research was chosen for this study as it provided the methodological framework to discover and understand the complexities within human interaction. Strauss and Corbin (2008) stated:

The world is very complex. There are no simple explanations for things. Rather, events are the result of multiple factors coming together and interacting in complex and often unanticipated ways. Therefore any methodology that attempts to understand experience and explain situations will have to be complex. We believe that it is important to capture as much of this complexity in our research as possible, at the same time knowing that capturing it all is virtually impossible. (p. 8)

Qualitative research allows for the investigation of complex topics so that meaning and understanding may emerge. A further benefit of the qualitative approach was the researcher’s ability to abstract data from a variety of different sources, allowing different perspectives to be portrayed through the analysis and evaluation (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The researcher was able to evaluate each participant’s prospective and through interviewing, understand his or her detailed account of the experience. Bogdan and Bilken (1982) affirmed that qualitative research provides a richness that is able to explain human experience and human interaction in a way that is often not accounted for through numeric studies.

Within a study of assistant principal mentorship, the qualitative approach was able to support and build on quantitative studies. The assistant principals’ experiences and interactions accounted for and rich meaning will be extracted as the researcher conducts interviews. As Bogdan and Bilken (1982) affirmed, “The best known representatives of qualitative research and those that most embody the characteristics we just touched on are participant observation and in...
depth interviewing” (p. 2, emphasis in the original). Through these methods, the researcher was able to enter the participant’s world and view the experience from his or her point-of-view.

**Symbolic Interactionism**

Once the data were gathered, an interpretive theoretical perspective was used to study principal mentorship. The interpretive perspective of symbolic interactionism guided the design of the study. Using symbolic interactionism as a guiding framework enabled the research to extract themes which illustrated the impact that formal principal mentorship had on assistant principals. In addition, the implications of the mentorship process for the assistant principals’ careers and for the level of comfort in their leadership roles were by extension examined. These underpinnings of symbolic interactionism provided a deeper understanding of how formal principal mentorship will impact school leaders now and in the future.

Human behavior and human interaction is an important aspect of studying assistant principal mentorship. Mead (1934) and Blumer (1969) established that symbolic interactionism is one way to study human behavior. Mead (1934) postulated that the “study of the experience and behavior of the individual organism or self in its dependence on the social group to which it belongs, we find a definition of the field of social psychology” (p. 1). Social interactions are an important part of understanding and identifying how specific behaviors impact a certain phenomenon. Crotty (1998) affirmed that “Only through dialogue can one become aware of the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent” (pp. 75-76).

Symbolic interactionism, therefore, was a useful perspective in studying principal mentorship and how it impacts school leaders because it, at its core, focuses on the interaction between the assistant principals and their mentors.
According to Blumer (1969), there are three premises that guide symbolic interactionism. They are:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interactions that one has with one’s fellows.
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer, 1969, p. 2)

Actions then are determined by meaning. Yet, meaning can be manipulated by social interactions. Therefore, the creation of meaning is a product that is formed through activities and interactions (Blumer, 1969; Hammersley, 2010).

One of the most important factors within symbolic interactionism is the focus on social products and how they “are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact” (Blumer, 1969, p. 5). Human behavior can be changed or modified by interactions with others. In an attempt to change one’s behavior, social interaction is required. Lyman (1988) asserted, “That subject matter is the human actor interacting with and interpreting the meaning of the objects and ideas in his environment” (p. 296). To this extent, human interaction shapes the ways in which humans are able to understand and to relate to the world.

Symbolic interactionism applied to the study of formal assistant principal mentorship allowed for the analysis of the perspectives of assistant principals and mentors participating in formal assistant principal mentorship. Within the framework of symbolic interactionism, the study evaluated the underlying themes within principal mentorship, along with the participants’ motivations (Blumer, 1969). The researcher interpreted the data in a way that established the
assistant principals’ views of mentorship and the overall impacts of assistant principal mentorship on the school’s performance. Bogdan and Bilken (1982) claimed that the interpretation of the data and the experience provides the foundation that is central to establishing and building meaning (p. 33). Strauss and Corbin (2008) alleged:

> There are many reasons for choosing to do qualitative research, but perhaps the most important is the desire to step beyond the known and enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge. (p. 16)

Symbolic interactionism established the framework in which to make these discoveries and focuses on human interaction as the guide.

**Rationale and Research Design**

There were no studies that were found that specifically examined the impacts of formal assistant principal mentorship on school leaders. Across the world, universities and educational organizations are attempting to answer the need for leadership preparation and many studies have been conducted in that regard. Peterson et al., (1987) showed that academies for assistant principals are effective in preparing them for leadership roles. Wong (2009) pointed to the important role between the school principals and their vice-principals in making a working team within each school. Marshall and Hooley (2006), Yu-kwong and Walker (2010), and Cranston et al. (2004) illustrated the difficulties that assistant principals have to deal with in their job that makes their role often ambiguous.

The research suggested that assistant principals are often unprepared for their role in leadership and need support to be effective in the first several years on the job (Lee et al., 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002; Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). To combat the rising numbers inexperienced leaders, mentorship has been cited as a way to prepare and support school leaders and give them on-the-job training that is so necessary in a leadership position.
Along with the research devoted to leadership preparation, research has pointed to the important tasks of implementing a leadership succession plan (Bengston, 2010; Tompson, 2010). These studies have provided a representation of what school leaders need to be prepared for the job and what types of support are necessary for their success.

Although this research on school leadership is quite extensive, the literature on assistant principal preparation has taken a back seat to other educational topics. Lee et al. (2009) stated, “Given that vice-principals (VPs) predominately make up the potential pool of principal candidates, an understanding of their roles and responsibilities will better inform policy-makers and practitioners with regard to the formulation of training and development strategies for VPs” (p. 187). This idea suggests that because some assistant principals will become the next principal, a great effort to prepare and support assistant principals is needed so that they may fill the leadership void within the school. The need for an enhanced understanding of assistant principal training was clearly evident throughout the literature (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002), and the research has pointed to mentorship as a way to prepare assistant principals more effectively, but the impacts of a formal assistant principal mentorship on assistant principals has not been explicit.

**Case Study**

Bogdan and Bilken (1982) affirmed that a case study approach can be used to gain understanding and develop meaning throughout the research process. A case study can be used to break down the data into different perspectives, allowing the study to become more focused and narrow. And therefore, through analysis, the different perspectives can be viewed individually, and then compared with other perspectives for further analysis and comparison. Merriam (1998) suggested that a case study can be used to cultivate meaning. In this way, the
The qualitative nature of a case study allows for a rich understanding of the data as described by the participant’s perspectives.

The researcher used the case study approach as the research design. This allowed for a descriptive study that focused on the new assistant principals’ experiences. Rhett (2004) stated, “The case study method is suited for this examination because this method can provide the opportunity to understand the insights of the principals relative to the mentoring they received from their former principals” (p. 36). This study exemplified how many different designs could be used within the framework of symbolic interactionism. In this example, the case study method fit the study’s parameters and therefore was an effective tool. Bogdan and Bilken (1982) confirmed that qualitative research is able to be flexible depending on the different types of studies and the different context associated with each one. Yet qualitative research provided a systematic approach for which to conduct a research study (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982).

Consequently, the research design can be crafted in a way that best fits the research study.

This study sought the perspectives of formal assistant principal mentorship on two participants, where each participant represented a case. Codes were created from each case and through inductive analysis, themes emerged. After each case was individually analyzed, the two cases were compared in a cross-case analysis to interpret, analyze and compare the codes, themes and patterns that materialized from the data. The case study approach provided the framework for this study, and allowed a greater understanding of how formal mentorship prepares assistant principals.

**Data Sources**

The purpose of this study was to examine how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts leadership. The selection of the participants was important. Each participant was
selected based on being an assistant principal, working in DuPage County Public High School, and having gone through the formal assistant mentorship program. The two participants were both employed by DuPage County Public Schools, and worked in DuPage County Public High School. Their perspectives of formal assistant principal mentorship provided insight into how formal mentorship impacts educational leaders, and their experiences will help inform leadership preparation programs. The national, state, and local call for school leaders to be ready for their administrative responsibilities created the framework that promoted leadership development programs, and through the two assistant principal’s perspectives, a greater insight into formal assistant principal mentorship was established.

**Sampling**

Sampling was used to establish who was going to participate in this study. In studying formal assistant principal mentorship, as described by Bogdan and Bilken (1982), purposeful sampling was used. This type of sampling allows for rich and precise data collection as the participants were able to be informative regarding the research topic. Roulston (2010) stated, “Researchers want to define a sample that is ‘representative’ of the larger population and calculate the sample size in relation to the size of that population” (p. 81). Within qualitative research, this type of sampling enables the researcher to get at the heart of that which is being studied.

Therefore, within this study, two assistant principals’ perspectives were used to bring to light the impacts of formal assistant principal mentorship. The sample criteria for the participants focused on three factors: (1) working as an assistant principal, (2) employed by DuPage County Public Schools, and (3) having participated in a formal mentorship program. Research has painted a favorable picture of mentorship as a way to train school leaders (Browne-
From this body of literature, the purpose of this study has been established to understand how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts school leaders.

Within the school district, formal mentorship has been implemented for more than six years. The initial program aimed to mentor the district’s principals and as the program grew, established formal mentorship for assistant principals as well. Therefore, assistant principals with more than four years of experience would not have participated in the formal mentorship of assistant principals and as a result the sample criterion examined assistant principals with four or fewer years of experience. The districts professional development plan for the assistant principals coincided with the formal mentorship program, making for a tightly coordinated approach to leadership development. The two participants, whom were studied, were engaged in these professional development programs and were therefore chosen for this study.

**Contextual Setting of the Study**

The current study of assistant principal mentorship took place in a large high school in Northeastern Georgia. The district itself was one of the largest in the state. In 2011-2012, the district served 133 schools and over 150,000 students. The research site, DuPage County Public High School, was one of the largest in the state of Georgia serving over 3,000 students. The school had 13 assistant principals, all holding a variety of different responsibilities within the school.

The high school was part of a district whose vision statement specifies becoming a world class educational system where students can gain the knowledge and experience that they need for the 21st century. The mission of the district was to pursue educational excellence while proving to make measurable improvements. The educational markers were determined by high stakes tests, county wide academic knowledge and skills, school based accountability, and a
continued commitment for improving the educational strategies through professional
development. The vision and mission established the culture of education in which permeated
the programs and curriculum that the district adopted and practiced. Table 3.1 represents the
student data of the school and of the district.

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Identifier</th>
<th>Research Site %</th>
<th>District %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/ Alaskan Native</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/ Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vision for school leaders was also clearly laid out within the educational vision of the
district and each principal and assistant principal was expected to follow the district’s principle
qualities. The principle qualities of school leaders consisted of the following:

- Are passionate about the vision, mission and goals of the school district
- Effectively and consistently communicate to those they supervise
- Model the principles of quality leadership
- Encourage and inspire others to develop characteristics of Quality-Plus Leadership
- Are committed to being lifelong learners
- Continually improve their own job performance so that the organization will continually improve
• Nurture and promote a performance culture within their areas of the organization

• Understand that communication is an indispensable, primary responsibility of leadership

This vision for the school leaders established the expectations of the principals and assistant principals, clearly laying out what is expected of the administrators within each school.

The district also supported the development of administrators by having an annual leadership conference. This allowed administrators to network with one another, as well as to keep current on the best practices within educational leadership. The conference brought in a variety of nationally renowned speakers to address various areas of educational leadership. The intent was to provide professional development and to pursue excellence in the district’s academics, as well as extracurricular activities.

The district was committed to developing and sustaining a leadership institute. The district had developed an academy for administrators to develop their leadership skills and for future assistant principals to develop their leadership potential. This structure allowed the district to structure the training and development of the principals and assistant principals within the district.

Along with the leadership academy, the school district created and utilized a formal assistant principal mentorship program. It is here where the interest of this study rests. The mentorship program was specifically designed to support principals and assistant principals through providing experienced and retired principals as assigned mentors. The goal of the program was to provide formal support for principals and assistant principals so that they may have available the tools and resources required to be successful.
Participant Profile

Participants were chosen based on purposeful sampling methods. Roulston (2010) confirmed, “Selection involves making decisions concerning who or what is the focus of a study, and characterizing the potential population from which the study’s participants might be drawn” (p. 81, emphasis in the original). Each participant met the criteria for the study. The participant criterion was: (1) working as an assistant principal, (2) employed by DuPage County Public Schools, and (3) having participated in a formal mentorship program.

Two assistant principal’s perspectives were examined. Each participant agreed to take part in the study in early May, 2012, and each of the first round of interviews were conducted in late May 2012, while the second round of interviews took place in June 2012. Table 3.2 illustrates the participant profile.

Table 3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile of Participants</th>
<th>Jessica Carter</th>
<th>Tyler Dooley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>DuPage County Public High School</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of experience</td>
<td>3 Years of Leadership</td>
<td>4 Years of Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took Part in Formal Mentorship</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Degree</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Educational Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Supervised</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants both worked in the same county and in the same school. Each participant had four years of experience or less and each participated in the formal assistant principal mentorship designed by the county’s leadership department.
Jessica Carter

Jessica Carter was a third-year assistant principal at DuPage County Public High School. She has worked at DuPage County Public High School since its doors opened in 2004. Jessica taught in the Business Education Department for the first five years and was promoted into school leadership in the fifth year of the school's existence. Jessica earned her doctoral degree in education leadership. She enjoyed working in school administration and believed that her administrative team not only worked well together but was also able to provide support for each other. She thought positively regarding the formal mentorship program and believes that she had a congenial relationship with her mentor. Jessica also values professional development and takes advantage of every opportunity that might help her with the work of school leadership.

Tyler Dooley

Tyler Dooley was a fourth-year assistant principal. Tyler worked one year as an assistant principal at another school in DuPage County, and then spent the last three years at DuPage County High School. He worked in Special Education, for six years, prior to becoming a school administrator and earned his Specialist in Education. Tyler, like Jessica, enjoys being a school administrator and has had a positive experience working with the other school leaders within DuPage County High School. His experiences with mentorship primarily come from the first year that he was at Southside High School in DuPage County. Along with being highly involved with school activities, Tyler embraced his leadership position by working to improve the academic achievement within his department. He enjoyed working with students and helping them see the bigger picture outside of just high school.

Interviews

The researcher was able to evaluate each participant’s perspective of being mentored in the first two years of their careers, and through interviewing, understand his or her detailed
account of the experiences. Bogdan and Bilken (1982) affirmed, “The data collected has been termed soft, that is, rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures” (p. 2, emphasis in the original). Each participant’s perspectives provided a richness that is able to explain human experience and human interaction in a way that is often not accounted for through numeric studies.

Roulston (2010) spoke of what it takes to create ‘good’ interviews. Roulston (2010) showed the following as ‘good’ interviewing practices:

1. Involve appropriate preparation
2. Demonstration of appropriate respect for participants
3. Intensive listening on the part of the interviewer
4. Development of thoughtful interview guides that used appropriate question formulation with fewer, rather than more, questions
5. Posing short, open-ended questions
6. Flexibility on the part of the interviewer to deviate from prior plans when necessary
7. Effective use of follow up questions within interviews to elicit the participants’ understanding of topics

These tips have been reinforced by other researchers, such as Strauss and Corbin (2008), Bogdan and Bilken (1982), Ellingson (2009) and Merriam (1998). The researcher’s ability to use the right type of questions and apply the use of probes was important in allowing the participant to not only feel comfortable with the topic of the interview, but allowed each participant to expound on their experiences (Patton, 2001).

Each interview could be structured differently. Merriam (1998) described how interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured, and within this structure, the
researcher should use an open-ended question format. Applying these principles would provide the researcher with the opportunity to generate the richest data possible by allowing the participants to express their views and share their experiences with the researcher.

Within this study, each participant was interviewed twice. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, allowing enough time for each participant to elaborate on their different experiences and their different perspectives. The first interview was conducted in May 2012, while the second interview was conducted in June 2012. The interviews were conducted after school was let out for the summer, and each participant had the convenience of picking the time and the place of the interview.

Before the interviews began, each participant signed the consent form and a brief description of the study was given. Each participant understood their responsibilities and agreed to participate. The researcher made a point to remind the participants that this was voluntary and that each participant could retract any information that they wanted at any time. Roulston (2010) suggested using member checks so that the participants could validate that the researcher was portraying their perspectives accurately. Member checks were done throughout the research process and each participant had an opportunity to read over the final manuscript before the study was completed.

The first interview focused on answering the interview questions found in the Interview Protocol #1. This protocol was a semi-structured interview and was developed from the DuPage County Public Schools mentorship objectives. These objectives, seen in Table 3.3, provided the framework for which the mentors designed and constructed the mentorship meetings. The objectives coincided with the research questions, which focused on assistant principal efficacy,
role socialization and job-embedded learning. Table 3.3 shows the mentorship objectives and the interview questions that arose from them.

Table 3.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentorship Objectives and Interview Protocol #1</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DuPage County Objectives</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Provide school leaders with opportunities</td>
<td>1. How does principal mentorship provide assistant principals with opportunities for personal and professional growth, emphasizing quality concepts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for personal and professional growth,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emphasizing quality concepts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Provide school leaders a partnership with</td>
<td>2. How are assistant principals impacted by partnering with a proven mentor/leader who has consistently demonstrated the characteristics of a quality-plus leader?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a proven leader who has consistently</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demonstrated the characteristics of a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quality-plus leader.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Provide school leaders practice and</td>
<td>3. How does principal mentorship provide assistant principals with practice and opportunities, which analyze interpersonal, management, and leadership skills?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opportunities to analyze interpersonal,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management, and leadership skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Provide school leaders with direction and</td>
<td>4. How does principal mentorship provide assistant principals with direction and clarification on management and leadership issues?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clarification on management and leadership issues.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Provide school leaders with encouragement</td>
<td>5. How does principal mentorship provide assistant principals with encouragement and support for high academic achievement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and support for high academic achievement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Provide school leaders with a supportive,</td>
<td>6. How does principal mentorship provide assistant principals with a supportive, non-evaluative relationship with assigned mentor?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-evaluative relationship with assigned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mentor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Assist with the use of established criteria</td>
<td>7. How does principal mentorship assist with the use of established criteria to measure the effectiveness of programs and student achievement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to measure the effectiveness of programs and student achievement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Being semi-structured, the first interview established how formal mentorship benefited each participant. The interview questions guided the conversation, but there was room for the
researcher to probe using different styles of questions. For example, the researcher would use the phrase, “Tell me more about,” or “Please tell me a specific time that that happened.” These phrases attempted to get deeper into the participants experiences so the impacts of mentorship would be more clear. The participants were expressive and descriptive about their experiences with their mentor and did not need much probing to generate the types of discussions that were desired.

Both participants received the interview guide prior to the first interview and spent some time preparing what they were going to talk about during the interview. One participant in particular, had files readily available to help jog her memory about what the different mentoring sessions were about. The other participant had a binder full of documents from the professional development sessions, and he was able to use it to recall some of the different types of training he received in his first several years on the job. Both participants had a plethora of stories and experiences that enabled them to talk for some time about the impacts of formal mentorship on their leadership ability. As each participant came to a stopping point, the researcher transitioned into the next question, attempting to create a fluid transition from one thought to the next.

After the first round of interviews, the researcher transcribed each interview within two to three days. The transcriptions were then immediately read over and the researcher began to read over the data looking to establish categories and codes for the analysis. The researcher brought copies of the transcripts to the participants or emailed them a copy so that they were able to read over the interviews and check for reliability and accuracy of the transcripts.

Each participant was given the opportunity to choose the time and place for the second interview. Each participant seemed very willing to continue the conversation examining their perspectives of formal mentorship. At the beginning of the second interview, both participants
asked basic questions regarding the transcription process and how the data would be used in the study. One of the participants is interested in working on a doctoral degree and was asking questions about the process and therefore showed interest in the study at hand. The other participant had already earned a doctoral degree, but completed a quantitative study, and so she was interested in the process as well, but for different reasons.

The second round of interviews were conducted based off the initial data collected and aimed to go deeper into the participant’s experiences. The interview questions for the second interview were open-ended and focused on each participant specifically detailing events that were mentioned in the first interview. The second interview also went into more depth regarding the impacts of formal mentorship and allowed each participant to explain their perspectives in great detail. Table 3.4 gives a sample of the questions that were used for the second interview.

Table 3.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview #2 Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, build efficacy in assistant principals?</td>
<td>In the first interview, you mentioned that assistant principal mentorship improved job-embedded learning by ____________. Can you tell me about a specific time when this happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact role socialization of assistant principals?</td>
<td>You mentioned that mentorship gave you opportunities for personal growth. Can you tell me about a specific time when you benefited personally from being mentored?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact job-embedded professional development of assistant principals?</td>
<td>You mentioned how the mentor was ____________, could you tell me what positive qualities of your mentor impacted you the most? And please tell me about how the qualities have impacted you leadership.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.4 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions compared to Interview #2 Protocol Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In our last interview you briefly mentioned the impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of mentorship on your leadership skills. Please tell me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about a time when mentorship has improved your leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first interview established baseline data where the researcher was able to gather detailed information on how mentorship prepared them for their first and second year on the job. After the baseline data was established the researcher was able to focus on different topics for the second interview. For example, one participant had individual mentorship sessions as well as group sessions, where they were able to work with other administrators during the mentorship process. The questioning for those interviews established how that participant benefited from both individual and group sessions and how they were combined to create the overall formal mentorship program.

The second interview focused more squarely on the interactions with the mentor and how the mentor guided and supported them through the first and second year of their career as an administrator. The questioning for those interviews created an understanding of how that participant was impacted by the mentorship sessions. Moreover, the second interview provided an opportunity for the researcher to gain a fuller understanding of how each participant benefited from formal assistant principal mentorship.

Data Analysis

Ellingson (2009) described qualitative data analysis as a “hybrid of art and science” (p. 60). The researcher was allowed to blend creative analytic approaches to the scientific methods of analysis. Strauss and Corbin (2008) elicited that the artistic style of qualitative questioning,
the use of open-ended questions and un-formulaic procedures, developed a unique approach to scientific studies. The analytical approach of induction, which is often used in qualitative analysis, consisted of digging through the data to find emerging categories, patterns, and themes. Strauss and Corbin (2008) confirmed that analyzing data using inductive methods allows the researcher to go from specific to general and the data are used to formulate and develop hypotheses. As a result, the researcher was able to develop meaning from the data as generalizations emerged from the data. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) affirmed, “Once a researcher has established the categories within which the data are organized and has sorted all bits of data into relevant categories, the portrayal of a complex whole phenomenon begins to emerge” (p. 237). Through induction, the data were used to discover meaning. And as Strauss and Corbin (2008) asserted, the use of the constant comparative method ensured that the interpretation of the data can be aligned as each theme and category was developed.

The generalizations that emerged from the data were evident as all the themes were combined to understand and evaluate the impacts of formal assistant principal mentorship on assistant principals. Roulston (2010) described that the method enabled the discovery of the participants experiences with mentorship. The interview process allowed the researcher to capture the perspectives of the assistant principals and the impacts of formal assistant principal mentorship on school leaders.

**Constant Comparative Method**

Just as symbolic interactionism provided a framework to find meaning through social interaction, the constant comparative method was used to analyze and interpret data (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Within this theoretical framework, researchers are able to build and to establish a variety of different
perspectives that can be seen throughout the research study (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982). As in symbolic interactionism, the constant comparative method uses human interaction and human behavior as the initial framework for analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated:

   In comparing incidents, the analyst learns to see his categories in terms of both their internal development and their changing relations to other categories. For example, as the nurse learns more about the patient, her calculations of social loss change, and these recalculations change her social loss stories, her loss rationales and her care of the patient. (p. 114)

The constant comparative method allows human interaction to become part of the research and as human behaviors change and adapts to situations, the research is able to adjust and also be accounted for within the data analysis.

   According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), there are four stages to the constant comparative method:

   1. Comparing incidents applicable to each category
   2. Integrating categories and their properties
   3. Delimiting the theory
   4. Writing the theory (p. 105)

The four stages can operate “simultaneously throughout the analysis and each provides continuous development to its successive stage until the analysis is terminated” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 105). The continual analysis and development of the data allows the researcher to discover and generate themes as they emerge. This simultaneous comparing of the data and the observed incidents is what defines the constant comparative method.

   Constant comparative analysis begins by establishing codes the researcher finds within the data, which are then assigned to different categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser (1978)
asserted, “The analyst should consciously look for core variables when coding his data. As he constantly compares incidents and concepts he will generate many codes, while being alert to the one or two that are core” (p. 94). The researcher consistently looked for the “main theme” seen throughout the data. As this became apparent, the data became more manageable and workable. The codes and the categories laid the foundation for the analysis and built the framework in which the main themes emerged (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). The constant examination also enabled the meaning to appear as the data was continually examined and studied (Glaser, 1978).

As the codes and the categories emerged, they were closely anticipated and evaluated to understand their relation to one another (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). Glaser and Strauss (1967) asserted the defining rule of the constant comparative method: “While coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category” (p. 106). This rule emphasizes the basic process within the constant comparative method, to be continually matching and evaluating how each data set and each incident relates to the others. The richness of the study depends on close and careful evaluation of the data (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982).

Over time, the coding and categorizing of the incidents established “core categories,” which describe the data set along with the observed incidents (Glaser, 1978, p. 95). Glaser (1978) states:

Possible core categories should be given a ‘best fit’ conceptual label as soon as possible so the analyst has a handle for thinking of them. The analyst may have a feel for what the core variable is, but be unable to formulate a concept that fits well. It is ok to use a label which is a poor fit until a better fit eventually comes. (p. 94).
The core categories, regardless of what they are called, help establish the themes that emerge through the data. Table 3.5 illustrates the analysis process in which the initial codes, emerging categories, and the emerging themes were developed.

Table 3.5

Sample Analysis – Codes, Categories, and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Codes</th>
<th>Emerging Categories</th>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Practical and Theoretical Resources</td>
<td>Impacts of Job-embedded Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job-embedded Learning</td>
<td>On-the-job Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td>Leadership Development</td>
<td>Increased Role-Socialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from Peers</td>
<td>Role Identity</td>
<td>Improved Sense of Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from Mentor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Program</td>
<td>Impacts of Formal Mentorship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To establish “core categories,” Glaser (1994) stresses that the researcher should not act too fast or too slowly. Glaser and Strauss (1967) point out that to establish research based themes, the analyst much have enough data and enough codes. If there is not enough research, then the themes will prove to have a “large array of loosely integrated categories, and an undeveloped, undense theory with little explanatory power” (Glaser, 1978, p. 95).

Glaser (1978) provides criteria for making “core categories:”
• It must be central
• It must reoccur frequently in the data
• It takes more time to saturate the core category than other categories
• It relates meaningfully and easily with other categories
• It has clear and grabbing implications for formal theory
• It has considerable carry-through
• It is completely visible
• A core category is also a dimension of the problem
• The core category can be any kind of theoretical code (pp. 95-96)

These criteria helped clarify the difference between the most important categories and the ones that are minor, less impactful categories.

Glaser (1978) suggested that from the core categories arise the overarching themes that have emerged from the data and from the categories. The emergent themes and the existing themes were able to be combined so that new meaning is established from the research study.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) asserted:

These sources of developing theoretical sensitivity continually build up in the sociologist an armamentarium of categories and hypotheses on substantive and formal levels. This theory that exists within a sociologist can be used in generating his specific theory if, after study of the data, the fit and relevance to the data are emergent. (p. 46)

The combination of existing themes and emergent themes establishes implications that can be used within the research study. Often, some of the existing or emergent themes are not able to be used in the study (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Analysis the Data

As the interviews were scheduled, participants were informed that the interviews would be audiotaped (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982; Roulston, 2010). Before the interview took place, the
consent form and the interview guide were given to each participant so that they had the opportunity to read through each document (Appendix A). This allowed each participant to be aware of his or her right to withdraw any information they deemed necessary at any point of the process. In addition, it allowed them to prepare for the questions the researcher asked during the interview (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982). A constructionist conception was used as the interviews were analyzed and made “sense of the research topic” (Roulston, 2010, p. 60). The conversationalist approach also guided the analysis, and thematic analysis was used to reorganize the data into thematic representations (Roulston, 2010).

The data were analyzed on a continual basis. After each interview the audiotape was immediately transcribed, which initiated the data analysis process. Transcripts and the researcher’s journal were read and were tabulated so that thematic codes could be used as a representative of the data. Roulston (2010) postulated, “Through this iterative and recursive process, the analyst can assemble a list of preliminary codes which will be adjusted, collapsed, and revised as necessary throughout the analytic process” (p. 153). This illustrated the importance of the analytical procedures as they represent the data and represent the findings.

Two to three days were left between interviews, allowing time for transcription directly following each interview. Analysis of each interview occurred after transcription, and during the data collection process (Roulston, 2010).

Table 3.6 provides an example of how each transcription was used to analyze each of the participant’s perspectives. The researcher broke apart the data into categories so that coding could establish and identify the important themes that could be seen through data analysis.
Table 3.6
Sample of Transcription Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Words</th>
<th>Line #</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was just completely not prepared for the job at all and now I am just more prepared</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Impacts of mentorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good listener and a good suggestioner</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Support from the mentor</td>
<td>Positives of mentorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it was good to have a mentor</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We talked about different programs we could do trying to help kids</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>Job-embedded training</td>
<td>Practical advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there any time you needed to call on them</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Formal Mentorship</td>
<td>Provides support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mentor sessions for me where more informal type of conversations, obviously we would hit on different things, we talked a lot about the initiatives and some of the struggles that we were having</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>Formal Mentorship</td>
<td>Mentor support &amp; provides differentiation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As data were collected, field notes were recorded, allowing the researcher to express any feelings, thoughts, and descriptions of the data and of the data analysis. These field notes, as Bogdan and Biklen (1982) asserted, are “the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study” (p. 74). Table 3.7 illustrates how the field notes were taken in accordance to the research questions. Also, the process of continual data analysis allowed for the adjustment of interview questions before the next interview, if needed. At the time of the interview, the second interview was scheduled. Each participant was also asked if he or she would be willing to answer follow up questions regarding the data and the interpretation of data. The data were analyzed on a continual basis.
Table 3.7
Sample Field Notes related to Research Questions and Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Field Note excerpts</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, build efficacy in assistant principals?</td>
<td>I want to expand on my questions regarding how Ms. Carter’s mentor impacted efficacy</td>
<td>Job-embedded learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Network and connections that were built during mentor-ship enabled a deeper experience.</td>
<td>Building self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact role socialization of assistant principals?</td>
<td>The listening seemed as important as anything else</td>
<td>Role-Socialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Their competence also plays a factor into mentorship</td>
<td>Role-Socialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact job-embedded professional development of assistant principals?</td>
<td>If a leader does not have the experience or the capacity they can only do so much.</td>
<td>Job-embedded learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentorship naturally builds experience in new leaders by providing a voice, by providing job-embedded learning, and by building personal/professional growth.</td>
<td>Job-embedded learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the transcription and analysis, a second interview took place. This round of interviews focused on clearing up any questions that were remaining, and allowed the participants to add any other comments about their leadership styles and the impact it had on instruction. As before, two to three days were given between interviews, allowing time for transcription directly following each interview. Analysis of each interview occurred both after transcription, and during the data collection process. The researcher created a chart that linked
the categories and concepts to one of the research questions. Table 3.8 exemplifies how the
categories and concepts were linked to the research questions.

Table 3.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, build efficacy in assistant principals?</td>
<td>Mentors act as a support Provides a voice to deal with difficult situations Increased Professionalism Understood county policy Makes suggestions Listens Validates my work</td>
<td>Formal Mentorship Effective Professional Development Support from the mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact role socialization of assistant principals?</td>
<td>Provides validation Mentorship creates tools that helps me on the job Knowing that others are dealing with the same thing Understanding the discipline policy</td>
<td>Support from the mentor Job-embedded training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact job-embedded professional development of assistant principals?</td>
<td>On the right track Learning through dialogue Through the conversation the answer is often discovered Research-based strategies used Practical tips on how to work with teachers Building school climate Establishing teacher collaboration techniques</td>
<td>Job-embedded training Focus on Student achievement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After each interview, the participant was asked if he or she would be willing to discuss the transcript or the interpretation of data if needed, and if they would be willing to answer any further questions in the future. The follow-up interview sought to answer questions that arose from the first two rounds of interviews. This was an important aspect of the process, as the participants were able to add to their earlier descriptions and any topic that needed further explanation was taken care of at that time.

The next stage began the writing and editing process. As progress was made, bi-weekly communication with the participants was maintained as a way to allow them to member-check the work being formulated. Consistent communication with the dissertation chair and the dissertation committee was also kept, which allowed the researcher to seek guidance and advice during both the data collection process and the writing process. After the dissertation was written, the participants were asked if they were interested in reading over the work and making any necessary changes. Input on grammatical errors and sentence structure was continually sought from the support network, which consists of the dissertation chair and committee, to ensure that editing was up to date and all necessary revisions were made.

**Theoretical Sensitivity**

Theoretical sensitivity, within the course of the data collection and of the data analysis stages, described the ability of the analyst to decide which data incidents are meaningful and which ones are not. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) asserted, “Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others” (p. 145). Glaser (1978) stated, “The first step in gaining theoretical sensitivity is to enter the research setting with as few predetermined ideas as possible-
especially logically deducted, a prior hypotheses” (p. 3). Theoretical sensitivity allowed the researcher to analyze the data as it really was and not to make assumptions before the data had been fully explored.

**Theoretical Saturation**

Another aspect of the constant comparative method that differed from other methods is that the data can become “theoretically saturated” once the theoretical findings have reached a limit (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1994). Glaser (1978) affirmed, “Constantly comparing develops in the analyst a clear, focused flexibility to keep transcending his own and other analyses until he theoretically saturates his problem” (p. 15). In this way the analyst saw which incidents “point to a new aspect” and which incidents confirm previously founded aspects (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 111). In some ways, this simplified the researcher’s job because the researcher had continuously developed categories as the data was analyzed. Any new data was simply applied to an existing category or supported starting a new category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Along with theoretical saturation, Glaser (1978) warned researchers to be aware of theoretical pacing, referring to the need to methodically work on understanding their data and building connections between different concepts within the data. Glaser (1978) prescribed, “Significant theoretical realizations come with growth and maturity in the data, and much of this is outside the analyst’s awareness until it happens. Thus the analyst must pace his patience, and not just be patient, accepting nothing until something happens” (p. 18). Theoretical pacing allows the researcher to properly digest all that the data are saying. This time was vital for the researcher to discover and work through the process consistently and methodically. To reach
theoretical saturation, the researcher needs to fully comprehend how to best use his or her time so that the themes and patterns within the data can effectively emerge.

Reliability and Validity

The reliability within a study was vitally important. Being reliable affirmed that if a study is repeated it would yield the same results. Bogdan and Bilken (1982) affirmed:

Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations. As the preceding discussion indicates, two researchers studying a single setting may come up with different data and produce different findings. Both studies can be reliable. One would only question the reliability of one or both studies if they yielded contradictory or incompatible results. (p. 44)

Establishing data collection and analytic procedures that were consistent with the theoretical framework and are able to be effectively implemented within the study enables the researcher to create a reliable study.

Validity “refers to testing of the work in action, that is- do the resulting actions produce desired results?” (Roulston, 2010, p. 90). Bogdan and Bilken (1982) suggested that the validity depends on the ability of the research to be accurate. This is determined by the degree to which the explanation depicts the description. Wittrock (1986) confirmed that applying the “basic validity criterion the immediate and local meanings of actions, as defined from the actor’s point-of-view, is crucial in distinguishing interpretive participant observational research from another observational technique with which interpretive research approaches are often confused” (p. 119, emphasis in the original). To establish validity in this case, member checks, both formally and informally, were used to allow the participants to evaluate the analysis based on what they originally intended.
Chapter Summary

The theoretical framework and research methodology of symbolic interactionism formed the basic premise of this chapter. The work of Blumer (1969) laid the foundational principles, which govern symbolic interactionism. The three main premises of symbolic interactionism consist of using human actions as the basis for understanding, deriving meaning from social interactions and establishing meaning through an interpretive process (Blumer, 1969). These principles established a research design that was consistent with the theoretical framework. The study of formal assistant principal mentorship used symbolic interactionism to discover meaning and construct research implications as the data was being analyzed.

Derived from symbolic interactionism, the constant comparative approach was utilized to extract themes from within the data. As the data was analyzed data strands were simultaneously compared, so that categories and themes could be established. The data collection procedures were consistent with the principles of symbolic interactionism and that of qualitative research methodology. The following chapter presents an in-depth look at the context of DuPage County Public High School and the individual case findings.
CHAPTER 4

INDIVIDUAL CASE FINDINGS

Never before in American history has education been at the center of such political, social and economic controversy. The newest education legislation, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and President Obama’s *Blueprint for Reform* (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), call for the restructuring of educational policy and the reforming of educational evaluation practices. The emphasis on these new policies has dramatically changed the ways that schools operate and has substantially altered the way in which school administrators lead and direct their schools.

President Obama, in a press release on March 4, 2011, asserted:

> A world-class education is the single most important factor in determining not just whether our kids can compete for the best jobs but whether America can out-compete countries around the world. America’s business leaders understand that when it comes to education, we need to up our game. That's why we’re working together to put an outstanding education within reach for every child.

President Obama clearly presented the vision and mission for American education; the expectations call for American educators to provide the best education possible to every student attending public schools. However, questions remain. Do America’s current policies give every child the best opportunity to learn and grow? How should teachers be evaluated? How can principals and assistant principals be best prepared for their job of leading schools? The current educational climate is placing more demands on school leaders today than ever before in American education.

School leaders are facing more pressure and more accountability to increase student performance. The mounting pressure and the focus on accountability have presented a call for
principals and assistant principals to be prepared for school leadership the minute they take the job. Therefore, this study of assistant principal mentorship remains pertinent. The preparation and development of school leaders creates the foundation for which education will flourish, as school leadership continues to be the heartbeat of educational success.

Moreover, in the course of educational reform, the job of the assistant principals has changed significantly. Assistant principals today are more than just school managers; they are instructional leaders who are responsible for the educational quality of their school (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006; Ehrich et al., 2004; Hall, 2008; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002). Specifically, assistant principals must create an educational atmosphere in which students not only learn relevant content but are able to put their learning into practice by performing well on local, state, and national exams.

The purpose of this study was to examine how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts leadership. The following chapter presents the individual findings of this study. The following sections are as follows: research questions, the contextual framework for assistant principal mentorship, the contextual framework for DuPage County Public School System, the contextual framework for DuPage County High School, Participant’s Perspectives, the Perspectives of Jessica Carter, and the Perspectives of Tyler Dooley.

**Research Questions**

The research questions laid the foundation for investigating formal assistant principal mentorship. This established both the context for the related literature and the framework for understanding the impacts of mentorship on school leadership, as seen by the participants. The research questions, which form the cornerstone of the study, correlate directly with the findings. The research questions were as follows:
1. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, build efficacy in assistant principals?

2. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact role socialization of assistant principals?

3. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact job-embedded professional development of assistant principals?

**The Context for Assistant Principal Mentorship**

The current educational culture of America has been shaped not only by the current laws and policies but also by the societal changes that have occurred over the past several decades. Casavant and Cherkowski (2001) suggested that these societal changes have created new challenges for school leaders and have intensified the demands on principals and assistant principals. Because of the need for highly effective administrators, politicians as well as educators are looking for ways to properly train school leaders. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) affirmed that new standards for principals and assistant principals have redirected universities to structure their leadership preparation programs to better meet educational objectives. Yet the results have not clearly proven that this restructuring has dramatically improved leadership quality (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003).

Research points to the effectiveness of several different strategies to improve the leadership ability of school leaders. Marks and Printy (2003) suggested that the leader’s capacity remains a very important attribute in the development of a school. Similarly, administrators need to be able to build the professional and leadership capacities of the teachers in the school. Marks and Printy (2003) stated, “To enlarge the leadership capacity of the schools attempting to improve their academic performance, some principals involve teachers in sustained dialogue and decision making about educational matters” (p. 370). School leaders become successful in
improving academic performance as they are able to build the capacity of teachers (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001).

The academic culture within the school rests on the leadership of the school. Witzers et al. (2003) find that administrators’ actions are linked to student performance, and although the impact may be minimal, assistant principals do affect student learning. These findings illustrate the importance of the assistant principals’ role in teacher instruction and classroom performance.

Research also emphasizes the importance that assistant principals play in schools, but it remains critical to understand what best prepares these school leaders. Leading studies find that leadership development must provide job-embedded training that gives assistant principals leadership experience (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Kottkamp, 2011; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002; Zepeda, 2008). Casavant and Cherkowski (2001) affirmed, “One effective strategy for improving school leadership is mentoring” (p. 75). Mentoring, if carried out effectively, provides principals and assistant principals with a support system that guides them through the challenges of being a school administrator. Mentorship also creates job-embedded learning experiences for assistant principals as they work through the challenges of decision making with someone who has been there and made similar decisions before.

**The Context for DuPage County Public Schools**

DuPage County Public Schools have taken the research on mentorship to heart. The goal of DuPage County Public Schools leadership development is “to increase student achievement by identifying, recruiting, and preparing prospective school leaders; and selecting, developing, training, and supporting them to become highly effective instructional leaders” (DuPage County Public Schools, 2012). Over the last 10 years, the county has been developing and implementing
forms of mentorship. During the last five years, the county has specifically been enacting mentorship for assistant principals. These assistant principals are assigned a mentor who supports and guides them through their first two years. The mentor can continue into the third and fourth years if the assistant principal requests additional support, or if the county sees it as necessary for his or her development as a school leader.

In addition to assigning mentors, the county has implemented a series of professional development sessions that are intertwined with their mentorship program. Each assistant principal meets with his or her mentor every other month and attends a training session during the alternate months. This program gives the assistant principals monthly contact and a system that is able to provide not only individual support but also collaborative support.

The training sessions are designed to provide the assistant principal with just-in-time training. Just-in-time learning, within this study, was defined as professional development for school leaders that is effective and relevant to their current situation (Leithwood et al., 2010). Therefore, the mentor sessions in the beginning of the year would focus on topics that would impact the assistant principal at that time. For example, topics that would help assistant principals at the beginning of the year are centered on student discipline and teacher observations, whereas the sessions on testing and registration for the next year would be scheduled for later in the year. This schedule provides the best support and training for assistant principals at the time when they would most likely encounter problems associated with specific topics.

The mentorship program provided each assistant principal with a mentor, who was typically a retired principal. These sessions were designed to provide each assistant principal with an experienced person who could guide them through the challenges of being a beginning
principal. Within this study, Jessica Carter found that these individual sessions were extremely helpful in validating the work that she was doing. She saw mentorship as a way to make sure that she was on the “right track.” On the other hand, Tyler Dooley saw these sessions more as a way to communicate and to “build confidence.” He benefited from mentorship by being “exposed” to different opinions and by having another “voice” that guided and supported him in handling the difficulties of being an assistant principal. In effect, by combining individual mentorship and group sessions, DuPage County used formal mentorship as a tool to prepare assistant principals. Figure 4.1 provides an illustration of how DuPage County Public Schools establishes strategic direction and leadership components within the county.

Figure 4.1

**Strategic Direction and Leadership Development Components**

**Strategic Direction:** The strategic direction supports the vision to build successful school leaders.

**Leadership Development Components:** The leadership development components build the model for establishing and developing leadership preparation in DuPage County Public Schools.

The effectiveness of formal assistant principal mentorship relies on the district’s ability to coordinate and implement the vision and mission of the district, as seen by the above chart. Without the direction and vision of the district leadership, mentorship would be ineffective. However, when mentorship is aligned with the vision and mission of the district and is able to meet the goals and objectives of the district, mentorship proves to be very successful. Figure 4.1
illustrates this, as the leadership development program of DuPage County Public Schools has been carefully thought out, formulating the district’s strategic direction and leadership components, and carefully constructed so that school leaders may have the greatest impact on student learning and therefore the best chances to improve student performance.

Over the past several decades, DuPage County Public Schools has had a successful academic record. The leadership preparation program has seemed to work well for the county over the last ten to fifteen years. The district has consistently outperformed the state averages and has accomplished this despite a growing student population, including a rise in the percentage of minority students. Table 4.1 compares the district’s achievement compared to the state of Georgia’s scores.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DuPage County</th>
<th>Georgia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade on-Track Rate</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
<td>76.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Achievement</td>
<td>96.2%</td>
<td>93.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average SAT Composite Score</td>
<td>1511</td>
<td>1431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance (High)</td>
<td>95.38%</td>
<td>94.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AYP Status</td>
<td>AYP Met</td>
<td>AYP Met</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2

Comparison of Demographics and Academic Subgroups: DuPage County versus the State of Georgia 2010-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/ Subgroup</th>
<th>District (percent)</th>
<th>State (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free and Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the past 10 to 15 years, DuPage County Public Schools have seen dramatic population growth. In 2000, the U.S. Census showed the DuPage County population to be 588,448 and in 2010, the population grew to 805,321. The increase seen over this period was just over 30%, making the county one of the fastest-growing counties in the United States during this period. The growth in population has pushed the district to expand its educational services quite rapidly. Also, as seen in Table 4.3, the demographics have remained fairly consistent over the past three years. The one category that draws the most dramatic change in the above chart is within the percentage of free and reduced lunch. As seen in Table 4.3, the percent of free and reduced lunch has risen rather sharply from 46% in 2008-2009 to 52% in 2010-2011. Typically,
the increase in the free and reduced lunch category adds pressures on the district to meet the unique needs of students from lower socioeconomic circumstances.

Table 4.3

Demographic and Subgroup Changes in DuPage County from 2008 – 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/ Subgroup</th>
<th>2010-2011 (Percent)</th>
<th>2009-2010 (Percent)</th>
<th>2008-2009 (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student with Disabilities</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free and Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ever-shifting patterns within the student populations have created a greater need for principals and assistant principals to establish policies and procedures that meet the needs of their student body. Therefore, the need for high quality school leaders is apparent. As presented through this study, assistant principal mentorship has the potential to build efficacy, establish a clear role, and provide essential on-the-job-training for assistant principals.

The Context for DuPage County Public High School

The following section provides a description of the contextual settings of DuPage County Public High School. Two participants participated in this case study. Both participants worked at DuPage County Public High School and were chosen based on purposeful sampling. As a
DuPage County Public High School is situated in a suburb of Atlanta. The school just completed its 8th year and has grown rapidly to become one of the largest high schools in the State of Georgia. The student population over the past 3 years has been well over 3,000 students. The faculty is comprised of over 200 certified teachers as well as having 14 administrators, 13 assistant principals and 1 principal. The county has over 100 schools under its direction, which are then broken down into clusters. Each cluster is represented by one high school, and each of the feeder schools, the middle and the elementary schools, are a part of that high school’s cluster. Overall, the clusters are then grouped into five different areas, each having an Area Superintendent who oversees the operations of each cluster of schools. Each principal reports directly to the area superintendent, who then reports to county officials.

Although the district has seen a slight demographic shift over the last decade, the demographics of DuPage County Public Schools have remained fairly consistent, especially over the past three years. Table 4.4 illustrates the demographic and subgroup data of DuPage County High School between 2008 and 2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/Subgroup</th>
<th>2010-2011 (Percent)</th>
<th>2009-2010 (Percent)</th>
<th>2008-2009 (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The DuPage County Board of Education has been devoted to building world class schools. This can be seen in DuPage County High School, as well as throughout the district, as the district’s vision and mission directly correlate to the standards and objectives within each school. Along with aligning the goals of the district with the performance standards being taught in the classroom, the district has provided each of the schools with classroom technology. The use of technology in the classroom has aided teachers in their ability to deliver high-quality academic lessons. For example, some of the science and math classrooms have been fitted with interactive white board technology that enables the teacher to be creative with how the mathematic lessons are delivered to the students. Also, the foreign language classes have language labs that allow students to hear and speak the language with guided instruction from their teacher. All these innovations are aimed at increasing student achievement and building a culture of teaching and learning within the school and within the district.

Along with building a solid academic curriculum, the school has benefited from having an extensive extracurricular program. The school has a prolific athletic department, where teams are continually competing not only to play in state tournaments but also to win state
championships. Over the past 5 years, multiple teams from various sports have won state championships and others have ended the season ranked within the top 10 in the state. The athletic department also has benefited from active engagement from the community. The shareholders have had an active role in supporting the high school. The community shows up to sporting events to support school teams and are also actively engaged in consistent dialogue with the administration regarding providing the best academic and extracurricular activities for the students who attend.

A Focus on Student Achievement

Student performance continues to be a focus for the faculty and staff at DuPage County Public High School. The standards and objectives for academic courses are continually aligned with the district, state, and national guidelines. Teachers are able to instruct students based on tightly aligned curriculum that will enable each student to have an opportunity to pass the district, state and national exams. Students in elementary and middle schools have a series of exams that they must pass, along with achieving other criteria to become eligible for promotion to the next grade. Also, in high school, students take a county-designed assessment during their tenth grade year, which is required for graduation. High school students are also required to take and pass the Georgia High School Graduation Test to fulfill graduation requirements. This series of assessments is designed to ensure that students who graduate from DuPage County High School are prepared for the next phases of their lives, whether that be attending college or other career options.

The district’s educational goals have been concentrated on improving overall achievement by focusing on certain underperforming subgroups. Mathematics continues to be a weaker subject for students attending the high school, specifically African-American males.
Consequently, the administration has established goals and criteria to help students, particularly in 9th grade, perform better on the standardized math assessments. Along with the Mathematics Department, the Science Department has implemented a series of programs that are designed to increase student performance on the tenth grade assessment as well as on the Georgia High School Graduation Test. For example, the Science Department has developed a program for students during their homeroom period, in which they receive instruction on not only in science content but also on test-taking strategies. The hope is that in this way students will be more prepared for the high-stakes exams and that ultimately, student achievement will increase across content areas.

Moreover, keeping pace with the academic standards of DuPage County Public Schools, DuPage County Public High School has typically outperformed the district averages, the state averages, and the national averages. The SAT and ACT exams both provide examples of how the students are performing well on these standardized exams, although the administrators and the teachers both understand that there is still room for improvement. Table 4.5 compares the composite scores for DuPage County High School, the DuPage County school district, the State of GA and the nation on the ACT and SAT exams.

Table 4.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DuPage HS ACT Composite Score</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuPage County ACT Composite Score</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of GA ACT Composite Score</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National ACT Composite Score</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuPage HS SAT Composite Score</td>
<td>1535</td>
<td>1586</td>
<td>1542</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The emphasis and focus on student achievement has become a typical response to the laws and policies that have been enacted across the state and across the nation. Teachers and students are becoming very acquainted with the standard-based curriculum that has been implemented across the county. But as research has clearly suggested, it is the administration that establishes the policies and procedures that enable the school to perform at high levels. Teachers are the driving force for improving the academic performance of their students, but the principals and assistant principals are the ones who dictate the overall achievement of the school by establishing the structure and the organization for which the learning takes place.

Assistant Principal’s Role

There are 13 assistant principals at DuPage County Public School. While the principal is responsible for the overall operations and instructional practices of the school, the assistant principals remain a key authority in developing and implementing school policy and school procedures. Each of the assistant principals is assigned an area of responsibility, most of them having two to three areas over which they have direct authority. The assistant principal who is assigned director of curriculum often has the most difficult position, as he or she is charged with overseeing the assigning of teachers and students to classes and supervising the overall academic policies of the school. There is an assistant principal who leads the professional development within the school, one who is the testing coordinator, and one who is in charge of running the
attendance office. The remaining assistant principals are given discipline responsibilities; usually the alphabet is broken into five sections, each principal having one of the alphabet ranges. The assistant principals who are responsible for discipline are often given a number of other assignments as well. For example, there is an assistant principal who handles the policies and procedures for textbooks. One is assigned to organize the facilitation of parking decals to the faculty and to the students. Yet another assistant principal leads the special education department. As can be seen, the size of the high school has created a need for multiple assistant principals, and all have responsibilities that govern the operations and management of the school facility and the school personnel.

Typically the assistant principals who have responsibilities over discipline also are the leaders in charge of academic departments. Each department has a principal who governs the policies and procedures of that department. Also, the leader in charge supervises and evaluates teachers within each respective department, ensuring that the quality of education is satisfactory for the school’s academic standards and performance levels.

**Professional Development**

The professional development within DuPage County Public School is linked to the Local School Plan for Improvement, also called the LSPI. These goals are developed each year by the principal and assistant principals to establish the academic objectives for that school year. The assistant principal in charge of professional development creates a plan to match the goals and directives of the LSPI given for that academic year.

Over the past three years, the school’s professional development plan has been centered on building teachers’ ability to use classroom data to inform their instruction. The plan was centered on having each teacher conduct action research projects so that they might understand
more fully the inner workings of their students and that they might target lower performing groups in hopes of raising their performance levels. This past year the professional development plan facilitated improvements in 9th grade mathematics, an area that was a weak point for the school. Along with action research, the professional development plan focuses on student engagement. The idea was that teachers were working hard to deliver instruction, but in some cases, the students were not engaged in the learning process. Therefore, the school conducted a baseline study that measured engagement within the school and after implementing techniques to improve engagement, re-measured the levels of student engagement in classrooms and found a remarkable improvement school wide.

**Participant’s Perspectives**

Two assistant principals were interviewed for this study: Jessica Carter and Tyler Dooley. Each of the study participant’s interviews was conducted between May and June, 2012. The participants took part in two interviews at a time and location of their choosing. Each participant had the opportunity to read through the interview transcript to verify and assess the content of the transcription. As these member checks were conducted, each participant was reminded that they could revise and make edits to the content of their interviews at any point before final submission. This ensured that the data analysis was a reliable reflection of what they were intending to say and that no content was taken out of context.

The first interview for each participant was conducted at DuPage County High School the week after school let out in May, 2012. The assistant principals were asked to schedule an hour for the interview, although the first interview went slightly over an hour. The second interviews were conducted outside of the school. Jessica Carter’s second interview was conducted over the phone as she had family responsibilities and was not able to meet in person. Tyler Dooley’s
The interview was conducted early in the morning at a local restaurant. The interviews were able to capture the participant’s perceptions and perspectives of formal assistant principal mentorship. The first interview, which was based on the DuPage County mentorship objectives, established the ways in which mentorship impacted their first and second year of being an assistant principal. The second interview not only clarified content from the first interview, but was able to get further into the experiences that each mentee had with formal mentorship.

Both participants worked at DuPage County Public High School and participated in formal mentorship offered by the county. The participants are certified in leadership and hold advanced education degrees. Table 4.6 illustrates the participant’s profiles.

Table 4.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Profiles 2011-2012</th>
<th>Jessica Carter</th>
<th>Tyler Dooley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>DuPage County</td>
<td>DuPage County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Supervised</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education Experience</td>
<td>10 Years</td>
<td>10 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Leadership Experience</td>
<td>3 Years</td>
<td>4 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Degree</td>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>Ed. Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigned a Mentor</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed District Training</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Jessica Carter**

Jessica Carter began her career at DuPage County Public High School as a business education teacher and after five years at the school, moved into an administrative role. At the time of this study, Ms. Carter just finished her third year as an administrator. She also took part
in the formal mentorship program that the county mandated for first and second year assistant principals.

As an administrator at DuPage County Public School, Ms. Carter supervised and evaluated the Social Studies Department. As the supervisor, she was the administrative leader over the department and was responsible for the inner workings of the department as well as its academic performance. Ms. Carter also had discipline responsibility in which she had a section of the student body that she oversaw. Along with these two main responsibilities, Ms. Carter also organized the advisement lessons for the homeroom classes. These advisement classes met every day and therefore required an administrator to oversee the curriculum.

Ms. Carter looked favorably on the mentorship program. She said it was “very timely” and formal mentorship gave her the resources that she needed to be successful in her first and second years as an assistant principal. She thought that formal mentorship, as a “whole package,” provided a strong foundation for her to begin her administrative career. She affirmed, “I see it (mentorship) as one big training.” While some people see training as a nuisance, Ms. Carter looked on it as an opportunity to learn and to grow. Ms. Carter confirmed, “I really think that the administrative offices did a great job providing the resources that we needed and that DuPage County does a great job of training you.” She embraced the opportunities within the mentorship program to gain the resources that she needed to help her in her job and also used mentorship as a way to guide and support her in the decisions she made in those first two years as an administrator.

When discussing formal mentorship, Ms. Carter validated that there are benefits of mentoring novice assistant principals. She asserted that without having formal mentorship, she would have not been able to handle some circumstances as easily as she did. Ms. Carter used
words like “support system,” “connecting with others,” “right track,” and “validating,” to describe what she saw as benefits to her professional career and personal level of satisfaction. She definitely painted formal mentorship as a way to build her leadership skills and looked at the whole training process as a “very strategic” and “relevant” process where she was able to learn and grow as a school administrator.

**Building Efficacy in Assistant Principals**

Building efficacy was apparent in the way Ms. Carter spoke about formal mentorship. She viewed formal assistant mentorship as a way for her to improve her ability to lead and to become a better educator. She was genuine in her desire to constantly learn. She asserted, “In the beginning it was helpful to have somebody provide you with a checklist.” While Ms. Carter is of the type that will continually work to build her self-efficacy on her own, when she was given proper resources and proper training, like a mentor and a formal mentorship program, she was able to become more effective as a school leader.

Ms. Carter used the relationship with her mentor to gain expertise in her work. She proclaimed, “And you know now it is second nature.” Ms. Carter became more effective as a school leader through spending time with her mentor. Not only that, but she was able to make it “second nature.” Becoming “second nature” indicates that whatever the mentor had rubbed off on the mentee.

Ms. Carter confirmed that mentorship, unlike any other professional development model, allows the assistant principal the opportunity to embody the leadership qualities of an experienced principal. She asserted, “I had something to refer to” and “to make sure that I had it all.” For Ms. Carter, mentorship acted as a validating voice that guided her. Ms. Carter claimed:

In the very beginning, it was helpful to have somebody else provide you with a checklist of things that you could use and go ahead and take it back to your school that day to
implement. So, um, that was to me one of the best things help me grow in the role, and just having resources and people that you knew to call on.

Ms. Carter benefited from formal mentorship as she was given the resources that she needed to “grow in the role.” Formal assistant principal mentorship built Ms. Carters efficacy by allowing her to embody the leadership best practices by observing, practicing, and working with an experienced mentor.

The formal mentor training program provided Ms. Carter with the practical resources as well as the theoretical resources that enabled her to become more effective at her job. Ms. Carter described the practical resources as “checklists,” which could be forms or procedures that made her job easier. For example, Ms. Carter describes how the training provided her with a detailed description of how to effectively handle a disciplinary panel. These panels are for students who do not follow district rules and may be expelled. Ms. Carter benefited from mentorship as she was given guidance about how to handle these disciplinary actions. The theoretical resources that Ms. Carter referred to consisted of leadership tips and strategies. Ms. Carter brought up a book that she and her mentor read together that became a model for her leadership style. The phrase “How full is your bucket” was used by Ms. Carter to indicate the guiding principle of the book. “How full is your bucket” refers to the ability of the leader to encourage and build up colleagues, opposed to depleting one’s metaphorical bucket.

Whether it was practical advice or deeper theoretical conversations, the formal assistant principal program established the premises for which Ms. Carter developed efficacy. Ms. Carter used words like “was set,” “formal schedule,” “meet with other people,” and “connecting with others” to describe how the formal mentorship program benefited her effectiveness. Ms. Carter used the phrase “was set” to describe how she did not have to prepare anything for the mentorship meeting. Everything was provided for her. She benefited from the “formal
“schedule” as the program was well thought out and planned according to what was most important at that time.

Ms. Carter often used the word “timely” to describe her experience. Ms. Carter became more effective by meeting with her colleagues during the mentorship sessions. The program developed a network where she was able to call on her peers in certain times. She felt like she was able to connect with others who were in the same position as her. For example, she mentioned another assistant principal who she emailed and called so that they may work through certain problems and talk through different scenarios. The connections established during the formal mentorship program allowed Ms. Carter to have a greater sense of efficacy and as she claimed validated the work that she was already doing.

Ms. Carter effectiveness was strengthened as she spent time with her mentor. Ms. Carter described her relationship with her mentor almost as a guiding voice that strengthened her leadership ability. Ms. Carter declared:

We would talk about things that were going on here at school and in a non-evaluative way, but to say that you are on the right track and that you are good and have you thought about looking into this? Those kinds of conversations were really good for me. It was not my peers that you were talking to, and it was not someone who was evaluating me, it was someone that has had a lot of experience and I kind of get information about how I am doing in a benchmark, whether I am on the right track or not. And I thought that was good.

Ms. Carter benefited from the conversations as they were non-evaluative, and she was encouraged by the conversations. The conversations were meaningful and provided direction for Ms. Carter’s leadership. Ms. Carter became more effective as a leader as she was situated within her job while she was engaged in the conversations with her mentor. This will be discussed more in the job-embedded learning section, but Ms. Carter’s efficacy was strengthened through the mentor relationship as she worked through the problems and difficulties of her job. It was
through the live experience that enabled her to learn and to grow through the mentorship relationship.

Along with these benefits, formal mentorship also established a system in which assistant principals were able to establish a network. Ms. Carter claimed that the network established through formal mentorship could be one of the most important advantages of the program. Ms. Carter affirmed, “All of that together, was a support system and provided resources so you know, as a part of the whole mentorship, you got to experience the gambit.” Formal mentorship as a whole built and established a support system. The support system built efficacy as Ms. Carter was able to use what she gained from formal mentorship as a frame of reference. Ms. Carter stated that it was a “good network to have.” Although she often stated that she never had to call her mentor in an emergency, she did say that it was nice to know that she could call her if she had to. Knowing that the support was there was reassuring for Ms. Carter.

Ms. Carter also claimed that her effectiveness as a school leader was enhanced through examining research-based strategies. She claimed:

They always base everything on some type of research. They would present a book or other information; we would go through and talk about it. That was even better because then you had a resource that you could go back to. We would ask questions like, what is the research practice that they are basing that on? And so they would provide information on the research finding and we would work through it as a team individually and in groups at our table.

The research-based strategies created a benchmark for the leadership team and, as much as possible, the policies and procedures were based on quality research practices. Ms. Carter’s efficacy increased as she was able to base her leadership skills on research and provide justification for the work that she was doing.

Ms. Carter reported becoming more effective in her ability to establish collaborative groups within the department she supervised. She was responsible for supervising the Social
Studies Department, in which was in the process of creating collaborative groups within each subject area. Ms. Carter claimed, “Mentorship benefited me as I was working with the Social Studies Department to start the process of coming together with the course teams.” She was able to use research based strategies to encourage and execute the formation of collaborative teams within the department. Ms. Carter also stated, “The conversations that I had with my mentor provided me with useful information that helped me as we made that transition in social studies.” She was able to take practical advice and apply it to the specific situation that she was working through at school.

**Improving Role Socialization of Assistant Principals**

Along with building efficacy, Ms. Carter benefited from formal mentorship by feeling more comfortable in her role as an assistant principal. The transition from teaching to administration can be a difficult one, and so current scholarship looks to role socialization as one of the important steps that school administrators need to take to meet the demands of the job (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006; Grogan & Crow, 2004). Ms. Carter has demonstrated the importance of feeling comfortable in her role as she has repeatedly emphasized the importance for her to feel validated by her mentor and by the mentorship program. In this way, she has established an identity as a school leader and has used formal mentorship as a way to become accustomed to her role as a school leader.

One of the ways that Ms. Carter became socialized to the difficulties of school leadership was by being connected to a network of other school leaders. The DuPage County formal assistant principal mentorship established a cohort of assistant principals that all went through the formal mentorship program together. Ms. Carter met with her mentor every other month and then met with other colleagues in a group mentorship session the months in between. According
to Ms. Carter, both the individual mentor sessions and the group mentor sessions provided great insight into how to effectively lead and how to create solutions for different problems that arose.

Ms. Carter spoke highly of the group sessions as she was able to bounce ideas off the other assistant principals, hearing different views on how to solve difficult situations. She claimed:

I think I was more connected with the people that I was in the group with, meaning other assistant principals. We would email back and forth. There was another assistant principal from another school, and we shared common experiences where we could relate to each other’s situations. And so that has been a good network to have, but most of the resources they gave us were pretty much, you could take it and use it. Or they would provide ideas that then I could bring back and utilize.

The connections that were established through these group sessions allowed Ms. Carter to feel more comfortable with what she was doing back at DuPage County Public High School. She was able to see that other school leaders also had similar problems that she did and that she was not alone. She also was able to create a tool chest of strategies that the different leaders would use and so when she faced a similar situation, she was able to pull from these past experiences.

Along with the group sessions, Ms. Carter benefited from meeting individually with her mentor. She valued the time that she had and felt like it was beneficial for her to meet. Ms. Carter proclaimed the following based on her experience with her mentor, “It was good to reflect on what I have been doing, how I have felt about the work I have been doing and it was something that I needed and it was nice that someone was not evaluating me.” The connection with the mentor created a natural transition that allowed Ms. Carter to feel like she was more comfortable in her job. Ms. Carter postulated:

You feel much more comfortable in that third year and so having the mentor process for two years is probably ideal because the first year you survive and the second year you are able to reflect a little more and the third year you feel even better.
Formal mentorship enabled Ms. Carter to not only survive the first year, but also to feel like she was able to make an impact by feeling like she belonged in her position.

The connections that were established through the formal mentorship program allowed Ms. Carter to know her role as an assistant principal and feel like the decisions that she made were the best for student learning and for the school. Ms. Carter asserted, “I think it is more of a reflective, now I know where to go to get the answer. You know. I remember seeing that in our mentorship sessions and I know that we have talked about that already.” She was able to handle situations better because she had already been prepared for what might happen. And when things happen that have not been discussed, she had the experience to know where to go to get the answers. She also has the leadership framework needed to make the best decision.

Along with building connections, Ms. Carter felt more comfortable as a school leader as she experienced different perspectives from a variety of different sources within the mentorship program. Ms. Carter and her mentor held conversations about a variety of different topics. Ms. Carter stated:

We talked about so many different things. There were many different topics; like we talked about communication with teachers, how to develop a team and how to work with a group of teachers. Then we looked at the research, we talked about school climate and a variety of other topics.

All these conversations enabled Ms. Carter to see a different perspective on how to handle each of these situations.

Ms. Carter felt like these conversations built her experience without having to go through the experience. The preparation was vital as she was aware of the experience before it would take place. Ms. Carter proclaimed that her mentor “provided me with some ideas on to handle difficult situations and why they would handle it that way.” Ms. Carter felt like she had a toolbox of leadership strategies that she was able to apply to her job and it not only “validated” what
she was already doing, but it also gave her confidence that she had the right answers for the situation.

Additionally, if Ms. Carter did not know the answer, formal mentorship gave her the confidence that she could face a difficult situation without having all the answers. For example, Ms. Carter faced a difficult situation with a couple of teachers within her department. She claimed:

You have to be able to show the teacher why that is not good practice and why we all need to be on the same page. And so she helped me through that and just talking through the situation and how they are handling it and how we are addressing the teachers. I think that we made a lot of strides in the department, but it was helpful to hear her say, you just have to stick with it.

Ms. Carter gained critical advice for a difficult situation.

Ms. Carter’s mentor provided her with different perspectives that allow her to make the best decision and come to a workable conclusion. Ms. Carter stated the following regarding the conversation with her mentor:

She said that she had been through that before, and some people don’t need to be teaching at that specific school if they cannot get onboard. And you know that was reassuring. It is hard to have those conversations, but it was good to hear that we are doing it for the kids, and that we are doing in the best interest of the kids, and it is about moving it forward. So, that was helpful.

When a leader is in a difficult situation, it is challenging to see past the current problem. Formal mentorship allowed Ms. Carter to see the bigger picture. A different perspective was given to Ms. Carter that allowed her to handle the situation better than she would have without mentorship. Her mentor provided her with practical advice that benefited her leadership as she was going through this challenging situation with several teachers in her department.

The group sessions also provided Ms. Carter with different perspectives that benefited her socialization into a leadership position. The group sessions focused on different scenarios
that assistant principals could face. Each group would discuss the situation and how they would handle it and then present their answers to the whole group. Ms. Carter felt like “hearing from different people who were all going to attack things differently” really benefited her leadership. She saw that there was more than one right answer. She was able to take these conversations back to her school and was better able to cope with problems at school as she was not only prepared to handle problems, but was also able to see the bigger picture that accompanied each particular difficulty.

Additionally, formal mentorship improved Ms. Carter’s ability to become socialized into her leadership position as she was guided by her mentor. She felt like mentorship provided a litmus test; it showed whether she was on the “right track or not.” The guidance was not simply telling Ms. Carter what the right decision was, but instead, it allowed Ms. Carter to learn different perspectives and then be able to make the right decision on her own.

The guidance for Ms. Carter was seen as structured, but yet informal. She stated, “The mentor sessions for me were more informal type of conversations, obviously we would hit on different things, we talked a lot about the initiatives and some of the struggles that we were having at the time.” For Ms. Carter, formal mentorship enabled her to feel comfortable in her position as her mentor was able to adapt the sessions depending on what situations came up.

Ms. Carter told of a time when a teacher was behaving differently than what was expected by the administration. Ms. Carter stated that the teachers “were having different philosophies about how to teach certain classes and so we would hit on different strategies to address those issues. I would just talk through those situations with her.” Ms. Carter and her mentor were able to discuss these situations and come up with possible ways to approach the problem. Ms. Carter found this very helpful as she was able to come up with possible
resolutions with an experienced school leader that was “individualized” and unintimidating. Ms.
Carter’s mentor had no agenda for being there, except to help and support her.

The guidance of the mentorship program acted as a form of osmosis. The transfer of
knowledge was propelled through the mentorship process. Socialization occurred as Ms. Carter
became accustomed to the leadership skills that were strengthened through mentorship. Ms.
Carter claimed:

It wasn’t overwhelming because they were able to give you information on a particular
topic and then they give you some handouts and other resources that you could take with
you. They were not long sessions, but it was just enough to get your feet wet with it, and
it provided some different ideas and was something that you could go back in and look at.
If you were going to need to pull resources, you had them at your fingertips.

The amount of resources, knowledge, and practical advice that was transferred through
mentorship allowed Ms. Carter to feel much more prepared in her position than she would have
without formal mentorship. And as she stated in the above quote, the information was not over
barring; it was presented in a manageable way that allowed Ms. Carter to feel more at ease with
her position.

Formal mentorship provided Ms. Carter with an opportunity to understand and feel more
comfortable with her role. Role socialization was established in Ms. Carter through the
connections she made, the perspectives and experiences she gained, the guidance and support
from her mentor, and the transfer of leadership skills that took place through formal mentorship.

**The Impacts of Formal Mentorship on Job-Embedded Learning**

Ms. Carter was able to take the skills and concepts that were learned in the mentorship
sessions and apply them directly to her situation at school. This study defined job embedded
professional learning based on three criteria:

1. It is relevant to the individual learner
2. Feedback is built into the process

3. It facilitates the transfer of new skills into practice (Zepeda, 2008).

Ms. Carter met all three of the parameters for effective professional development. This section will focus on Ms. Carter’s perceptions on how formal mentorship impacted these three factors, as related to job-embedded learning.

Ms. Carter felt as if the mentorship sessions impacted her learning needs and was able to individualize the content so that she was able to apply what she learned directly to her situation. Ms. Carter received feedback from both the individual sessions and from the group sessions. Ms. Carter stated that the feedback was not intimidating or intrusive, but rather supported her and encouraged her. And lastly, Ms. Carter was able to implement the new skills into her daily practice.

Furthermore, the confidence that she gained was a direct result of the resources that became available to her. She claimed, “So for me that was very valuable because you knew someone you could call.” She had a network of people that she could call if she needed help and guidance. Ms. Carter stated that “if you had a question and if someone had done something before, they could provide you with resources.” The knowledge of just knowing that there were others who were willing to help at any time made Ms. Carter feel at ease.

Ms. Carter found that mentorship gave her confidence in the job that she was currently doing. She highly valued the professional development sessions. She would take notes and soak up as much information that she could. She asserted:

I think I am more confident. You are naturally insecure when you are first starting it. And that is one thing that I talked about with her. Did I do it right? I don’t know, you question yourself. And the more I went through the mentorship and the more I talked to her I found that I was on the right track and doing the right thing and asking the right questions.
Ms. Carter firmly believed that formal mentorship benefited her professional growth as well as her personal growth. She continued by saying:

And I think the more I went through the experience and facing different things, that is when the confidence was built and now I have been through three years, and I think, ok, there are going to be things that I am going to say that I don’t know what to do with, but I am confident that I can work it out and ask the right questions and get to the right answer.

Through job-embedded professional development, Ms. Carter gained confidence to know that she can handle the situation, even if she did not have the perfect answer to the problem.

Job-embedded learning built confidence in Ms. Carter as she was given on-the-job training about concepts she was able to immediately apply to her work situation. The resources were at her fingertips. She proclaimed, “They would provide ideas and I could bring the resources back and use them.” She also mentioned that the training had “real life application.” The resources covered the gambit, they were practical tips on how to organize your time, they provided handouts and forms that could be used in any and all situations, they provided timely and relevant staff development, and they generated ideas that could be used in the work place.

One of the topics that was applicable for Ms. Carter was that of school climate. She stated, “Another one was we talked about climate, school climate, and again they would always provide research, and we would again break out and have a topic and look at the research findings.” Ms. Carter benefited from being able to discuss what current research says regarding school climate, and then being able to apply what she discussed to her school setting. She declared, “We would discuss the applications for the current research, how we would see that fitting within our building and then we would come back together to discuss what our group came up with.” For Ms. Carter, the discussion on school climate was not only research based, but became relevant as she pondered how she could apply what she learned to DuPage County High School.

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Another way that the formal mentorship program impacted Ms. Carter’s on-the-job training is by providing her cohort with relevant speakers that discussed current trends within school leadership. She claimed that there were county level officials and local school employees that would speak on different topics related to school leadership. Ms. Carter pondered, “They presented information on Title I schools and how they were doing testing intervention, which was something that I am doing at the local school. They had the title I funding to do some different things, some creative things.” Ms. Carter benefited from this information as she was able to take away ideas on intervention to be able to use at DuPage County Public School.

Additionally, even though she was not involved with Title I, Ms. Carter benefited from understanding what others schools are dealing with. It strengthens her leadership ability. She continued, “So while Title I wasn’t something that I had any experience with, and we may not implement it that way, it provided me with some ideas on how they are doing and why they would do it that way.” Therefore, the knowledge gained through these sessions had a direct impact on what she was able to take back to her school. It benefited her leadership ability and built up her capacity to effectively and efficiently lead.

Along with Title I, Ms. Carter was also given experience with how to handle the transportation department. Ms. Carter stated:

Other schools had challenges that we did not face, for example they had a session on transportation for intervention classes. And so I think it is really important to know that we are a big county, but it is not just about you knowing what we are doing here. There are a lot of different ways that things are done, and for me that was good to be able to see. Mentorship provided job-embedded professional development as the mentees were able to gain experience in a variety of different topics that they may one day face. The tools established by attending these sessions provided direction and clarification for the mentees. For Ms. Carter, the training was able to provide important information regarding topics, such as Title I and about
transportation. She was able to become more knowledgeable and better able to serve her school through understanding more about what takes place in and around schools.

Moreover, Ms. Carter benefited from mentorship as she was able to directly apply what she was gathering in the sessions to what she was going through at school. The resources and tools were designed for her to take and use. She told of a time when she was provided some information regarding professional development and so she immediately went back to her high school and relayed the information to the other assistant principals and to the principals.

The direct application of leadership skills proves to be one of the biggest benefits of formal mentorship. Ms. Carter was able to take the resources that were provided to her, whether it was the practical advice or the actual physical materials itself, and apply them to her job. She claimed, “The sessions were very much leadership oriented. They would provide the resources to us and they were tied to some of the topics that we talked about. The other sessions also provided more school generated topics that we discussed.” Her description of “school generated” refers to the point that the topics were taken either from research based strategies or from needs expressed from past assistant principals. Ms. Carter continued by saying, “The one on one mentor sessions provided me with insight as we would have conversations about the leadership strategies that I could use on the job.” Ms. Carter was provided one-on-one individualized training that focused completely on her needs for that hour session.

Along with the individualized attention, Ms. Carted stressed the importance of meeting face-to-face. She asserted, “The sessions must be face to face as I was able to take the information back and use it at school.” The implication here is that Ms. Carter benefited from meeting her mentor face-to-face as well as meeting in groups face-to-face. The sessions were meaningful and productive.
Formal mentorship was able to provide effective job-embedded learning for Ms. Carter. She highlighted several factors that allowed her to directly apply what she learned to her situation as school. They were:

1. The topic was situated in a school setting with the idea that assistant principals may be able to use it at their local school.

2. The conversations with the mentors benefited the mentee as they were focused on meeting their needs and building their leadership skills.

3. Practical tools were provided to the mentees in a “flash drive” format that could be easily taken and easily used.

As reported earlier, these three factors directly coincide with this studies definition of job-embedded professional development. Ms. Carter experience with mentorship has proven to be not only research based, but also able to make the most impact on her ability to effectively lead schools.

Additionally, as formal mentorship has impacted job-embedded learning by being relevant and by providing feedback that can be directly applied to the job, it also has been timely. Being timely implies that the skills and feedback that has been given to Ms. Carter was able to be transferred and used immediately. She stated:

I thought it was very timely. It was provided at the right time and contained the right types of topics. I thought it was good that they asked us what types of topics we wanted to study because they were able to really get what we needed. I now see the whole package from having gone through the new assistant principal training. I understand the benefits of those workshops and now I see mentorship as one big training.

From Ms. Carter’s point-of-view, timeliness established the framework for formal mentorship.

Finally, Ms. Carter used the word “package,” as a way to describe the mentorship program. And in a way, this reflects the importance of timing the topics so that each assistant principal will be prepared for what they need at the right time. Ms. Carter showed that this is an important aspect a formal mentorship program. Overall, Ms. Carter has displayed the powerful
transformations that leaders undergo when they are placed in a well-designed and effective mentorship program.

**Tyler Dooley**

Tyler Dooley began his career in the DuPage County Public School System as a middle school special education teacher. Mr. Dooley eventually transferred to Dupage County Public High School, where he worked for three years. During that time, he was working on his leadership certificate and obtained an assistant principal job at another school in the district (Northside High School). After working at Northside for a year, he transferred back to DuPage County Public High School and has been there for the past three years. Like Ms. Carter, Mr. Dooley took part in the formal assistant principal mentorship program that was offered by the county, although his story is slightly different. Mr. Dooley was hired as an administrator two weeks after the school year started, so while Ms. Carter benefited from the mentorship training that began prior to the school year, Mr. Dooley did not. He did, however, get started with the program as soon as he started on the job and met with his mentor just as the other assistant principals throughout the county did.

Mr. Dooley’s administrative role has been to lead the Special Education Department. As the administrator over special education, Mr. Dooley’s responsibilities were to supervise and to evaluate the teachers within the department. In addition, he was in charge of handling discipline within this department. These departmental responsibilities consumed most of Mr. Dooley’s work hours, but he has held other responsibilities as well. For example, during his first year at Northside High School, he was in charge of media relations, where he would send in stories of successful students for the local newspaper to add to their prep column.
During the interviews, Mr. Dooley had an opportunity to reflect back on his experiences with formal mentorship. He had a positive experience with the program; however, after looking back, he mentioned how at the time he felt he was sometimes too busy to spend the time that was needed with his mentor. He affirmed that this was a fleeting thought, because as soon as he would meet with his mentor, the benefits were clearly seen and he benefited greatly from formal mentorship. Mr. Dooley used phrases such as “walked me through,” “good connection,” “exposed,” and “make an impact” to describe some of his thoughts related to formal mentorship. These phrases show the benefits of mentoring as he was able to gain advice and support from an experienced school leader, without being evaluated or having to confide in someone who was working in the same building. Mr. Dooley confirmed that it was extremely nice to have an opinion from someone who was just there to support him and guide him through the first two years of being an assistant principal.

Mr. Dooley asserted that he benefited from his mentor and that the formal mentorship program provided him with the necessary tools to succeed in the first and second years of being an assistant principal. He suggested that one of the biggest benefits for him was that the mentor provided a different perspective. Mr. Dooley used the word “voice” to illustrate how mentorship was able to broaden his perception and allow him to view his job from different points-of-view.

**Building Efficacy in Assistant Principals**

Building efficacy was an important part of mentorship for Mr. Dooley. He was hired two weeks into the school year, and admitted that he had a slightly larger learning curve than someone who would have gone through training prior to starting the school year, as Ms. Carter had. Mr. Dooley believed he was hired because he is a quick learner and is able to adapt to situations quickly and easily. Therefore, Mr. Dooley thought that having more professional
development would have been beneficial, although not being afforded that luxury, he did the best he could with what he had.

Mr. Dooley felt like formal mentorship was able to build efficacy in that it provided a voice that listened, guided, and supported his work as a school leader. According to Mr. Dooley, it was this voice that helped him to be successful in his first year as an assistant principal. Mr. Dooley suggested that his mentor strengthened his leadership skills by “making suggestions in different ways.” And he also stated that “every time I talked to her there was some piece of information that I could take and say that was a good idea.” Mr. Dooley’s mentor helped build efficacy by having several takeaways that he could use in his leadership practice.

Mr. Dooley also felt that through the stresses of the first year, his mentor helped him see his job from a different point-of-view. Mr. Dooley claimed:

> I think I was real narrow-minded to how things would go. You don’t see the big picture, you only see the picture as it relates to you and your world and she was very good at opening up and teaching me that your goal is to empower others to lead and then the second part of that was she was really good at telling you how you could do it.

Mr. Dooley became more effective in his job as he saw the bigger picture. He felt as though he was less stressed over small encounters and was able to focus on empowering others, rather than doing their job for them.

Mr. Dooley told of a situation where there was a first-year department chair who needed help keeping up with her responsibilities. Mr. Dooley found himself doing her work as well as doing his work as an assistant principal. Through the conversation with his mentor, he was able to see the benefits of empowering her to take more leadership in the department. Mr. Dooley stated, “And that conversation started me to force myself to teach her how to do it so that I could have it taken off my plate.” As seen in this example, through mentorship Mr. Dooley was better able to handle situations within his department. He was able to see the bigger picture, which in
this case benefited him in that he had more time to do the work he was responsible for, as well as benefiting the department chair as she was more able to take care of her responsibilities.

Along with providing guidance, formal mentorship strengthened Mr. Dooley’s feeling of efficacy as his mentor provided direction and counsel. About himself, Mr. Dooley stated, “I need directives.” He is a confident leader and likes to know the answers to the problems so that he can effectively carry them out. Mentorship provided the guidance and direction that Mr. Dooley was looking for and did it in a way that he was able to take and apply on a day to day basis.

Mr. Dooley felt like the directives that his mentor provided allowed him to grow as a leader. He stated that the best guidance that she gave him was in the form of listening and then responding to his situation. He asserted:

She was a good listener and offered wise counsel. But she did it in a way that was not telling me that, I have been a principal for 15 years and I met a lot of different types of people and I have witnessed this type of experience before. Here is something that I have done before and maybe it will work for you. That is how she approached it. She knew and plus she had credibility, she had been a principal before and she was the first female athletic director in the county offices, so she knew how to manage coaches who have a different personality. A stronger type of leadership personality and she knew how to manage and lead people. So, I really appreciated that.

For Mr. Dooley, listening was almost as important as the suggestions. He knew that his mentor was an accomplished school leader, and he respected her knowledge of leadership and her ability to listen first. These traits created the rapport that was needed to catch Mr. Dooley’s attention.

Along with listening, the advice that was given to Mr. Dooley was done in a way that was not demeaning, but supportive. Mr. Dooley stated that he “appreciated” the way that his mentor approached the conversations they had, and he showed that he respected her and thought that the time was worth it. Formal mentorship provided direction and confidence that Mr. Dooley needed to handle the situations during the first and second year on the job.
Additionally, Mr. Dooley benefited from mentorship as he became more aware of how to handle situations. Mr. Dooley used words like “retrospect,” “exposed,” and “walked me through,” to describe his feeling on how he was better able handle situations that came up. In becoming more aware, he was more effective as a school leader.

He was able to handle his colleagues with a better understanding of what he needed to do and what they needed to do. Mr. Dooley confirmed, “And she taught me to be more aware of the greater good and the situation that you are surrounded with.” He followed this up with an example of a time when a he felt like a teacher undercut his authority. He stated, “I recall she walked me through having a conversation with a teacher who undercut my authority as a new administrator, and I was pretty frustrated with that. She just walked through how to handle that situation.” Not having gone through an experience where a teacher undercut his authority before, Mr. Dooley was able to hear from an experienced leader how to handle the situation. He became more effective because he had a mentor to guide him.

While Mr. Dooley was more aware of how to handle situations, he was also more able to empower his colleagues. He stated, “I was more aware of how to handle situations and I think that I would sort of ask the people what their perception was.” He wanted to “see what their position was, they could voice their positions, and then I could explain why we have to do this or that.” Mr. Dooley was able to adapt leadership techniques so that he was able to build rapport with his colleagues. He wanted to learn their position so that he could better gage how to empower them in the situation. Also by knowing what their feelings were, he was better able to convey what the administration’s stance was, and how each could work together to create a positive result.
One of the leadership tools that Mr. Dooley learned was that he needed to listen; he needed to understand teachers so that he could lead them. He understood the bigger picture that to empower teachers he needed to let them be responsible for their jobs. Mr. Dooley asserted, “I also learned that you don’t have to address everything, and if you do have to address something there were thousands of different ways to address it.” Through mentorship, Mr. Dooley was able to take his positive skills and become more effective. He was able to reflect on what he was doing well and what he could improve on. By saying that there were many different ways to handle a situation, Mr. Dooley was suggesting that he could better understand the big picture of school leadership and therefore lead more effectively.

Mr. Dooley confided that he typically was an intense leader. He was accustomed to working with people that had the same strong leadership style. However, he found that sometimes he needed a different approach. He asserted:

I did not have to just get the bull by the horns and say that you should not have done this or that. In retrospect, in addressing that teacher that way put me behind with other teachers. And by the middle of the year, I had earned the respect of most of the teachers in the department.

Understanding that he needed a different approach with different types of teachers benefited his leadership and ultimately empowered more teachers to be more effective in what they were doing.

Another tool that benefited Mr. Dooley was that of reflection. Through mentorship, he was able to apply reflective practice and become more effective as a leader. Mr. Dooley postulated:

Our conversations were brief and they always focused on me, and one of the things that I like to do in a conversation is to ask others what they would do so I do not have to do all the talking. She always was a very good sport about not just letting me dominate the conversation, and I also feel that she could have said you are doing this wrong, and she didn’t do that. She always found a way to allow me to get to the point where I owned up
to where I have done something wrong, if that makes sense. She always, through the
dialogue, let me get to the point where I would end up saying I probably should have
handled that differently than I did.

Through their conversations Mr. Dooley was able to reflect on past decisions and therefore
considered ways that he could make better decisions. He understood the bigger picture.

By saying that he probably would have handled a situation differently indicates that he
reflected on how he handled a situation and understood that there were different ways that the
same situation could be handled. And this also shows that as a result of their conversations, he
felt more confident in handling future situations more effectively. He used mentorship as a type
of “map.” He knew where he used to be and he was able to see where he wanted to go.

Mentorship provided a powerful tool where Mr. Dooley was able to directly apply what he was
learning to his current situation and therefore become a better and more effective leader.

Through mentorship Mr. Dooley was able to have a higher level of efficacy regarding his
position as an assistant principal. He benefited from having guidance, direction, awareness, and
the resources needed for school leadership. Through the experience with mentorship, he was not
only able to survive his first-and-second year on the job, but he was able to make a positive
impact on the school and on the colleagues that he worked with.

**Improving Role Socialization of Assistant Principals**

Mr. Dooley felt as though formal mentorship helped make him more comfortable in his
role as a school leader. He saw that there was a transfer of knowledge through the mentorship
process that allowed him to have a better understanding of his role. He established a clear vision
of what he wanted to do and knew what he needed to do to get there.

The transfer of knowledge came naturally within the mentorship model. Mr. Dooley was
greatly advantaged by having a mentor rather than not having one. Mr. Dooley probably would
have learned these skills and knowledge on his own, but with mentorship the learning process was sped up to the point where he could use what he was learning directly in his job.

The transfer of knowledge and skills through mentorship enabled Mr. Dooley to learn rather quickly how to handle certain situations. And if there was a situation that was unclear, he had the confidence to not rush to a judgment, but rather gather information and make the best decision possible. Mr. Dooley stated the following regarding the leadership skills that he picked up from his mentor:

I benefited by having a broader perspective on how to be a better leader. I used to think that an effective leader looked a certain way and had to act in a certain way. They were assertive, they weren’t scared to jump in the mix and get their hands dirty with stuff. They weren’t scared of anybody. Like in a situation with an angry parent, they would jump in the middle and support.

Mr. Dooley learned that leaders do not always have to be domineering. He acquired a new perspective, that there were many different ways to handle a situation and sometimes a different approach was needed to get the best outcome.

Mr. Dooley’s broader perspective enabled him to feel more comfortable and more confident in his role. He asserted:

What I have learned from her? There are thousands of ways to lead and what really makes a good leader is being able to pull from a different bag of skills and apply that to the given situation, like being more adaptive. I felt like that the biggest things that I learned are that I need to be able to adapt, and the second is using your position to empower others to lead. I try to always to consider how I would speak to a teacher or a kid. What am I doing to teach them to go out and make an impact?

Mr. Dooley’s mentor did not necessarily directly tell him to learn these lessons. But it was through the mentorship process that Mr. Dooley came to these realizations. He was able to discover his role as a leader through mentorship. For Mr. Dooley, he found that he needed to be more adaptive and that he needed to empower others to do their jobs more effectively. The
Another important finding is that Mr. Dooley acquired a “bag of skills.” He understood that each situation is different and needs an appropriate response. For example, Mr. Dooley recognized that communication was an essential part of school leadership and he worked to communicate better with his colleagues. Also, Mr. Dooley learned how to organize himself more effectively. He established a filing system within his office where he could process paperwork more effectively. These skills, among others, enabled Mr. Dooley to be more effective in his role as a school leader.

Along with the transfer of knowledge and skills, Mr. Dooley’s mentor provided him with practical advice on career goals. Discussing future goals is an important aspect of mentorship as Mr. Dooley was given the tools that he needed to meet his career goals. The conversations that ensued gave Mr. Dooley a sense of purpose in his job and provided several ways for him to meet his goals. He asserted, “I want to be a principal and she walked me through how to get your name out there. Collect data, create an academic program, present at summer leadership, get your name and face out there.” He felt like that advice was very helpful and that he worked toward meeting those goals.

Furthermore, even within the first year he worked to gain experiences in a variety of different environments. Mr. Dooley wanted to not only gain experience but also become a more influential leader. For example, through the conversation with his mentor, he came up with a plan to start a lunch program for his students. He stated, “We talked about different programs to help kids.” He further explained, “We started a lunch program and that came from a conversation she and I had about how to use additional time in classes to try to help kids.” From
these initiatives he was able to have influence over students learning and also build a resume that would enable him to have the experience to move into the next level of leadership.

While building a program was important, Mr. Dooley’s mentor suggested that the program must meet some important criteria. He asserted, “One of the things that she suggested was that you implement a program that improves student achievement.” He continued, she suggested “that you collect data and that you present at the summer leadership and then you get your name out there as a person who’s moving and shaking.” In terms of role socialization, Mr. Dooley was able to understand not only what his current role was, but also the expectations of becoming an effective administrator, which was centered on improving student achievement.

Additionally, Mr. Dooley benefited from personal advice. He postulated, “The other thing that she did, I think that was really helpful, was that she really focused on me and told me how I could grow as an individual.” Formal mentorship allowed Mr. Dooley to focus on his leadership skills and what he could improve on in his work. And not only was it self-reflective, but he had the counsel and advice from an experienced school leader. The combination provided an environment that was conducive to building leadership skills and talents.

Mentorship afforded Mr. Dooley the ability to understand his role from a principal’s viewpoint. He was given the behind the curtain view of leadership. As in many professions, it is easy to get focused on ones tasks at hand, rather than understand the broader perspective. Mr. Dooley stated:

She asked if I wanted to be a principal. I said yes, at some point I would like to be a principal. She provided me with not really a map, but she would just say that these are things that you can do to get where you want to be.

Mr. Dooley became a better leader by having conversations such as this one. He became comfortable with leadership as he became aware of the bigger picture. Mentorship established a
clearer picture of what his purpose was, which for Mr. Dooley, was to be adaptive and to empower others to do their job to the best of their abilities.

Role socialization also impacted by Mr. Dooley’s ability to confide with his mentor. Without confidentiality, much of the work within mentorship would not be possible. Mr. Dooley could gain expertise from a variety of sources, but the positive aspects of mentorship were that he could trust his mentor to keep their conversations between themselves. He claimed, “I think it is important that as a first year person at a new school it is good to have a mentor at that school. It is good to have an outsider, not from that school.” The outsider allows a level of comfort as he or she is not a part of the everyday working of the school and therefore can give an unbiased opinion.

Along with the unbiased opinion, the outsider’s opinion creates an atmosphere where the mentee, in this case Mr. Dooley, can benefit the greatest. This atmosphere allowed Mr. Dooley to speak honestly about situations and not withhold information. He asserted, “You can’t confide with a colleague because they are responsible for your mistake and if you confide in a mentor your mentor can coach you through the mistake and that is a good thing.” Mr. Dooley understood his role better, by speaking with his mentor rather than a colleague. Any mistakes or personal challenges could be more easily expressed to a mentor and therefore Mr. Dooley could better learn from his mistakes.

Also, through mentorship, Mr. Dooley knew that he could call on his mentor at any time. He claimed, “I know if I needed something I could call her and she would answer her phone.” Being a phone call away provided Mr. Dooley with the confidence that if there was a situation that he needed assistance or advice, he knew where to go. Mr. Dooley suggested that this made
him feel more comfortable in his role and that he was more confident knowing that he had someone who supported him no matter what.

Role socialization is an important aspect of first-and-second year principals transitioning into experienced leaders. Mentorship supported role socialization by transferring knowledge and skills, promoting leadership succession by establishing career goals and, lastly, by providing the mentee with a trusted confidant. Through formal mentorship Mr. Dooley became more confident in the decisions he made and therefore was better able to lead his colleagues and make key instructional decisions.

**The Impacts of Formal Mentorship on Job-Embedded Learning**

Mr. Dooley found that job-embedded learning was one of the biggest benefits of formal mentorship. This study defined job-embedded learning as having these attributes: the professional development is relevant to the learner, feedback remains a part of the process, and job-embedded learning facilitates the transfer of new skills into practice (Zepeda, 2008). Based on Mr. Dooley’s perspective, he believed that these characteristics of job-embedded learning were clearly seen through his experience with mentorship. Job-embedded learning created the foundation on which Mr. Dooley was able to directly apply what he was learning through the mentorship he received “on the job.”

Formal mentorship allowed Mr. Dooley to gain valuable resources and tools that are needed to be effective as a school leader. Mr. Dooley went from feeling unprepared to feeling confident as an administrator. Mr. Dooley admitted, “My first year I was just completely not prepared for the job at all and now I am just more prepared and see how things evolved before you get in the middle of it and try to shake it up.” Although he initially felt unprepared for the job, Mr. Dooley was able to gain confidence throughout the mentorship process.
Formal mentorship provided Mr. Dooley with the resources that he needed to be successful. Even though Mr. Dooley didn’t necessarily feel prepared for the job, he was hired because he was a good leader and had the tools to be successful. Mr. Dooley postulated:

I thought I was prepared, I had gone to school, had a certificate that said I was prepared. But no one is prepared for that, for a number of reasons, so I would say, that during the year, working with my mentor, helped me as I moved into year two, just to do a better job. And more so than had I not had a mentor.

Mentorship was used as a way to provide resources so that Mr. Dooley could use his skills and talents to impact student learning. He was able to become acclimated to his role through working with an experienced mentor. As he admits, he was better prepared for his job by having a mentor, rather than not having one.

Mr. Dooley also spoke extensively about the benefits of learning on the job. Mr. Dooley asserted that one of the best resources that helped him the most was that he learned that he needed to be adaptive and that he needed to empower his colleagues. These two takeaways impacted his leadership, as he was able to immediately put them into practice. He did not read about these strategies and he did not hear them in a lecture, he learned them on the job.

Mr. Dooley also illustrated another extremely important point. He learned how to lead by actually leading. Mr. Dooley asserted:

I just think it is good to have somebody to talk to about it. But you are in leadership, you could read leadership books and talk about leadership strategies, but until you actually do it, you have no idea. And really have someone to pour into you.

The mentorship program provided a safety net of sorts where the assistant principals were able to have the support and guidance from an experience principal. And as his mentor was able to “pour” into him and give him the guidance that he needed. The individualized treatment benefited Mr. Dooley and allowed him to gain confidence in his leadership skills.
Another important resource that Mr. Dooley gained from mentorship was that he learned how to delegate. He stated, “Well I think that you learn that. The old phrase used to be delegate, you would delegate the task and the truth is that it is not really the right way. You are trying to grow other people.” The same way that Mr. Dooley’s mentor poured into him, he was able to pour himself into others. He continues, “And you grow them by giving them the opportunity. So it is just an effort that we make, having to work with others and helping them see where they want to go and helping them get there.” Formal mentorship enabled Mr. Dooley to apply the new leadership skills into practice. Mr. Dooley was better able to understand how to empower others. By seeing what his mentor did with him, he was able to turn it around with those that he worked with. The end result was that he was leading his colleagues to engage in their own professional learning experience, therefore, improving on their own skills and professional practice.

Along with building resources and tools, Mr. Dooley found that mentorship provided him with the ability to empower his colleagues by being able to understand their perspective. He was able to be more effective in his leadership as he was able to see it from their point-of-view. Mr. Dooley asserted, “So I learned from that experience that I had with her, to just back up and see if you can see the bigger picture.” By having a mentor, he was able to take her positive qualities and apply them to his leadership practice. He explained, “There is always a bigger picture than we see when we are alone.” By having a mentor, he was able to see another perspective that provided him with a better view of how to successfully lead.

Furthermore, by seeing the big picture, Mr. Dooley became a better leader. After reflecting back on his mentorship experience, Mr. Dooley explained that he was able to handle the situation with the department chair more effectively. He proclaimed:
I can tell you that the conversations about the department chair were important steps for me. I was doing two jobs. She didn’t know how to do her job, and I had a better idea of how to do her job and to do my own job. My mentor telling me that I needed to teach her how to do her job was one of the best things that helped me that year.

Mr. Dooley was able to not only learn how to empower colleagues, but he had the chance to actually put it into practice. It was a lived experience. As it turns out, job-embedded learning ended up empowering Mr. Dooley to do more than what he could have done before. The end result was that Mr. Dooley learned how to empower the department chair to do her work.

Mr. Dooley was applying the skills of mentorship and forming his own style of leadership. Mr. Dooley claimed, “Well, you have a notion in your mind going into being a formal leader, what that style is.” And as he went through formal mentorship he saw that, as a leader, he must adapt to each situation. He asserted, “You learn that your style should be different for every person and for every situation. And that you need to have multiple styles.” By seeing different perspectives, and by seeing the bigger picture, Mr. Dooley was better able to handle different situations that he came across.

Additionally, Mr. Dooley found that formal mentorship established job-embedded learning and allowed him to become more adaptive. He stated that he learned to “be familiar with different ways to approach leadership to be successful in that leadership position.”

Mr. Dooley was able to apply different leadership models to different situations. He asserted:

Well, the truth is that our leadership shouldn’t be punitive to others. And the right thing, and the just thing, is to teach people to be better. And if you don’t make each other better you will end up getting in each other’s way. And we all too often let the little things like that go instead of making them our job to help teachers be better. And I have to figure it out- whether or not it is a personality issue, a flaw, or just the overall structure of the policy or procedure.
Based on his experience with mentorship, Mr. Dooley found that his role is to help improve the quality of teaching. In doing so, he must become adaptive to each situation and problem-solve to find the best solution.

Formal mentorship established job-embedded learning through building resources and tools, by allowing Mr. Dooley empower his colleagues by understanding their perspectives, and also by becoming adaptive to the leadership position. From Mr. Dooley’s perspective, having a mentor guide him and walk him through the challenges of leadership was an essential element. Mr. Dooley postulated, “I think that it is essential. In any job, for an assistant principal who has no leadership, no formal leadership experience, I think it is essential to have a mentor.” Mr. Dooley continued, “I don’t know if I couldn’t have juggled this if it weren’t for a mentor.” From Mr. Dooley’s perspective, he benefited from formal mentorship and was given the tools that he needed to be successful in his job. Job-embedded learning is a key ingredient to the overall preparation of school leaders and helps to ensure that leadership training is transferred from one leader to another.

This chapter has provided the background, the context and the data for each individual case study. The participants’ perspectives have formed the basis for data collection. Each case has exhibited data based on the participants’ perspectives of building efficacy in assistant principals, improving role socialization in assistant principals, and implementing job-embedded learning for assistant principals. The data that emerged represented the participants’ perspectives on formal assistant principal mentorship. The following chapter will present the cross case analysis of this data and present common themes.
CHAPTER 5

CROSS CASE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts leadership. To uncover the inner workings of this study, two assistant principals were interviewed to understand their perspectives on how formal mentorship impacted their leadership ability. The research questions that guided the study are as follows:

1. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, build efficacy in assistant principals?
2. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact role socialization of assistant principals?
3. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact job-embedded professional development of assistant principals?

Each participant was interviewed twice. Their perspectives formed the basis for the findings of this study. Also, each participant was asked to read through the transcriptions as well as the individual case analysis. The member checks ensured that the analysis was reliable and accurate, while also safeguarding the findings, ensuring that the findings were aligned with what each participant intended to say.

Both of the participants worked at DuPage County Public High School. The school is situated northeast of Atlanta, and at the time of the study was ranked as one of the largest high schools in the state. Although the demographics of the school have shifted slightly in recent years, at the time of the study the majority of the students were white, totaling about 60% of the school population. DuPage County Public High School has consistently made AYP and has met other academic standards that are required by the state. Each of the participants had a role in the
supervision and evaluation of one department within the school; therefore, they were both involved with shaping the academic culture of the school. Jessica Carter was the administrator over the Social Studies Department and Tyler Dooley was the administrator over the Special Education Department. This study sought to understand their perspectives on formal assistant principal mentorship and how it impacted their leadership ability.

Each participant had positive experiences overall with formal mentorship. They both thought that the program was instrumental in forming their leadership styles and provided them with the necessary guidance and support to help them be successful in their first and second years on the job. Ms. Carter indicated that mentorship kept her “on track.” She repeatedly used the word “validating” to describe how formal mentorship confirmed the importance of the work that she was doing and gave her the confidence to excel even when her mentor was not present. Ms. Carter was reassured because her mentor was “on call.” Even though she said that she never needed to call her mentor in an emergency, just to know that someone was there just in case, provided her with confidence. Ms. Carter thought that formal mentorship helped build the foundation of her leadership strategies.

Mr. Dooley also saw formal mentorship as being a cornerstone for his leadership ability. He thought that one of the greatest contributions formal mentoring made to his personal leadership style was that he was more aware of potentially important situations and was better able to adapt depending on the circumstances. As can be seen, both Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley reported that formal mentorship enabled them to be better leaders and provided the guidance and support that they needed for their first and second years on the job.

This chapter details the perspectives of the two participants on formal assistant principal mentorship. The three aspects of formal mentorship that were discussed included how formal
mentorship built efficacy, supported role socialization, and provided job-embedded learning. The similarities and the differences of each of the participant’s perspectives were compared and the commonalities were analyzed. The researcher used interpretive analytical processes to determine when the data reached saturation.

**Perspectives on Building Efficacy in Assistant Principals**

Within this study, efficacy was defined as the process in which assistant principals become effective in their role as a school leader and are able “to perform a task and achieve a goal” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Formal mentorship was able to accomplish both of these criteria as the participants were able to perform more effectively in their assistant principal role while carrying out the policies and procedures of their school and their district. Based on the perspectives of the two participants, four major themes emerged as related to building efficacy in assistant principals through formal mentorship. They were:

1. Assistant principals were able to apply instinctual habits based on good leadership practice.
2. Assistant principals were able to establish a network of communication that provided support and structure.
3. Assistant principals were given advice and guidance from their mentors that reinforced their leadership development.
4. Assistant principals gained confidence as an administrator through the formal mentorship process.

For both Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley, building efficacy was an important benefit of having a mentor and going through the formal mentorship program.
One of the first ways that formal mentorship established efficacy within each of the participants was that the leadership qualities of their mentors became a part of their own leadership practice. The leadership skills and knowledge became a habit; they became instinctual. Ms. Carter pointed to this as she suggested that the leadership qualities became “second nature.” Mr. Dooley illustrated this as he used the word “voice” to describe how he was able to hear and apply his mentor’s skills and knowledge to his job. In each of these cases, efficacy was established as they both began to instinctually exhibit these positive and enduring leadership qualities.

The process of making the skills and knowledge of leadership become instinctual forms the essence of mentorship. Ms. Carter illustrated this by claiming:

To me it was more that we were able to elaborate with what was going on at school. Things that I was dealing with. Like someone was there listening and they enforced good practice. And to say those are things that are happening at every school and are not just unique to you. You know as a principal or formal principal they were used to it, they dealt with it. You know in a different way or different manner, but it was reinforcing to know that they dealt with these situations and could reinforce the way that you were handling the situations that you were going through.

For Ms. Carter, mentorship enforced “good practice” and allowed her to become accustomed to applying good leadership skills to her job. Along with the knowledge becoming more instinctual, Ms. Carter was able to take the past experiences of her mentor and apply them to her current situation. She used the word “reinforce” to describe how she was continually learning how to apply her mentor’s leadership strategies.

Mr. Dooley had a similar experience. He was able to instinctually form leadership habits through having a mentor. Mr. Dooley revealed this by suggesting that every school leader should have a mentor. He saw that these habits are formed through the ability to “bounce” off ideas and be able to have someone else there who could listen. Also, Mr. Dooley saw that the
leadership characteristics become instinctual as each school leader has “a ton of weight” and responsibility on them. By saying this, Mr. Dooley understood that he was making important decisions and that he needed and wanted guidance from a mentor so that he could have the knowledge and skills that his mentor had when she was working in schools.

Another factor that improved the participants’ efficacy was the way in which formal mentorship established a network between the participants and other school leaders, including their mentors. Both Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley, saw that by establishing a network of leaders, they were able to be more effective in their jobs. They were not isolated and left to themselves. Instead they were given the license to ask for help and guidance when they needed it. The ability to “build relationships” became a very important aspect for Ms. Carter. For example, she was able to establish a relationship with another assistant principal from another school, which allowed her to have a resource and a friend who she could call on. Mr. Dooley was also able to benefit from the network established from formal mentorship. He was able to build relationships throughout the county, which helped establish a group of leaders that he could refer to if needed. Also, Mr. Dooley articulated the desire to eventually become a principal. Through mentorship, he was better able to establish connections that he may call on one day.

By creating a network, Ms. Carter was able to feel effective. She was a part of something that was bigger than herself. She knew that there was a community of other school leaders who were dealing with some of the same types of problems that she was and that she could call on them for help at any time. She affirmed, “You knew that somebody was there who was experienced and you could call on at any time. And we had a great team and there is not one person on the team that I could not call at home.” The connections that were established not only provided help in times of need, but also created friendships at the same time. A sense of
trust was created. Ms. Carter affirmed about her mentor, “I knew that she was genuine and if I needed to call her I could.” Ms. Carter knew where to find her and even bumped into her on occasion. Ms. Carter stated, “Now when I see her at leadership meetings, she comes and talks to me. I like that and I like that we have a very supportive relationship.” Formal mentorship provided the structure for which relationships were built and established.

Mr. Dooley also benefited from the relationships established through formal mentorship. Mr. Dooley asserted, “And working with people and seeing how they do things is the biggest teacher of all.” Through mentorship, Mr. Dooley was able to establish a network of other school leaders, where he was able to learn and grow as an administrator. Mr. Dooley continued, “You can pull positives from everybody, and we work well as a team and that is part of it as well.”

More than just the mentor sessions, the interactions among other assistant principals provided a framework in which Mr. Dooley was able to become a more effective leader.

The network and connections that were established through mentorship can be seen as an unintended, but significant, consequence of the formal program. Through the perspectives of Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley, networking played an important aspect of becoming an effective leader.

Additionally, the participants built efficacy through formal mentorship as they received advice and counsel from their mentors. Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley both indicated that they benefited greatly from hearing their mentors’ opinions regarding different situations that they came across. Ms. Carter spoke about how her mentor listened and gave advice regarding a situation with a couple of teachers at school. Ms. Carter was able to talk through the situation and come to conclusions with the guidance of her mentor. Mr. Dooley also claimed that his mentor was able to provide important guidance. One example that Mr. Dooley gave was related
to a department chair who felt unable to do her job. Mr. Dooley learned how to empower the teacher by applying the advice of his mentor.

Along with being able to obtain advice, Ms. Carter spoke of the importance of compatibility. Ms. Carter stated, “I felt comfortable talking to her and if I needed it she would help me with whatever I needed.” Mr. Dooley did not feel like he was as close to his mentor as Ms. Carter was with her mentor. However, Mr. Dooley definitely benefited from their relationship. He affirmed that she was “real helpful” in teaching him. For Ms. Carter, being comfortable with her mentor was an important part of their relationship. If she was not comfortable and did not get along, Ms. Carter would have had a much more difficult time being able to take advice and counsel from her. Ms. Carter even discussed the benefits of mentorship on a personal level. She affirmed, “You know there were personal discussions as well. You know, she asked about my family, that kind of thing and also about what was going on at school.” Ms. Carter became more effective as an administrator as she had an encouraging and positive relationship with her mentor.

Building efficacy also allowed each of the participants to grow in confidence. Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley both amplified how formal mentorship increased their confidence levels. Ms. Carter stated that she felt more validated through the decisions that she was making and used the conversations with her mentor to keep her “on track.” She knew where to go for help and had the confidence to wait to find the best solutions. Mr. Dooley gained the confidence to handle a variety of situations using different methods. He felt much more confident in his second year than he did in his first and even more so in his third year. Mentorship was able to provide both participants with the experience and guidance that they needed to be successful.
Efficacy is extremely important. Through formal mentorship both of the participants were able to build effectiveness and feel like they were capable in their jobs as assistant principals. They were able to lead instinctually. They had established a network of support and guidance. They received timely and useful advice and counsel. They gained confidence in their role of assistant principal. These factors helped provide the framework that was needed to transform the two participants into effective leaders who make a difference in the way children learn.

**Perspectives on Establishing Role Socialization**

Role socialization was another important factor that allowed the assistant principals to be successful in their jobs. Becoming accustomed to their role is a critical component of the leader’s ability to meet the demands of the job. From Ms. Carter’s and Mr. Dooley’s perspectives, there were three main themes that evolved from formal mentorship that impacted their role socialization. The themes included:

1. Assistant principals felt more comfortable in their role as a school leader.
2. Assistant principals had a greater sense of awareness and a broader perspective of how to handle leadership situations.
3. Assistant principals were more prepared for the job and therefore felt more acclimated to their role.

Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley stated that through mentorship they were able to become more comfortable and competent in their role as a leader, and were therefore more likely to meet the high levels of responsibility associated with school leadership.

One of the first points that came out of the interviews with both Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley, regarding role socialization, was that they both felt more comfortable in their role. By
having an experienced mentor, each of the participants heard how an experienced leader would handle the different situations that arose as a part of school leadership. Mr. Dooley learned that he needed to be able to change his leadership style depending on who he was dealing with. He was not able to apply a one-size-fits-all mentality to leadership. He stated that he needed a “bag of skills” that he could use in a variety of situations. Ms. Carter also became more acclimated to her role. She dealt with several teachers who were not following the policies and procedures as directed by the school. Ms. Carter and her mentor discussed different ways to handle the situation and she benefited greatly from having the experience of her mentor at her side. Although some of these situations have no one right answer, both participants were able to understand how to use different perspectives to come to the best possible conclusion.

Being confident also helps build their capacity to lead. Ms. Carter asserted, “And so for me it was a real confidence builder and that is very important. You know, some of the situations that we deal with are very tricky.” Through having a mentor she gained the confidence that she needed to handle the “tricky” situations. She continued, “I feel like you can handle it and I got that kind of thing.” Mr. Dooly also built confidence through being able to confess his mistakes and learn from them. He felt like he could tell his mentor about situations and get good advice and feedback and in doing so knew that he could handle that situation better the next time. For example, Mr. Dooley told of how he felt more comfortable with having the “tough conversations” with teachers. He had an experience where he was having trouble communicating with a teacher about school policies. After having talked about it with his mentor, he felt like he could do a much better job with those types of conversations.

Also, for both Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley, their comfort level was greatly improved as their mentor listened. Ms. Carter felt like her mentor listened to the “things that I am dealing
with.” Ms. Carter also claimed that she was “being heard and being able to voice what I was doing.” As Ms. Carter grew from the advice that her mentor gave, she grew equally as her mentor listened to her. Ms. Carter was able to “walk through” the situations that she was dealing with and come to some of the conclusions on her own. Mr. Dooley also benefited from his mentor listening to him. He used the word “vent.” He felt like he could vent to his mentor and get all the frustrations out. Mr. Dooley stated that she “got me to the point of owning up.” By being able to own up to his decisions he admitted that was better able to learn from those experiences.

Along with feeling more comfortable in their roles as assistant principals, both Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley become more aware of their own leadership styles. They understood how they fitted into the overall leadership model of their school and of their district. Ms. Carter said that she felt more “confident” with the choices that she made. She learned what her strengths and weaknesses were. Mr. Dooley was also more aware of situations as he was “exposed to a lot of different stuff.” Mr. Dooley stated that through mentorship he had the “confidence of knowing” that he could be successful as an administrator. Being more aware also afforded Mr. Dooley with an understanding of how to apply practical advice. He affirmed, “We talked about different programs that we could do to help kids.” Through these discussions, he not only felt more acclimated to his role but also felt like he could more effectively impact students. As Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley became more aware of different leadership strategies they were able to apply different strategies to various situations. In this way, they were better equipped to handle the challenging situations that arise within school leadership.

Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley also adapted to their roles as school leaders as they gained a broader perspective and were able to see the bigger picture of school administration. For Ms.
Carter, understanding different perspectives allowed her to apply what she was learning in the mentorship sessions and use them in the “local school setting.” She affirmed that her main goal was to “support” teachers in an effort to teach students. Ms. Carter claimed that through mentorship, she gained a greater understanding of how to “put teachers first” – something she considered to be important. As she understood this perspective of supporting teachers and was able to apply it to her job situation, she ultimately became more satisfied and confident in her role.

For Mr. Dooley, seeing the bigger picture was a pivotal point in the mentorship process. Through their conversations, Mr. Dooley and his mentor formulated a game plan through which he was able to meet the variety of different needs within his department. The game plan did not have a one-size-fits-all mentality, but rather gave him a “broad perspective.” Mr. Dooley affirmed that through mentorship he had a great understanding of “coming up with a plan, teaching people how to do it and getting people on board.” For Mr. Dooley to understand and gain a big-picture view of how to get “buy-in” from his constituency made a difference in his ability to impact both teachers and students.

Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley became more aware of situations at school and gained a larger perspective for school leadership, which improved their role socialization. They both felt more comfortable, more confident and better able to handle difficult situations that would arise in their position of leadership. Formal mentorship effectively provided a greater sense of purpose for each of the participants and improved their role socialization.

Both becoming more comfortable and understanding leadership from a broad perspective helped influence the last theme that emerged from the data, which was preparation. Both Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley were more prepared for their jobs as they became more socialized to their
roles. Ms. Carter affirmed that the “variety of experiences prepares you.” She claimed that mentorship provided different experiences that ultimately prepared her for her job as a school leader. Through the face-to-face mentorship sessions and through the group sessions, Ms. Carter felt like she could handle any situation that was thrown her way. She knew how to address the problems that she would face in the day-to-day operations, and she knew where to go for help for any unusual situation that might come up in school. She proclaimed, “the more I went through mentorship, the more I was on the right track.” Mr. Dooley had similar feelings. Having been hired after the start of the school year, he had to play catch-up and learn his role on the job. Whereas Ms. Carter had training in the summer before her first year, Mr. Dooley began the year thinking he would be teaching. Because of being hired two weeks into the school year, Mr. Dooley naturally felt unprepared for his role initially. However, he claimed that through the help of mentorship, “I am just more prepared.”

Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley also were prepared for their jobs as their mentors gave them practical tips. These practical leadership tips allowed them to feel more at ease within their jobs. Ms. Carter’s practical advice was more leadership focused. She learned ways to build capacity within the teachers in her department. She was advised that she needed to pour into the teachers by building them up, instead of asking them to do too much and draining their ability to do their jobs. She referred to this as “How full is your bucket?,” which means that as a leader she should add to the teachers’ metaphorical buckets compared to depleting them. Mr. Dooley’s practical tips were centered on organization. He admitted that he needed to be more organized and his mentor provided some ways that he could achieve that. For example, for every discipline situation he would have the students write down an account of what happened in the incident. He created a witness form. He kept the form open on the computer in his office so that he had it
ready when he needed it. Every time a discipline situation would occur he would have the student write an account of what happened. For Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley, these practical tips prepared them for their jobs and increased their role socialization.

Role socialization has proven to be a factor in an assistant principal’s ability to lead. Through formal mentorship, assistant principals increased their role socialization by becoming more comfortable in their jobs, being able to see leadership from a broader perspective, and becoming more prepared for their leadership role. The relatively simple role of a mentor can help produce dramatic improvements in the quality of leadership in assistant principals.

**Perspectives on Job-embedded Learning**

Job-embedded learning played a central role in the formal mentorship program. This study defined job-embedded learning as consisting of taking skills and concepts learned through formal mentorship and applying them on-the-job. Job-embedded learning provides the context and framework for the power of mentorship. Without job-embedded learning, mentorship turns into a mere conversation; with job-embedded learning, mentorship is able to provide authentic and meaningful dialogue that makes a difference in the ways that assistant principals lead. There is direct application. Within the cross case analysis, there were four main themes that emerged from the participants’ perspectives related to job-embedded learning:

1. Assistant principals received timely and relevant professional development that aided them on the job.
2. Assistant principals learned on-the-job skills that could be directly applied to their current situation.
3. Assistant principals received individualized attention to their individualized situations.
4. Assistant principals were able to directly transfer the knowledge and skills established through formal mentorship. Each of the participant’s perspectives highlighted the importance of on-the-job training and proclaimed the critical role it played in their leadership development.

Formal mentorship provided timely and relevant professional development to assistant principals. Ms. Carter even uses the word “timely” to describe her mentorship experience. She affirmed that mentorship provided training for “what we might be dealing with at that time.” If there was a situation that emerged, Ms. Carter knew her mentor was available to help. Ms. Carter felt like she had her mentor’s attention “any time she needed her.” Mr. Dooley also felt that the timely nature of mentorship was extremely helpful. He even went as far as to say that every time they got together, there was some type of advice or tip that he could directly apply to his current situation. Mr. Dooley asserted that even though he had a thousand things to do, it was important to “take that time talking” through situations that arose. Both participants viewed the timeliness of mentorship as a key component to their own professional development.

The timely nature of mentorship provided an authentic and genuine experience. Ms. Carter cited numerous advantages of having “continuous meetings.” Whether it was book studies, walking through different scenarios, discussing personnel issues, discipline problems or really anything under the sun, mentorship had the potential to provide clarity and guidance at just the right time. She asserted that whether she was meeting face-to-face or in group sessions, she benefited from that professional development time. Also, as Mr. Dooley was able to vent about situations that were frustrating, his mentor was able to provide advice at that current time. Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley also suggested that the feedback was appropriately timed. Often the
situation had occurred a few days before or they were in the middle of the situation so their mentors were able to walk hand-in-hand with them through the different options.

Along with being timely, the mentorship sessions were relevant. The term just-in-time training refers to the premise that the training establishes what the assistant principals need and provides the training when they need it. In referring to just-in-time training, Ms. Carter confirmed, “I think it is powerful. They have really provided a framework to help new principals for sure.” The framework that she is referring to is that the training sessions were established throughout the year so that when they needed the training they had it. Ms. Carter claimed:

The mentors would plan the sessions based on the things that you were dealing with at that time. Like discipline and evaluation and management that you have to do. And that was very early on in the year, whereas looking at the articulation from 8th grade, and how they determine the point allocations, that was all in the spring, it was timely depending on what you were going through.

Just-in-time training became a powerful tool that enabled Ms. Carter to be prepared for what was about to happen. Mr. Dooley, on the other hand, did not have quite the support Ms. Carter had. Mr. Dooley was hired two weeks into the year and was hired one year before Ms. Carter. For some reason, he did not attend the group sessions. He admitted that he thought the group sessions would have benefited him; however, at that time, he was unaware of the sessions and for some reason was not required to attend them. Whereas Ms. Carter benefited from both the individual time with her mentor as well as group mentorship sessions, Mr. Dooley had only the individualized time with his mentor. That is to say, he also benefited from just-in-time training, but it was more on an individual level between him and his mentor and not in a group setting.

Additionally, formal mentorship provided the skills that the assistant principals needed on the job. Ms. Carter asserted, “All the conversations stemmed from what kind of leader I wanted to be.” The skills that were presented through mentorship individually met Ms. Carter’s needs.
For example, one of the conversations that she and her mentor had was how some assistant principals rushed to make decisions. Ms. Carter learned that instead of rushing to make decisions, she should wait and talk to one of her colleagues regarding the situation. She even goes as far as to say that one “might wait and talk to the kid, and to the parents, and talk about the situation as a team.” In this way, the decisions she makes will not be “rash;” they will be thought out and deliberate. She will attempt to make the best decision possible based on the situation. Mr. Dooley benefited from establishing organizational skills and practices. The organizational skills that he mentioned consisted of filing paperwork, establishing procedures for disciplinary actions, and creating a system of organization as he supervises and evaluates teachers. These skills were learned on the job and benefited each of the participants.

Furthermore, formal mentorship provided individualized professional development. Each of the participants had a different style of leadership and struggled in different areas. The individualized attention from their mentors provided a framework that could mold the professional development model to the needs of each individual. The individualized treatment enhanced the job-embedded learning as it was tailored to the current situation. Mr. Dooley received individualized attention on the topic of organization. He postulated:

I am a big picture guy, an idea guy, and she explained that you can’t fake organization, you can’t lie, you have to have a system of how you get things done, you know? And I do think that you can get better at it. Some people are naturally good at it and concerned about it. You think if you are not that you can fake it, you know, you can make things work. You can see that with people that you work with, some are organized and some are not, you know? That is just how it goes.

Through mentorship, he was able to address the issue and find solutions that helped him become more organized. Ms. Carter’s individualized situation was dealing with the teachers in her department. Ms. Carter and her mentor had conversations that dealt specifically with how to communicate with those teachers. Ms. Carter benefited from having gone through the
experience of dealing with difficult teachers and learning how to best handle that type of situation.

The first three themes of the impacts of job-embedded learning on assistant principals, which included that formal mentorship was timely and relevant, provided on-the-job-skills, and was individualized, all helped to create the final theme which was the transfer of knowledge and skills into practice. Both participants pointed to the importance of application. Ms. Carter used the word “genuine” to illustrate the nature of mentorship. She asserted that formal mentorship instituted the “application of a variety of topics.” The following is the description of the variety of topics that she referred to:

They talked about operational things too; your evaluations, your facility type, records and management, all of those kinds of things, and a lot of that was geared towards academic achievement. Also, relationships with teachers, developing teams, and the end goal being to look at your data and see improving student achievement. Most of it was things like that, but there were some nuts and bolts things too. We also discussed how to handle discipline situations, along with teacher observation. We talked about observations of teachers, what is effective and what is not effective. We talked about strong qualities of effective teachers, and what you are looking for when you go around, what are red flags that you see? That kind of thing can help us to say, this might not be an effective teacher. And then they would do role playing situations.

Ms. Carter felt prepared for the job as she was given so much through the mentorship process and was therefore able to transfer the knowledge and skills to the work that she was doing.

Mr. Dooley was also able to directly transfer what he was learning into his leadership practices. He understood the “importance of the process.” Mr. Dooley took advantage of the different resources that were available to him. One of the resources that benefited him, as well as Ms. Carter, was the practical forms and procedures that were provided through formal mentorship. These resources helped them do their job. The transfer of the knowledge and skills of school leadership provided the crucial tie that bound theory and practice. Each of the
participants had “takeaways” that they could use on the job and that benefited their leadership practices.

Job-embedded professional development creates the optimal environment for developing assistant principals for school leadership. Formal mentorship provided assistant principals with timely and relevant professional development, on the job skills, individualized attention and the ability to transfer knowledge and skills to the workplace. Through the examples of Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley, the powerful features of formal assistant principal mentorship are clearly displayed.

**Chapter Summary**

The evidence from the analysis of the collected data reflects the impact that formal mentorship had on the assistant principals who participated in this study. Data analysis showed there was often a link between each of the themes, as one theme could be seen to impact another and vice versa. The data revealed that formal assistant principal mentorship had great impact on the leadership ability of each of the participants. Although each of the participant’s perspectives portrayed the positive sides of formal mentorship, it was Tyler Dooley who mentioned that he was not always excited about his mentor sessions as he felt like he had many other pressing issues to address. After reflecting, Mr. Dooley definitely agreed that the mentorship sessions were well worth his time. He even suggested that every assistant principal, as well as principals, should have a mentor. Ms. Carter never displayed any negative perspectives on mentorship, as she benefited from most every aspect. From the cross case analysis, the themes that emerged illustrated the importance of formal assistant principal mentorship and highlighted the necessity of the program.
This chapter provided the cross case analysis which represented the emergent themes that arose from the data. The following chapter will provide an overview of the trends that have emerged from the findings of this study as well as link the findings of the study in relation to the literature. Implications for further research will also be discussed.
CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts leadership. As seen through the literature, formal mentorship impacts school leadership, and this study aims to further expand on how mentorship impacts assistant principals. Interviews of two assistant principals were used in an effort to gain more clarity and understanding on the following research questions:

1. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, build efficacy in assistant principals?

2. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact role socialization of assistant principals?

3. How does formal mentorship, as related to just-in-time training, impact job-embedded professional development of assistant principals?

The research questions formulated the parameters by which the study occurred. The questions were situated within the theoretical framework of this study and the methods of research were designed to uncover the essence behind the research questions.

This chapter includes a description of the research design and an in-depth discussion of how the literature compares to the findings of this study. Along with that, this chapter will provide a look at implications for further research and end with concluding thoughts.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative case study approach to gain a better understanding of how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts leadership. Interviews were used to uncover the
perspectives of two assistant principals. Their perspectives provided the baseline data on which the findings were situated.

The researcher used the qualitative approach to examine the perspectives of two assistant principals on their mentorship experiences. Roulston (2010) confirmed that researchers want to use a representative sample of data to illustrate how an event impacts the larger constituency. Within this study, the two participants’ perspectives were used as the sample, and as the researcher used the case study approach, trends were identified. Although the case study findings should not be overgeneralized, the trends that emerged illustrate important aspects of leadership development. It is through the qualitative approach that significant aspects of formal mentorship could be brought to light. As Patton (1986) confirmed, qualitative methods help “capture what people say in their own words” (p. 22). The data collection therefore represents the perspectives of the participants and forms the foundation for data analysis.

The constant comparative method of analysis was used to formulate commonalities among the interview data. Through the use of the individual case study, initial data were analyzed and presented in Chapter 4 and the cross case analysis was completed in Chapter 5. The commonalities and emergent themes were developed into the findings. Trends became apparent throughout data collection, throughout the analysis, and throughout the research process.

The constant comparative method provided a tool that allowed the researcher to develop themes that emerged from the individual cases. As the categories were beginning to form, the data were compared and evaluated as it related to the overall research questions. The constant analytical approach safeguarded the data so that it would not only be accurate but also would
validate to the overall research design. Each of the participants’ perspectives was analyzed using the constant comparative method, and through the cross-case analysis trends began to emerge.

The guiding theoretical framework which shaped the researcher’s analysis and interpretation of the data was centered on symbolic interactionism. According to Blumer (1969), there are three premises that guide symbolic interactionism. They are as follows: human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them, the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interactions that one has with one’s fellows, and these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969). Actions then are determined by meaning and are ultimately manipulated by social interactions. Therefore, the activities and interactions create the meaning and formulate the backdrop on which the in-depth analysis takes place (Hammersley, 2010).

Within this study, applying symbolic interactionism allowed the researcher to examine how the different interactions between the participants and their mentors helped to form their perspectives of the formal mentorship program. The trends that became apparent were related to a past experience that the assistant principal had and reflections with their mentor on how they could have handled it better, a current situation that the assistant principal was dealing with, or a hypothetical future situation that the assistant principals could be prepared for. All three of these encounters were noted by the participants as being helpful to their ability to handle situations. Mr. Dooley repeatedly indicated that he was better off with a mentor than without a mentor. Ms. Carter used the word “validated” to describe her desire to make sure that she was on the “right track.” Through the perspectives of the assistant principals, it was clearly articulated that formal mentorship positively impacted their leadership ability.
Each of the participants’ perspectives added to the overall conversation regarding the impacts of formal mentorship on assistant principals. The interactions that the assistant principals had with their mentors created an experience that not only shaped their beliefs regarding school leadership, but also shaped their leadership practices. Based on their experiences, four trends emerged from the data that help illustrate the impacts of formal mentorship on assistant principals.

**Discussion**

There are four trends that emerged from the cross-case analysis. The following section relates the findings of this study to the current body of literature. The four trends are discussed based on the participants’ views and experiences, which are highlighted in this section.

**Trend 1**: *Formal mentorship prepared assistant principals for school administration as they became more effective, having a greater sense of efficacy, for their jobs.*

Each of the participants clearly articulated the important role that the formal mentorship program had on their preparation and their sense of efficacy. Mr. Carter often referred to the benefits of formal mentorship in that she was provided with the resources to do her job well. She felt more than adequately prepared for the work that she was doing. Mr. Dooley also stressed the importance of formal mentorship as he confirmed that he was more prepared with mentorship than he was without it. He affirmed that he had the “confidence of knowing.” He knew that he had a resource, in that his mentor was there to help him and guide him through the difficult situations of school leadership.

According to Ms. Carter, formal mentorship provided her with a variety of tools. She gained files of documents that she could use for an array of different situations, gained practical tips on how to handle discipline situations, and was provided with practical tips of how to handle
difficult teachers. Along with practical tips, Ms. Carter confirmed that she also benefited from the theoretical conversations that she and her mentor had. Ms. Carter discussed a few different books which she and her mentor read together that provided good insight on different leadership strategies. The current literature on leadership illustrates that formal mentorship can provide school leaders with the tools that they need to be prepared (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Ehrich et al., 2004; Grogan & Crow, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2010; Peterson et al., 1987).

By having a heightened sense of what was expected of them, each of the participants was able to be more effective and felt like they were making a greater impact on their schools. Mr. Dooley said that he needed more “directives” and that he benefited from his mentor’s advice. He put the advice into practice and was able to handle situations much better than he would have without it. Also, Mr. Dooley asserted that he was able to communicate better with teachers and build rapport with them in a way that was a direct result of formal mentorship. Ms. Carter also proclaimed the successes that she experienced as a result of mentorship. She stated that mentorship was “relevant” to what she was dealing with and that she was more prepared to communicate and supervise teachers through her experiences with formal mentorship. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2006) affirmed that one of the keys to successful mentorship was allowing the mentee to “engage in authentic leadership activities” (p. 175). The experiences that were illustrated through the participants’ perspectives showed that they received a high level of professional development through their mentorship program that focused on providing authentic learning experiences.

From Ms. Carter’s and Mr. Dooley’s accounts, they were engaged in authentic and meaningful learning activities that prepared them for their jobs and increased their feeling of efficacy. It was through their formal mentorship program that they felt more prepared for their
jobs as a school leader. Along with being more prepared, they were acclimated to their role of assistant principal by having an experienced retired principal to be their mentor. Research points to the potential benefits of mentorship (Grogan & Crow, 2004; Hall, 2008) and as seen through the participants’ accounts, both Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley benefited greatly from having a mentor and going through the formal mentorship program.

**Trend 2:** *Formal mentorship provided assistant principals with the proper framework that they needed to become acclimated to their role as a school leader.*

Each of the participants greatly benefited from formal mentorship in that they became more acclimated to their roles as assistant principals. The current body of literature has highlighted the importance of role socialization for school leaders as it allows them to become acclimatized and familiarized with the responsibilities associated with leadership (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006; Daresh, 2004; Grogan & Crow, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002). Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley expressed that through their mentorship experience they were able to become more experienced and more able to handle leadership situations. Formal mentorship gave them a firsthand account of how a seasoned, experienced, and successful retired principal would perform in certain situations. The training that took place for each of the participants established tools consisting of leadership knowledge and leadership skills, which enhanced their practical ability and created greater confidence in their role and responsibility with their schools.

Additionally, formal mentorship enabled the participants to have a greater sense of awareness. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) highlighted the importance of school leaders being acclimated to their roles so that they may feel more comfortable in the decisions that they make, and therefore become more aware of how to handle different situations. Echoing the
literature, each of the participants felt that principal mentorship increased their role socialization and allowed them to feel more at ease in their jobs. Ms. Carter affirmed that “it was good to reflect on what I have been doing.” Mr. Dooley confirmed that he “was more aware” of how to handle situations. They both also benefited from their mentors listening to them and felt like they were able to talk through situations that arose. Along with talking through situations, both Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley felt that their mentors walked them through situations. This allowed them to get the advice and counsel that they needed and be able to handle some difficult situations that arose on the job.

Along with becoming more aware, the participants were transformed as leaders. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) discussed the importance of “personal transformation” and that every school leader must “relinquish the comfort and confidence” in their previous roles to take on the new role as a school leader (p. 469). Personal transformations could be clearly seen through the accounts of each participant. Mr. Dooley admitted that he came into his first year as an assistant principal feeling unprepared. However, he came out of that first year having a greater sense of comfort and confidence as a school leader through the experience that he had with his mentor. Mr. Dooley claimed, “I am just more prepared.” Mr. Dooley underwent a transformation. He became more acclimated to leadership and had the right guide in the form of his mentor.

Ms. Carter’s transformation took place with her mentor as she was guided in the right direction. For Ms. Carter, the leadership style of her mentor rubbed off on her. She stated the leadership skills became “second nature.” The power of mentorship helped transform Ms. Carter and Mr. Dooley into seasoned veterans. Hall (2008) suggested that this transformation is like building a bridge. He described it as “principals as master artisans guiding less-experienced principals, formally and intentionally, building bridges to the future of school leadership” (Hall,
As seen through the participants’ examples, formal mentorship is able to provide assistant principals with the framework that they need to acclimate to their jobs as school leaders.

**Trend 3:** *Formal mentorship gave assistant principals the knowledge and skills needed to make instinctual decisions by applying principles of job-embedded learning, or on-the-job training.*

Job-embedded training, or on-the-job training, is one of the central themes of this study. As stated by Wynne (2010), on-the-job training is defined by the following:

> Also referred to as on-the-job learning or training, job-embedded learning specifically refers to the learning which occurs during the normal course of a teacher’s [or assistant principal’s] daily work activities. Participants learn by doing while continually reflecting and sharing with other teachers and administrators with regard to continuous improvement of instructional practices. (p. 21)

Each of the participants clearly indicated that they were better able to lead in their current positions with the guidance and support of their mentors. As described by the above definition, the assistant principals were learning as they were working. They were on their “normal” schedules and were fulfilling their “normal” responsibilities. However, with the guidance and support of their mentors, they were able to continually improve their leadership strategies. Ms. Carter illustrated this as she used phrases such as “timely,” “reassuring,” “I am on the right track,” and “real life application.” She was able to take what she was learning through the formal mentorship program and directly apply the knowledge and skills to her job.

Mr. Dooley also spoke of the power of job-embedded learning. He benefited from learning two main principles; he learned that he needed to adapt to situations and that he needed to empower others. These two guiding thoughts were learned as he was dealing with situations at school, on the job. He was able to directly apply those two concepts to his leadership skills and become much more confident in what he was doing as a school leader.
Job-embedded learning created the environment in which both participants were able to learn and to grow as school leaders. The mentorship environment naturally lends itself to job-embedded learning. In fact, mentorship without job-embedded learning turns into instructing or coaching. The addition of job-embedded learning provides the mentee with the situational context in which he or she may learn from the mentor and apply the mentor’s skill to the job. Hall (2008) uses the metaphor of an apprentice working with a master to illustrate how a mentee learns from the mentor. The idea is that the mentee is working to imitate the mentor. The transfer of knowledge and skills provides the context for the learning.

For Mr. Dooley, learning the “organizational tools” to be effective in leadership transformed his ability to meet the needs of students, as he was better equipped and more prepared. Another skill that Mr. Dooley learned from his mentor was effectively communicating with teachers. Although this is an ongoing task, he was able to better understand how to lead teachers by being able to work through situations with his mentor. He gained confidence in being able to communicate with teachers and being able to empower them. Both of these tasks were learned on the job.

Ms. Carter also stressed the importance of job-embedded learning, as she was able to apply the knowledge and skills learned from formal mentorship to her job situation. Ms. Carter affirmed that she benefited from learning how to “build school climate,” how to “build relationships with teachers,” and how to “handle discipline situations” more effectively. The current body of literature also supports these claims and shows that job-embedded learning has the potential to have dramatic positive impacts for school leaders (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Darling-Hammond, & Richardson, 2009; Fiszer, 2004; Zepeda, 2008).
Job-embedded professional learning has the potential to make new skills instinctual. The participants illustrated that by being able to spontaneously apply what they were learning to their leadership practice. The transfer of knowledge and skills therefore is able to make drastic improvements in school leaders. They are able to become more effective and more successful principals as they use formal mentorship to sharpen their leadership skills.

**Trend 4:** *Formal mentorship provided assistant principals with just-in-time training that enabled them to be successful in their first and second years as a school leader.*

As an offshoot of job-embedded learning, just-in-time training provides assistant principals with on-the-job training at just the right time. Research has shown that timing the topics of training with what the leaders are going through allowed the administrators the ability to be more successful in their jobs (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Murphy et al., 1985; O'Hahoney, 2003). Ms. Carter continually reiterated how she benefited from the individual mentorship sessions as well as the group sessions, as they provided her with the resources and the skills at the time that she needed them. She explained how she received training in the mentorship sessions on how to execute a disciplinary panel, and when she had her first real panel, she was fully prepared and also knew what to expect.

For Mr. Dooley, one example of just-in-time training came as he was handling a situation with the department chair. Mr. Dooley was doing his job as assistant principal as well as doing the job of the department chair. Mr. Dooley’s mentor gave him the advice that he must find a way to empower the department chair to do her job. He affirmed that he was learning how to “empower teachers.” This advice greatly strengthened Mr. Dooley’s leadership as he became more accustomed not only to handling supervisory situations, but also to empowering teachers to do their job better and more effectively. These examples illustrate the power of just-in-time
training as both of the participants benefited from mentorship and were able to apply what they learned to the current situation that they were dealing with.

Furthermore, as the participants both received just-in-time training that benefited the current situation at school, the formal mentorship program also established a list of topics that would need to be addressed through the professional development program. Ms. Carter received this type of training from the group mentor sessions. Ms. Carter described how in the beginning of the year she received training on discipline, school climate, student achievement, and communication with teachers. The spring semester consisted of training on hiring, scheduling, staff plans, classroom data, and what makes effective teaching. Both the fall and spring semester topics corresponded to what the assistant principals would be dealing with at that time. Murphy et al. (1985) found that districts and schools with tight coordination were better able to implement their leadership development programs. This research is also supported by Ehrich et al. (2004), which highlighted the importance of having a formal mentorship program. Based on the findings of the current study, it can be seen that DuPage County Public School District was able to provide their school leaders with the professional development that they needed to be successful.

As Ms. Carter went through individual meetings with her mentor as well as the group mentorship, it proved to be effective in providing the professional development that she needed. Mr. Dooley only had the individual mentor. He admitted that he would have liked to have gone through the group sessions as well. Mr. Dooley shared:

That would have been helpful going into being an administrator, having done that first. I would have had a better understanding, but the way that it worked, I was hired two weeks into the school year. I was hired during preplanning but I couldn’t go until the August board meeting where I was approved. And so I was behind anyways, and so they go through organization and things of that nature and some leadership things. The training
that I was supposed to do, I never received. So I got there and I started doing discipline the next day.

Mr. Dooley, having admitted that he was behind, had to work hard to catch up. However, although he did not have the benefits of the group sessions, he did have his mentor. Through his experience, it can be seen that he benefited from formal mentorship; however, he would have been better prepared if he could have gone through the initial leadership training and participated in the group mentorship sessions.

Formal assistant principal mentorship was an extremely important aspect of the participants’ leadership development. It can be seen that by having a formal assistant principal mentorship program, each of the participants received just-in-time training. The implications also highlight the importance of having differentiation within the mentorship model, which implies that the mentees attend both one-on-one mentorship sessions as well as group mentorship sessions. The combination of both provided the best professional development by allowing the assistant principal to gain the right resources at just the right time, thus feeling better prepared.

**Implications**

The impact of formal assistant principal mentorship on school leadership has implications for future research, policymakers, school leaders, and for the professional development of school administrators. The broader implications include the important role that assistant principals play in schools. Current literature has highlighted the increasingly vital role that assistant principals play in the overall achievement of schools (Lee et al., 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). As principals hold much of the responsibility within schools, they carry out the principal’s policies and maintain an important role in the function of schools. Therefore, the participants’ perspectives within this study formulated essential material for future research.
Along with the vital role that assistant principals play in schools, another implication remains the quality of the leadership within the district. Each of the participants within this study benefited from formal mentorship as the school district had a system and a model in place. The district, over the last 10 years, has built a leadership program that has helped greatly in leadership development and leadership retention. Without this formal structure in place, the district’s assistant principal mentorship would not have been nearly as successful as what it was.

This study was limited to the perspectives of two assistant principals. The study took place in one district in the northeast suburbs of Atlanta. The educational environment in this one district allowed for the development of school leaders. However, there are many different types of districts and the impacts of the formal assistant principal mentorship program may not have the same results in different counties or school districts. However, within the current educational climate of the United States, this study supports that as school leaders assume more responsibility for student academic achievement, they must be prepared to meet the demands of their job.

**Implications for future research**

Although much can be learned from the findings of this study, the case study approach highlighted the perspectives of only two participants and was conducted at the school where they worked. The implications for further research are centered on applying different research methods and a broader participant clientele to uncover further the impacts of formal mentorship on assistant principals. The term “taking to scale,” refers to a situation like this. The findings in this study showed that formal mentorship better equips assistant principals for their jobs. If formal mentorship would be implemented nationwide, would it yield the same results?
Both participants benefited from formal mentorship; however Ms. Carter received individual mentorship as well as group mentorship. Mr. Dooley only received individual mentorship. More research is needed on the impacts of group mentorship and its benefits to assistant principals. Ms. Carter spoke very highly of her group mentorship experience. While her mentor was still a part of the group sessions, the difference was that there were other school leaders present who were in the same situation that she was in. She asserted:

So I would say a combination of that- an individual and a group setting to provide support because the individual sessions are powerful for you to reflect personally and not feel pressure, whereas the group setting provides the collaborative support and the relationships from others and you know, the network that is created. It provides something totally different, you get the reflective piece. You know you get that reflective piece with your mentor, one on one.

Whereas the individual sessions provided guidance and support, the group mentorship sessions turned into a focus group, where each of the mentees could bounce ideas off each other. Further research would be needed to discover the impacts of individual versus group mentorship, as compared to studying them all-inclusively as was the case in this study. The research by Mertz (2004) presented the case for group mentorship; however, the literature as a whole, did not focus on group mentorship exclusively.

At the time of this study, much of the research on formal mentorship focused on development of principals. There were no studies found that examined the impacts of formal assistant principal mentorship. Hopefully the findings of this study will help guide and facilitate further research on the leadership development of assistant principals and therefore build a more effective system of professional development for school leaders.

**Implications for policymakers**

Based on the findings from this case study, one of the implications for policymakers is that formal assistant principal mentorship works. Across the country, great pressures are being
placed on school leaders to improve education. Federal, state, and local policies are continually tightening the accountability of principals and assistant principals for improved academic achievement. Ms. Carter illustrated how formal mentorship impacted her leadership by suggesting that through mentorship she was able to build a “foundation.” By this she implied that she felt more “comfortable,” was able to apply “research based strategies” to her job, develop a team, and “pull” from a variety of resources. Based on Ms. Carter’s account of her experiences, the whole system of formal mentorship added to her professional growth, and she was able to establish her own leadership style through working alongside her mentor and in the group sessions.

Mr. Dooley clearly demonstrated the power of mentorship as he claimed that he was not prepared for the job and through mentorship, along with his hard work and dedication, he was able to perform exceptionally well in his first and second year of being a school administrator. Therefore, based on the findings of this case study, the implications for policymakers are that districts should implement a formal mentorship program for their assistant principals, and the case could be made for formal principal mentorship as well.

**Implications for school leaders**

Hall (2008) established a vision for “professionalization” among school administrators; he proclaimed that principals can be seen as “master artisans” who guide “less-experienced principals, formally and intentionally, building bridges to the future of school leadership” (p. 452, emphasis in the original). The implications set forth for school leaders emerge from within the imagery of a master artisan versus an apprentice. The apprentice, no matter how talented, will benefit greatly from the guidance and support of the master artisan. In the same way, an assistant principal will benefit from the guidance and support of an experienced school leader.
From the perspective of Mr. Dooley, he always felt like he had “other things” to do and did not want to take the time to meet with his mentor. But he admitted that he always benefited from their conversations and even said that he always had something to “take away” that would directly apply to his job. As he looked back on his mentorship experience, he saw the advantages of having a mentor and said that he would recommend for all assistant principals, and even principals, to partake in a formal mentorship program. Ms. Carter echoed the importance of formal mentorship as she saw a link between the theoretical and the practical aspects of leadership. From her own experiences, she witnessed the power of mentorship as she transitioned into her leadership role. Through formal mentorship, school leaders are able to become more like the *master artisans*, having the knowledge and skills to more effectively guide, direct, and achieve their goals.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The purpose of this study was to examine how formal assistant principal mentorship impacts leadership. Each of the participants was from the same school and took part in the formal assistant principal mentorship program that was offered by their district. Their perspectives were investigated to further understand the impacts of formal mentorship on the development of their leadership abilities. This study was unique in that there were no other studies focused on the leadership development of assistant principals through the use of a formal mentorship program. The trends and themes discovered through this study are relevant to the current educational climate and have important implications for the impacts of a formal mentorship program on school leadership.

A review of the literature paints a favorable picture of mentorship (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006; Daresh, 2007; Ehrich et al., 2004; Hall, 2008; Harris et al., 2004). The evidence
suggested that assistant principals need mentors to be able to handle the variety of challenges that school leaders face. Grogan and Crow (2004) asserted that mentorship is like old wine being poured into new wine bottles. The essence of leadership will be transmitted from the mentor to the mentee. Through each of the participant’s views, evidence for this approach remains consistent as they each took aspects of their mentor’s advice and have applied it to their own leadership styles and practices.

Each of the participants perspectives represent the potential that formal mentorship can have on school leaders. Ms. Carter proclaimed that “they have really provided us with a framework to help new principals.” She believed that she gained practical skills and resources that she could use on the job and that she also acquired theoretical knowledge of leadership that increased her capacity to lead. Mr. Dooley concluded that the two biggest takeaways for him were that he learned how to “adapt” to situations and how to “empower others.” The stories of these two participants highlight the positive results that can emerge from implementing a formal assistant principal mentorship program.

Three negatives to mentorship mentioned in the literature, which were limited time, lack of professionalism from the mentor, and personality mismatches (Riley, 2009), never seemed to be an issue for either of the participants. The planning and organization of the district played a large role in ensuring that the formal mentorship program was effectively structured and executed. Further research into the district’s role in constructing the formal program would benefit the overall conversation regarding formal mentorship. Based on the perspectives of the two participants, the district collaborated well with the mentors and was effective in their organization and implementation of the formal mentorship program.
Properly preparing school leaders has been a recurring issue within education. Formal assistant principal mentorship provides one answer and remains one solution for the development of effective school leaders. Through the perspectives of two participants, it could be clearly seen that formal assistant principal mentorship shaped the ways in which they led and gave them the knowledge and skills to better meet the demands of their school environment. Formal assistant principal mentorship stands out as a powerful way to properly train and develop school leaders for the critical work that they do in schools.
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APPENDIX A

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

I, _________________________________, agree to participate in a research study titled "IMPACTS OF FORMAL ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL MENTORSHIP ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP" conducted by Timothy D. Bollier (404-482-1290) from the Department of Education Administration and Policy Department at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Sally J. Zepeda (706-542-0408) Education Administration and Policy Department, University of Georgia. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the identifiable information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to examine the impact of formal assistant principal mentorship on assistant principals as related to just-in-time training. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things.

1) Participate in two 60 minute interview about my role as an assistant principal and its impact on principal mentorship. This interview will be digitally audio-recorded, and a written transcript, identifying me by a pseudonym, of this interview will be produced for data analysis.

2) OPTIONAL: TAKE PART IN READING THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS TO CHECK FOR INACCURACIES. THE TRANSCRIPTS WILL BE EMAILED BY THE RESEARCHER AND EACH PARTICIPANT WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO DELETE OR CHANCE ANY QUOTATION. Since internet communications are insecure, I can also ask to have the researcher meet face-to-face to review the transcripts. THERE WILL BE TWO MEMBER CHECKS, ONE FOLLOWING THE FIRST ROUND OF INTERVIEWS AND THE SECOND FOLLOWING THE SECOND ROUND OF INTERVIEWS. THE RESEARCHER WILL KEEP BI-WEEKLY CONTACT WITH THE PARTICIPANT TO ENSURE ACCURACY AND VALIDITY OF THE INTERVIEW DATA.

3) Optional: Review the researcher’s final work on completion of the study and suggest revisions.

The benefits for me are that I will have an opportunity to communicate the impacts of formal assistant principal mentorship on assistant principals and/or to reflect on my own role as an assistant principal. The researcher also hopes to learn more about the role of assistant principal and to provide guidance to school and district administrators on maximizing the positive impact of mentorship on assistant principals.

No risk or discomfort is expected as a result of my participation in this study. I UNDERSTAND THAT MY EMPLOYMENT STATUS WILL NOT BE AFFECTED BY PARTICIPATING IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. I MAY SKIP QUESTIONS THAT I do not want to answer, AND THE INFORMATION GATHERED WILL NOT BE INCLUDED IN ANY EMPLOYEE RECORDS.

No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others. I will be assigned a pseudonym and this pseudonym will be used on all research records. Identifiers will be removed from the data immediately following interviews or observations or on receipt on documents. Identifiers will be blacked out or cut off of all written correspondence and replaced with pseudonyms. Audio files and transcripts will be stored in the researcher’s office and will be accessible only to Mr. Bollier. Audio files will not be publicly disseminated in any way and will be destroyed after one year. Excerpts of interview transcripts may be used in the final reporting of the research project, but these excerpts will not be individually identifiable.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Name of Researcher: _________________  Signature: ___________________  Date:______

Telephone: ___________________  Email: ___________________

Name of Participant: _________________  Signature: ___________________  Date:______

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu