

Does Mentoring Matter?

Rethinking Support for New Primary School Principals in BARBADOS, WEST INDIES

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ABSTRACT

In more and more systems of accountability new principals, in particular, have felt unprepared for leadership. This study examines a localized educational system which has no formal preparation program for new or prospective principals. These new principals were overwhelmed when faced with increased levels of responsibility and were retiring prematurely. In this mixed-methods descriptive study, the researcher examined the literature to determine the practicality of mentoring in the localized context in the absence of a formal preparation program and investigated the statistical significance of the perceptions and needs of these principals in preparation for the implementation of a formal preparation program for new principals. The statistically significant results of the quantitative aspect of this study revealed that it was not by chance that new principals perceive that mentoring and the acquisition of self-awareness skills are critical to their performance and must play a significant role in any leadership preparation program. These perceptions were substantiated in the qualitative interviews with surprising gender-related revelations.

Introduction: The Need for Principal Preparation in the Barbadian Educational Context

The Barbadian educational system has no formal preparation program for new principals. Rather, acting principals are chosen based on their positions of seniority or years of experience within the school system as teachers or senior teachers, on their attainment of graduate university degrees of some relevance to education, or their favorable performance reports as senior teachers. New principals are thus placed in sink-or-swim situations or left to trial-and-error methods to grow into the role while seeking to achieve student progress and school improvement. And while obtaining a technical and managerial certificate in educational management and administration from a teachers' college or university is an asset, it is no guarantee of either a position or of being successful on the job as a new principal.

At the time of the study, the primary researcher was the Senior Education Officer with responsibility for the management of all K-12 or primary schools on the island. This included the advisement for and spearheading of the recruitment, deployment and professional training of principals and the supervision of education officers who also advised principals. In this role, it became quickly clear that the current selection process—senior teachers interviewed by a selection panel of education officials, and if successful, receiving tenure for the rest of their careers—was fundamentally inadequate to the successful preparation of new principals. New principals were overwhelmed when faced with increased levels of responsibility and were retiring prematurely. Such premature retirements, in turn, prevent adequate transference of knowledge or skills, and lead to a further deterioration in the stability of school leadership on the island.

This situation is, in fact, but a more extreme situation of other countries' dilemmas in adequately preparing new principals. Conrad & Brown (2003) described the organizational model of the Ministry of Education in Trinidad and Tobago as one based on traditionalist bureaucracy and used the words of Helgesen (1990) to explain that this Caribbean model of obtaining school leaders has colonial roots of underlying hierarchical order with an emphasis on rank and division. They posit that such a model of choosing and preparing school leaders is a handicap to any school effectiveness and educational reform.

Borden (2002) describes the efforts of some Caribbean countries to meet the demands for better-prepared school leaders. During her research, she reported on training programs which range from one to two-day workshops to certificate programs. Regrettably, these programs were not sustained programs but were designed to meet specific objectives for education reform projects. Borden (2002) agrees that while such training programs are an important step in the process of developing leadership skills for principals, they also are hindered by common problems. These problems include: the amount of time spent in training does not allow principals to understand and implement the material; the curriculum and instructional materials are too theoretical; there is no supervised mentorship or coaching as principals seek to implement new knowledge. Principals return to their schools and continue their work in isolation. Therefore, this researcher agrees with Borden (2002) who notes that the preparation of principals must be an integral, long-term commitment and not an add-on which is designed to meet the specific needs of a particular education reform project and then terminated when all funds have expired.

In Barbados, the *Daily Nation* newspaper of August 30, 2007, contained a headline that caught the attention of many readers: “*Head-ing Out, Principals’ Association Worried About the Number of School Principals Calling it a Day*” (p. 3). The President of the Barbados Association of Public Primary School Principals lamented the fact that 20% of primary school principals in Barbados were retiring prematurely at age 55 before they reached the original retirement age of 60 or the new optional age of 65. Between September 2006 and August 2007, 19 of the 80 primary school principals retired from the service. The president of the principals’ association indicated this development was of great concern because these principals were leaving the system with great haste without transferring their wealth of knowledge and skills to their successors. He noted that it was unfortunate that there were no opportunities for these fleeing principals to mentor senior teachers who were likely to assume the responsibilities of principals as a result of their seniority.

The principals’ association president pointed out that, although some of these senior teachers were trained in the theoretical aspects of leadership and management at the teachers’ college, they had not obtained adequate practical experience because of the absence of mentoring opportunities. As the article stated, in such instances, they were transferred immediately from being classroom practitioners to being principals in charge of entire schools. His public cry was for an aggressive mentoring program for principals, particularly new principals, lest they too flee from the profession.

In addition to this, statistics from the Ministry of Education revealed that of the 71 schools that prepare primary school students to write the national entrance examination for the secondary schools, 49 were deemed low- performing, ranked at unacceptable

levels in language arts and mathematics. As at September 2007, novice principals had been assigned to 15 (31%) of these low-performing schools, schools in dire need of critical care from experienced principals who have not only high-quality managerial and pedagogical skills and knowledge with a sound understanding of the curriculum and instruction needed for increasing student achievement but also the social and self-awareness skills needed to lead the process. In these 15 low-performing schools were approximately 9, 000 students and 600 staff being led by novice principals, possibly through the utilization of trial-and-error methods (Barbados Education, 2008). The lack of mentoring and adequate networking thus imperiled the educational opportunities of those schools already most disadvantaged.

Purpose of the Study

The general consensus in the educational literature related to this study was the importance of preparing new principals if schools were expected to be dynamic learning organizations. Based on this knowledge, principals and administrative leaders in Barbados have been making a passionate plea for the implementation of a mentoring program to fill the void in principal preparation. They believe that mentoring may be a viable, interim method of satisfying the needs of the system while logistics and finances for a more comprehensive, long-term preparation program are developed.

It was against this background (the plethora of literature which addressed the significance of principal preparation, and the void in the Barbadian education system) that this researcher sought to test this belief empirically. The researcher examined the literature to determine the benefits of such a program for new principals and its

practicality to the Barbadian setting and investigated the statistical significance that presented the real needs and perceptions of new principals regarding mentoring as an option to meet their needs.

The primary purposes of this study were firstly to explore the literature as it relates to the essential elements of principal preparation to provide the scholarly background to the research. Secondly, this study was aimed at determining the critical skills new principals perceive as important. Thirdly, the researcher sought to establish whether new principals perceived networking and mentoring as critical to their success. The final objective of this study was to identify the essential elements or components that should constitute a Barbadian mentoring program if mentoring was found to be critical. It was parsimonious for this to be done through a descriptive mixed-methods study in which new principals could share their perceptions and experiences through a quantitative critical skills survey and qualitative interviews.

Role of the Researcher

For the past 13 years, the researcher has been employed by the Ministry of Education after having been assigned as a teacher for approximately 18 years. Currently, she has been serving as a senior education officer with direct responsibility for the department responsible for monitoring and ensuring the quality of the instructional leadership in schools. The education officers under her supervision must visit all schools to monitor, advise, and report on leadership and instructional practices. The researcher must also visit the schools to interact with the principals and teachers, offering advice and facilitating professional development sessions. Additionally, in her role, she has been

able to use reported information and statistics to inform policy decisions in the education system. Over the years, because of her role as an educational practitioner, she has observed and listened to new principals as they often struggle to perform their many tasks while they are “learning the ropes.”

However, in her new role as researcher, she has been able to listen critically and objectively to these new principals. Additionally, because of this new role, she has been able to use scholarly research and statistical analyses to explore and report on the phenomenon. Her intention has been for stakeholders in education to become more aware of the story of new principals in Barbados and to be informed by the research as they rethink the support necessary for new principals in Barbados.

It was against this background that she sought to conduct this research study with unequivocal support from the principals and their association. They welcomed the opportunity to engage freely in such an activity intended to inform policy makers of their experiences. They also recognized the need to produce frank, honest, authentic information if the results of the quantitative and qualitative components of this study were to be reliable, valid, and trustworthy.

The General Setting of the Study

The context of this study was Barbados, a Caribbean island, which is the easternmost island of the Lesser Antilles. This island extends 34 kilometers along a north-south axis and has a breadth of 23 kilometers, giving it a total land area of 430 square kilometers, which is about the size of San Antonio, Texas, or half the size of New York City.

Barbados has one of the oldest and most advanced education systems in the eastern Caribbean and has also been promoted internationally as a model of excellence. Education in Barbados has always been associated with success and advancement. Its investment in human resources has resulted in a 98% literacy rate, which exceeds the rates of Caribbean countries and places it among the highest in the world. Indeed, according to the Human Development Index given in the 2007-2008 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme, which measures achievements in terms of educational achievements (among other areas), Barbados was listed as the number one developing country in the world, with a global ranking of 31 out of 177 nations surveyed (Barbados Education, 2008,1).

Theoretical Framework

Given the critical importance of mentoring in the literature base, the study used a Vygotskian and sociocultural perspective on learning to focus on the issue that human activities are rooted in social participation and learned with the assistance of others, not in isolation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wertsch, 1991). The coaching and educating role of the mentor was related to the Brunerian construct of scaffolding. According to this theory, people can do with assistance what they cannot do without assistance, working and learning collaboratively in what is referred to by Vygotsky as zones of proximal development (Tharp & Gallimore; Vygotsky, 1978). Similarly, to take into account the informal nature of current mentoring practices in Barbados, the research adopted Bandura's (1997) model of observational learning to incorporate the idea that such learning may or may not involve imitation. For example, if a new principal observed a veteran principal engaging in a practice that was

not acceptable, what that principal learned was information to be processed cognitively but not imitated.

The research study used these frameworks to guide survey and interview questions as well as in the analysis of emergent themes in the transcript analysis. The research study was also guided through an advocacy/participatory framework in which the researcher begins with issues to be changed as their focal point and proceeds collaboratively with a united voice for reform and change (Creswell, 2003). Given the researcher's "insider" status, such a framework offered both boundaries for avoidance of ethical conflicts-of-interest and power dynamics as well as a constructive framework for future change in the Barbadian system of principal preparation.

Empirical Perspectives

Successful schools have become complex institutions requiring a high level of performance from every member of that institution; but the ultimate success critically must begin with the school principal, who has daily responsibility for ensuring that all students' needs are met. Principals, based upon their leadership skills, have become the determining factor in whether schools become dynamic learning organizations or failed enterprises.

Many research studies have shown that having an effective school leader is critical to the improvement of student achievement (Fullan, 2002; Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Yukl, 2006). Research done on school leadership revealed that one standard deviation of improvement in the leadership of the school was correlated with a 10% difference in student achievement on a norm-referenced standardized test (Waters & Grubb, 2004). Given the extreme importance being placed on the school principal and the

need to be effective, policy makers and significant education administrators must not leave the development of new principals to happenstance, good character, pleasant personality, or divine intervention. If leadership is to be the bridge that leads to school achievement, emphasis must be placed on the preparation of principals for their jobs (Hallinger & Hart, 1996).

Methodology

This mixed-methods study was based on an advocacy/participatory framework for design and was expected to be transformative in nature. The researcher intended that the study be nonexperimental in nature. A nonexperimental study is one that does not include true experiments with the assignment of subjects to treatment conditions (Creswell, 2003). The study was also descriptive in design because the researcher sought to provide descriptions of the variables to answer the research questions and to tell a story through the utilization of words, charts, and tables.

Population

The population of this study was composed of all the new school principals throughout the primary school system in Barbados who met the stipulated criteria. They were identified based on the number of years they were assigned as principal. Also, they had to be assigned at the primary level. Only those who had been assigned for 1 to 3 years were eligible. With this range, views from very new principals of 1 year as well as from those with experience of up to 3 years could be shared. The Ministry of Education's database of principals was the main source used to identify eligible principals. Twenty principals (25% of the total primary school principal population) qualified for

participation in this study. All 20 eligible principals, 13 females and 7 males, were eager to participate.

Data Collection Procedures

The research procedure was based on a sequential transformative strategy. This strategy has two distinct data collection phases; either the quantitative or qualitative phase may be used first, with priority being given to either phase or to both equally, if adequate resources are available (Creswell, 2003). By using two phases, the researcher could present the perceptions and experiences of the participants and better understand the phenomenon being studied so that the stories of these new principals could be recorded formally. The data collection process started in December , 2007 and concluded in May 2008 after which interview data were coded , emergent themes recorded , and the information from the qualitative and quantitative phases were integrated and analyzed.

The researcher utilized a nonrandom purposive sample of new principals assigned to lead primary schools for 1 to 3 years. The selection of the sample was purposive because it excluded members of the system who did not contribute to the specific purpose of the study.

Findings

Summary of Qualitative Data

The qualitative phase revealed evidence that new principals perceived the acquisition of self-awareness skills as critical to their performance, although content in the current certificate course was concentrated heavily on technical and managerial skills. Although both males and females valued the benefits of networking for professional

growth, males preferred a blend of networking and a certificate program. When questioned, males were less expressive about the extent to which they were impacted because of their lack of preparation. Females expressed their feelings with greater ease. Nonetheless, valuable information relative to the possible components of a program for the training and preparation of new principals in Barbados was recorded for future use. There were three emergent threads that were found in each respondent's conversation. Firstly, they all agreed that preparation was important enough for training to start when persons were assigned as senior teachers. Senior teachers should be viewed as principals-in-waiting and prepared accordingly. Secondly, they agreed that formal mentoring was essential in the absence of a preparation program. However, it must be emphasized that those persons developing a Barbadian mentoring program should not borrow too heavily, if at all, from American and European models. Thirdly, principals should be an integral part of whatever was being planned for their preparation. With regard to the customization of a Barbadian mentoring program, components should include; problem-focused learning opportunities; a handbook for leaders; clearly defined roles; commitment from institutions and policy makers; training for stakeholders; exchange visits and performance evaluation.

Summary of Quantitative Data

Demographic data analysis. The first seven survey items were intended to determine the demographic composition of the respondents. The first item dealt with gender. Of the 20 new principals, 7 (35%) were male and 13 (65%) were female. This was representative of the small and diminishing representation of male principals in the Barbadian education system. Only 21 male primary school principals were assigned in

the entire Barbadian education system during this period. This small number of male role models or mentors in education could have an impact on the distribution of mentors in a mentorship program.

Item 2 required the respondents to indicate age range. The responses revealed that all of the newly assigned principals were in the age range of 50-59, indicating that all of these newly assigned principals had either reached or were close to the retirement age of 55 or 60 yet they were assuming new roles. Although these data could indicate serious implications concerning the amount of effort and energy needed to take on the challenge of new principalships at such advanced stages of their careers, a cross tabulation with the variables of age and passion for making a difference revealed statistically significant evidence that these graying principals had not lost their passion for wanting to make a difference in the lives of their students.

Item 3 asked new principals to indicate their years of experience in the area of education. All 7 of the male principals and 11 of the female principals indicated that they had accumulated 30-39 years in education. One female principal had 20-29 years in education; another female principal had 40+ years. This substantiated the fact that these new principals were at or near retirement and could easily exercise their option to retire if they became overwhelmed or frustrated in their new jobs. All 7 of the male principals could retire if they chose that option. After working for 33-1/3 years in education in Barbados, one is eligible for retirement.

For Item 4, respondents indicated the number of years they had served as senior teachers. The data showed that the majority of new principals had served 6-10 years as senior teachers or principals-in-waiting. During this period, they worked as regular

classroom teachers while assisting their principals with some administrative duties. At this point in their careers, they had learned many of their leadership skills from observing their principals. However, there was often no guarantee that the leadership and managerial traits learned were beneficial. Additionally, during this period of being senior teachers, a selected few were chosen to take the Certificate Course in Educational Management and Administration.

The data revealed that 3 males and 8 females worked 6-10 years in senior positions before becoming principals, 2 males worked 11-15 years, 1 male and 1 female worked over 16 years, and 1 male and 4 females worked 1-5 years before becoming principals. This disparity could indicate an absence of a standardized measure for assigning new principals. In addition, this long wait to assume the principalship could lead to feelings of frustration.

Item 5 concerned the number of years each had served as principal. Seventeen of the 20 principals (85%) were within one year of the principalship. For Item 6, respondents were required to indicate their highest level of education attained. Fourteen (70%) of the respondents had obtained bachelor's degrees, 5 (25%) had earned master's degrees, and 1 principal had obtained a Diploma in Education. They all met the required qualification status to become principals.

A cross-analysis between highest level of education and years in education revealed that 18 of the principals who had completed bachelor's and master's degrees had been assigned to the principalship after 30-39 years in education. Although 14 principals achieved the basic required qualification for the job, only 6 sought to acquire a more advanced degree in education.

Item 7 concerned achievement of the Certificate in Educational Management and Administration. Of the 20 principals, only 14 (70%) had obtained this certificate, which is the closest attempt of the education system to prepare prospective leaders for their roles. The data revealed that all 7 (100%) of the male principals completed this program, but only 6 of the 13 females did so. Further investigation should be considered to determine whether males prefer to be prepared for their role through attendance at formal program and whether females prefer to network in social and professional groupings such as mentoring arrangements.

Critical skills survey analysis. After completing the first seven demographic items of the survey, the beginning principals in the study were asked to respond to another 24 items. They were required to indicate the extent to which they perceived each item to be critical to their abilities to do their jobs effectively. Responses were based on a 5-point Likert scale: 5 = *extremely important*, 4 = *somewhat important*, 3 = *neutral* (not extremely important), 2 = *somewhat unimportant*, and 1 = *totally unimportant*.

Permission was sought and obtained from Dr. John Daresh, the author of the original survey, to adapt this critical skills inventory for the purpose of this study. Items 1-8 were associated with the technical and managerial duties of a principal, those duties and responsibilities found in job descriptions or policy manuals. Items 9-16 dealt with issues defined as socialization skills, the things that principals need to know, do, or demonstrate to fit into a new organization or professional environment. Finally, Items 17-24 referred to self-awareness skills, those items that touch on one's personal ability to know one's values, attitudes, beliefs and dispositions as they are related to the

professional role of an educational leader and the principal's sense of self-efficacy (Daresh, 2006).

The responses of the new principals were then rank ordered into the three broad categories of technical and managerial skills, socialization skills, and self-awareness skills. These ratings were compared and analyzed quantitatively using the SPSS, version 16.0, to determine the extent to which the duties or skills were perceived as critical to success in the job of principal.

A comprehensive analysis of the responses to the critical skills survey showed that new principals in Barbados view self-awareness skills as most critical to their effective functioning. The irony of this revelation is that the education officers who assist with the recruitment and monitoring of principals expect the technical and managerial skills to be the most critical to the new principal's performance of the job.

The research conducted in Barbados through the administration of the Daresh instrument revealed some identical comparisons to those of Daresh as well as some significant factors that relate particularly to the Barbadian principal. This research showed that, even in the Barbadian context, new principals held similar views to those of new principals from around the world who participated in Daresh's research. New principals perceived that the acquisition of self-awareness skills is more critical to their performance than the acquisition of technical and managerial skills and socialization skills. However, all skill categories received high ratings by all the new principals in this study. These high responses may be indicative of the feelings of frustration, the lack of guidance and preparation, or the very idealistic perceptions of the new Barbadian

principals who participated in this study. However, further study of the phenomenon may elicit deeper feelings and responses and, therefore, provide a more realistic picture.

Significant Findings in Relation to the Literature

Findings from this study were analyzed in relation to the concepts and research findings from the literature review. Four main areas were explored: the proportion of male to female leaders, gender and networking, gender and expressiveness, and age and mentoring.

Proportion of male to female leaders. Of the total sample of beginning principals, 7 were males and 13 were females. This was representative of the diminishing number of males in the education system. At the time of the study in Barbados, only 21 male school principals were assigned in the entire school system. Groff, (2001), expressed concern over the absence of male principals in the American school system: The number of female principals had increased rapidly to 35% in 2001 from 25% in 1988. Fenwick (2000) supported these figures and indicated that the salaries of principals are not commensurate with the job requirements. Therefore, this may be one deterrent for males joining the leadership ranks.

The lack of male role models to serve as mentors was also discussed. Men are more likely to prefer other males as mentors because men are more likely to identify males as role models. The absence of male mentors could possibly deter males from networking and mentoring. Females are more likely to request females as mentors to avoid any speculation of intimacy or sexual harassment in a naturally close and social mentoring arrangement (O'Neil as cited in Ragins, 1994).

Gender and networking. For one survey item, principals rated how critical they perceived formal networking through mentoring to be as they performed their jobs. A cross tabulation was done with the variables establishing professional network with experienced principals and gender. A Pearson chi-square significance value of .02 indicated that the response was not a fluke response. Ten of the 13 female principals perceived networking or mentoring to be of extreme importance, while only 1 male perceived it to be extremely important or critical to his effective functioning. The literature indicates that females more naturally gravitate towards groups to learn and bond.

What was of greater significance was the finding that 100% of the male participants successfully completed the only leadership program available for potential leaders, the Certificate in Educational Management and Administration program. In the qualitative aspect of the study, these male principals indicated they preferred to be engaged in a preparation program that was a logical blend of theory and practice if that practical component was mentoring. To compare figures, only 6 of the 13 females completed the Certificate in Educational Management and Administration program. This could have implications for the way in which male principals are prepared for the job. To determine a deeper significance and the predictability of this finding and to control for the impact of other variables, a regression analysis was done. From these results, the researcher confirmed that the statistical significance was real and that no other variables were impacting on the way in which the males and females perceived mentoring.

This finding was further corroborated by the research of Gilligan (1984). The review of literature for this study indicated that while networking may be easily

accommodated by females who thrive on social bonding and attachments, males are more likely to address issues in a more pragmatic manner. Her findings that females prefer connections with other people and more caring relationships may indicate why the females in this study perceived networking as extremely critical. Noddings (2002) supported this finding as well and proffered that the domestication of females led to their ability to care for others and to form networks of care naturally. Baier (1985) agreed that females are better at portraying ethics of love, trust, human bonding, and friendship. Gilligan did not denounce the fact that men can show no care. Rather, she stated that men can show care and bonding in close relationships when faced with a dilemma. This could substantiate the reason why males in this study recommended a blend of networking and a formal certificate course. Faced with the dilemma of lack of professional support, the males were willing to network to have their professional needs met. They were willing to compromise by choosing a blended approach to principal preparation and training.

Gender and expressiveness. In the analysis of the quantitative survey data, the very high scores and apparent disparity from both male and female responses indicated either a high state of panic regarding what the principals perceived as critical to their performance or their unrealistic expectations. Surprisingly, an analysis of the responses to the qualitative interviews revealed that the male respondents believed they were coping fairly well, although there were some critical areas in which they needed assistance. The males seemed to be using self-taught strategies to cope, as indicated by the respondents. In contrast, the females expressed great frustration and were more descriptive in their responses. The researcher noted, in the coding exercise, the state of panic and frustration in the voices of the females.

One answer to this apparent ambivalence or bridge between the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study may be found in the research done by Gilligan (1984) and Brody (1999). Gilligan stated that men care about principles while females are more caring and emotive. She stated that men have a built-in emotional distance. Brody (1999) recorded that social and cultural factors dictate that females assume roles emphasizing affiliation and caretaking. Brody also stated that, from an early age, boys are shaped to minimize emotional expression while girls are shaped to maximize emotions that promote affiliation and restore social bonding. They are also shaped to display emotions of distress, helplessness, fear, and sadness.

Because women's self-esteem is tied to connections and attachments, women prefer to be close to others, listening to them and relating to them on a one-to-one basis (Hill, 1987). Men avoid disclosures and outward expressions of emotion to avoid appearing vulnerable (Manstead, 1998). Men are more afraid that they may become victims of retaliation or may lose their self-esteem if they engage in situations which necessitate disclosure and expression of feelings (Robison et al., 1990). Although respondents had complete anonymity during the quantitative survey, the face-to-face interview could have prohibited the male respondents from being fully expressive of their coping experiences. This action by the male respondents could have been a protection of their masculinity, not a feeling of threat from the researcher.

Age and mentoring. All newly assigned principals were within the 50-59 age group. All 7 of the male principals and 11 of the female principals indicated they had 30-39 years of experience in education. One principal served 20-29 years; one served 40+ years in education. This startling revelation showed that all of these new principals were

close to, had reached, or had passed optional retirement age. In fact, all of the males in this study were eligible for retirement. Yet, all the principals were at a point in their careers when they were assuming tremendous responsibility. Because of the lack of support, they could easily exercise their option to retire. However, in spite of their graying years, the new principals in Barbados had not lost their passion for wanting to make a difference in the lives of the students. This was revealed in a cross tabulation with the variables age and passion for making a difference. The chi-square significance showed that this finding did not occur by chance.

In the literature, Fenwick (2007) agreed that the ranks of the school leadership are graying. The U.S. Department of Labor estimated that 40% of the 93, 200 principals are nearing retirement and the need for principals will increase from 10% to 30%. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare new leadership and keep those employed from retiring prematurely. Gates (2003) recorded that 63% of public school principals were 50 years and younger, 85% were 55 years and younger, and 22% were 51-55 years of age. Gates, who researched new principals employed for 3 years and under, found that new principals have shorter careers because they are employed much later in their careers. Gates also stated that a director of the Arlington-based American Association of School Administrators expressed concern that young people are not being recruited for leadership and that the country lacks a systematic approach to hiring leaders.

This same view could be attributed to Barbados because no pattern was found for the recruitment of new principals given the disparity in ages and experience. The research further indicated that young leaders were not being recruited because administrative

experience and years in the profession were preferred as desirable qualities for the profession over youth.

Implications for Practice

Officials of institutions with responsibility for the professional development of principals should take seriously the training of staff or the employment of an educational change agent to deliver self-awareness, socialization, and technical and managerial skills. Careful note should be taken to include opportunities for the acquisition of self-awareness and socialization skills as well as a balance of the three skill categories. This should effect a positive change to those programs in which a heavy component of the technical skills is delivered. These professional development providers should also examine the specific learning needs of males and females and provide optional arrangements for learning and interacting.

Policy planners and administrative officials at the Ministry of Education should rethink their recruitment strategy. Thought should be given to the recruitment of younger leaders so that principals spend a longer in this career position. Given the aging principal population, these officials should ensure that every resource is made available to these aging principals so that frustration, isolation, and feelings of incompetence do not result in a speedy exit to retirement. Technology and secretarial assistance should be used as measures to ease the burdens of these graying yet new principals who are still committed to making a difference in the lives of their students.

Policy planners should also examine the reasons for the continued persistence of the disproportion of male leaders and brainstorm ways of enticing more males to teaching and to leadership. Importantly, policy makers must recognize the benefits of mentoring

and invest financially in a viable program while working towards a formal comprehensive preparation program for new school principals.

The current certificate program is intended primarily for experienced practitioners in the field of primary and secondary education who hold or are likely to hold posts of special responsibility. It is the sole formal attempt at providing leadership training but as principals have recorded in this study, it is highly theoretical and inadequate. It is recommended that the services of an educational consultant or change agent be utilized to assist with the revamping of this certificate program so that it may be better aligned to current research practice and the expectations of leaders and prospective leaders. In any reshaping, the unique needs of males and females should be taken into account.

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