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A perspective research on professional abilities of mentor principals

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to explore the professional abilities of mentor principals for filling the gaps in educational management and management discipline knowledge. The research results show that the professional abilities of mentor principals include five aspects: building trust, guiding practice, paying attention to learners, integrating resources, and professional growth. Building trust includes two dimensions: the characteristics of mentor and coaching ability; guiding practice includes administrative leadership and cultural shaping; focusing on learners includes teaching leadership and learning leadership; integrating resources includes resource application and school marketing; professional development includes development orientation and development approaches. The findings of this study would be applied to educational administration and leadership.

Keywords. Mentor principal; Professional abilities; Educational leadership; Educational management

Introduction

A mentor is a guide who can help the mentee find the right direction and develop solutions to career issues. Mentors rely upon having similar experiences to gain an empathy with the mentees and an understanding of their issues.

Countries all over the world have adopted the method of “mentoring and apprenticeship”, allowing novice principals following mentor principals to learn the operation and handling of various school affairs. In the UK’s system-led system, there are National Education Leaders (NLEs) to assist heads of poorly run schools in improving their ability to run their schools (The National College for Teaching and Leadership, NCTL., 2017). In addition, there are “model principal-supervisors” in the United States to assist first-time principals in running schools (Gettys et al., 2010).

The term “mentor principal” in this study is based on the related research of “the experience inheritance of the mentor principals”. The mentor principals with rich professional knowledge and experience having received the mentor principals professional training and qualifications, can provide apprentice principals with emotional support and school affair consultation in an appropriate time and manner, as well as in administrative leadership, curriculum and experience inheritance and practical discussion in teaching leadership, public

relations, etc., establish long-term relationships with apprentice principals (including professional development, training, first or new appointments, etc.), and accompany the apprentice principals' growth to improve student performance.

Looking at the world, all countries are striving to establish a high-level educational leadership system. UK Education White Paper announced the expansion of the National Leader of Education (NLE) programme in 2010. The aim of the NLE programme was to provide high quality school improvement support for underperforming schools. In 2020, the NLE advisory group made a series of recommendations about the future of the programme, including selecting a new smaller, high-quality cadre of NLEs supported by a professional development. The new cadre of NLEs would be made up of headteachers with experience in turning around schools and could provide additional school improvement capacity.

In addition, the role of the model head of US model principals also included coaching newly appointed principals to make them fit and competent. The United States selected senior and outstanding principals for primary and secondary school principals at the education stage, including internship guidance for prospective principals and the first two years of the first principal, providing guidance and counseling for them preparing to enter the educational administration department (Donna & Liang, 2016). The Washington D.C. Council of Chief State School Officers developed a set of professional standards for model principals to provide a reference for the training, evaluation and selection of model mentor principals (Council of Chief State School Officers, CCSSO, 2015).

There are no literatures with mentor principals' professional abilities as a basis for planning mentor principals training programs, professional development programs, certification examinations, and performance evaluations. Based on the above research background and motivation, this study proposes the following research goals.

1. Explore professional abilities for mentor principals of elementary and junior high schools.
2. According to the research conclusions, put forward suggestions for the reference of educational administrative departments and research.

Methods

This study uses a literature review to explore trends in educational leadership. Due to continuous research and breakthroughs in the field of education, the content and methods of education have changed in the 21st century. Therefore, strong leaders are needed to lead the development of the education field. This research builds on issues that scholars consider important.

Firstly, the professional abilities of the mentor principals are deduced from the relevant theories of pedagogy, and secondly, the literature of empirical research on the experience inheritance of the mentor principal is analyzed to understand the professional content of the mentor principal.

1. The Enlightenment of Pedagogy-related Theories to the Professional Abilities of Mentor Principals

Pedagogy is a discipline that studies educational phenomena and problems. It reveals the laws of education and is also a science that studies how to cultivate people. Pedagogy is based on philosophy, psychology, ethics, sociology, etc. It not only reveals the essence and basic laws of education, but also expounds the principles of education and its application in educational practice, forming a science that combines theory and practice. The enlightenment of pedagogy-related theories to the professional abilities of mentor principals is as follows.

1.1 The Enlightenment of Personality Trait Theory for Establishing the Professional Abilities of Mentor Principals

Personality traits are an important subject in psychology to understand human behavior. They are widely used in different research fields and objects. Being a teacher and a principal is a kind of work to help people, and, as for the personality traits of helping workers, affinity is very important. According to Costa and McCrac's (1995) trait theory, affinity includes trust, altruism, commitment, modesty, warmth, etc. The interaction between people is the starting point for the formation of all social formations, and interaction forms the complex relationship between people. Moreover, the most important condition for social interaction is trust; if people do not trust each other, society will disintegrate. It can be seen that the quality of trust is quite important to mentor principals.

1.2 The Enlightenment of Cognitive Apprenticeship for Establishing the Professional Abilities of Mentor Principals

Wu, C.-H. and Lin, T.-Y. (1999) pointed out that cognitive apprenticeship referred to an expert with practical experience guiding the apprentice in a real social context. Through the expert's demonstration and explanation, as well as the novice's observation and active learning, in a real social context the novice could actively construct the process of knowledge learning through mutual social interaction. Mentor teaching could apply cognitive apprenticeship learning theory to its greatest effect. In addition, adult learning was often a response to changing roles and responsibilities and was linked to their physical and psychological development. Therefore, mentor principals assist the principals who need help and "guide" them to adapt to the new role and take on the responsibilities of the new role through transformational learning and self-directed learning. In other words, the function of mentor principals guiding the apprentice principals to practice educational ideals is very important.

1.3 The Enlightenment of Learner-centered Theory for Establishing the Professional Abilities of Mentor Principals

McComb and Whisler (1997) defined learner-centered from a teaching perspective, arguing that each student was unique, including the learning speed, learning style, ability, emotion, and so on. Each person was a unique individual with his own life meaning and value ideals in order to develop his unique potential and self-realization. This was the biggest goal of everyone's existence and the core task of education. Therefore, mentor principals should use appropriate counseling skills to guide the apprentice principal to master the curriculum and instructional leadership strategies, so as to achieve the success of each child. We can see that focusing on learner is the most important subject for learning.

1.4 The Enlightenment of a Theory of Justice for Establishing the Professional Abilities of Mentor Principals

Lu, J.-L. & Lin, Y.-R., (2015) discussion on the fairness of educational resource distribution, mentioning that Rawls published *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, which raised academic concerns about justice concern. Rawls maintained that the principle of justice was the guiding principle for the establishment of all the basic institutions of society, which were used to regulate social institutions, determine the basic rights and obligations of individuals, and distribute the benefits of social cooperation; moreover, things of value (including freedom, opportunity, income, wealth, and self-esteem, etc.), should reasonably meet the needs of each individual. He believed that everyone had the right to the highest liberties, and that these liberties were equal and compatible with the liberties of others. The Model Principal Professional Standard in the United States proposes that "principal supervisors should assist school district principals to ensure that they can integrate community resources so that each

student of different backgrounds has equitably access to the resources needed to succeed” (CCSSO, 2015). We can see the importance of integrating resources to fairness and justice.

1.5 The Enlightenment of Lifelong Learning Theory for Establishing the Professional Abilities of Mentor Principals

The existence of lifelong learning is as old as human history. After the 20th century, these long-existing concepts were gradually developed into theories, and became the most important and influential trend of thought in the 20th century. Hu, M.-G (1997) believed that lifelong learning referred to the individual as a learner, at each stage of life from birth to death, forming self-directed learning or group learning with planned or unplanned learning activities according to their own interests and needs. Tsai, X.-M. (1996) believed that learning was a lifelong process, and lifelong learning emphasized the complete development of an individual throughout his life. All educational purposes and activities were not only the preparations for life, but also an indispensable part of life. Therefore, mentor principals should seek various channels. In addition to self-growth, they should also help apprentice principals use different learning resources to achieve school operation and development. This shows the importance of lifelong learning theory to professional development.

To sum up, this research will use trait theory, cognitive apprenticeship, learner-centeredness, justice theory, and lifelong learning theory as the theoretical foundations to deduce the professional abilities of mentor principals, including building trust, guiding practice, focusing on learner, integrate resources, professional growth as shown in **Figure 1**.



Figures 1
Core Concepts of Professional Abilities for mentor Principals

2. Empirical Study on the Inheritance of Experience of Mentor Principals

The following is an analysis of domestic and foreign scholars’ empirical research on the inheritance of experience of mentor principals, including the characteristics and skills of mentor teaching, counseling strategies, focus on learner, resource integration, and professional growth.

2.1 Characteristics and Skills of Mentor Principals

Ding, Y.-G. and Zhang, D.-R. (2002) conducted a questionnaire survey on 200 elementary school principals in Taipei City, Taiwan, to find out what the principals thought about the characteristics of successful mentoring principals. The result found that 141 valid samples believed that a successful mentor principal should possess the characteristics of, in order, sufficient principal experience, open and warm personality, willingness to assist first-time principals, and enthusiastic attitude. Lin, M.-D. (2013) believed that the inheritance of the experience of mentor principals should also pay attention to the interpersonal relationship of the education leadership profession. Through formal and informal methods, mentor principals and apprentice principals could establish a trusting relationship with each other. In passing on the experience and wisdom to run a school, mentor principals could use a lot of skills. Observation skills included actions or attitudes that easily made the principal fall into leadership crisis; communication skills contained listening, clarifying, giving feedback, persuasion, conversation, discussion, dialogue, etc. Lin, W.-L. (2001) believed that mentor principals had to have the ability and willingness to guide. Zhang, D.-R. (2014) believed that in order to smoothly proceed cognitive coaching, mentor principals had to use harmony and harmony skills in the coaching process, which could build a trusting relationship between mentors and apprentices.

Boylan (2013) studied the training of mentor principals and pointed out that new principals got honest feedback from people they trusted as they began to deal with the daunting task of the school, so mentor principals first built trusting relationships with apprentice principals and maintained confidentiality and trusted the way to develop action plans. Capasso and Daresh (2000) pointed out that an ideal counselor should possess the skills and abilities of a warm and sincere attitude, a responsiveness to needs, an emphasis on the goals and abilities of the counselee, the ability to communicate with others, a clear attitude and correct values, sense of humors, ability to discuss confidentially, caring attitude and belief, listening to others' perspectives and giving back in moderation. Gettys et al. (2010) examined the effectiveness of six Missouri principal-supervisors identifying five mentoring strategies, among which to build trust between mentors and apprentices was the first. Daresh and Playko (1993) believed that the principal-supervisor training should include coaching courses such as listening, observation, feedback and problem solving, with the establishment of trusting relationship, as the first priority.

Only a mentor principal with open and warm personality traits, as well as guidance ability and willingness to guide can win trust (Lin, M.-D, 2013; Cheng, H.-H., 2019). In order to smoothly proceed cognitive coaching, mentor principals must use harmony and harmony skills, caring and supportive attitudes, etc. to build a trusting relationship in the coaching process (Zhang, D.-R, 2014), and to demonstrate the interaction skills of higher-level agencies and the establishment of interpersonal networks skills, etc. (Daresh & Playko, 1993; Gettys et al., 2010), have a clear attitude and correct values, and be able to listen to others' perspectives and give appropriate feedback with a caring attitude, a commitment to confidentiality, and guide them to think independently (Chen, M.-J. & Wu, M.-Z. 2008; Lin, W.-L., 2001; Capasso & Daresh, 2000).

All research results of the above scholars can be concluded that the attitude of mentor principals was to build a trusting relationship with the apprentice principal. Therefore, this study will be warm, sincere, and committed personality traits, as well as guide introspection, caring support, independent thinking communication skills, which can be summed up as a condition for "building trust".

2.2 Strategies for Mentors

Lin, M.-D. (2013) believed that the mentoring strategy of mentor principals did not to expect the apprentice principals to copy the leadership concept and actions of mentor principals, but guided the apprentice principal to understand his own strengths and weaknesses, reflect on criticism, and continuously improve his professional ability. Lin, W.-L. (2001) emphasized that, in the process of guiding the apprentice principal, mentor principals should not only focus on the imparting of experience, but should also be able to guide the apprentice principal to think and judge independently on issues. In other words, mentor principals should be able to “inspire” the apprentice principals. Lin, W.-L. pointed out that the role of mentor principals should not be limited to the imparting of experience; more importantly, they should be a guide and inspiration to cultivate the leadership ability of the apprentice principal and guide the apprentice principal to practice his educational philosophy.

Chen, M.-J. et al. (2013) pointed out that mentor principals had to guide the apprentice principals to enable school administrative affairs to be well-planned, for example, mastering the skills of annual school affair planning and developing the vision for school development. Low et al. (2002) pointed out that principal-supervisors must have good school performance, have administrative and teaching leadership skills, and be good at expressing the knowledge and skills of running a school, in order to guide the apprentice principal to perceive the school culture, shape a high-quality school culture, and guide the apprentice principal to establish the school vision. Boylan (2013) pointed out that mentor principals should guide the apprentice principals to deeply understand and experience the school culture through visiting the school and the community.

The mentor teaching includes guiding the apprentice principal “to understand the school”, “to become the principal”, “to promote school affairs”, and “to resolve conflicts” (Chen, M.-J. et al., 2005). The experience of mentor principals is mainly used to guide the first principal to get through his/her difficult initial period, such as understanding the school culture, improving interpersonal momentum, establishing an effective administrative team, integrating into the school culture, promoting communication and mutual understanding, and creating a positive, friendly and safe school (Lin, M.-D., 2013). In addition to focusing on the transfer of experience, mentor principals should be able to guide the intern principal to think and judge independently on issues, and establish a personal leadership style (Lin, W.-L., 2001). Mentor principals might guide the apprentice principal in the context of the real social situation through example and words, demonstration and explanation, allowing the apprentice principal actively constructing knowledge and cultivating personal leadership (Wu Q.-S. and Lin, T.-Y., 1999). In addition, the mentor principals should encourage the apprentice principal to understand their thoughts and needs by observing and interacting with staff as well as students and parents to gradually understand the school culture, integrate into the school culture, and further lead the team to build consensus, and create a spontaneous and positive, friendly and safe environment, and shape a high-quality school culture (Boylan, 2013; Chen, M.-J. et al., 2013; Lin, M.-D., 2013).

Based on the results of the above analyses, this study proposes that guiding practice includes two dimensions of administrative leadership and cultural shaping. Administrative leadership includes vision leadership, leadership style and leadership ability; cultural shaping includes spontaneous, positive, friendly and safe.

2.3 Focus on Learner

Lin, M.-D. (2013) believed that principals should create an environment conducive to teaching and learning, generate consensus actions for continuous dialogue with learning leaders, and increase the density of teaching leaders. The main goal of mentor principals should be to assist the apprentice principal to lead directly or indirectly, with the ability of teaching planning, teaching visual guidance and teaching evaluation, so as to improve the learning effect and performance of students, and the sustainable improvement of the overall efficiency of the school. Chen, M.-J. et al. (2013) pointed out that mentor principals should focus on curriculum and teaching leadership, and lead apprentice principals to create a good teaching environment, improve teachers' teaching knowledge, engage in curriculum and teaching material development, have teaching visual guidance capabilities, and develop strategies for student achievement indicators. Zhao, Q.-Y. (2018) also recognized that mentor principals used appropriate counseling skills to guide the apprentice principal to master teaching leadership strategies, and directly participate in, demonstrate or authorize others to engage in measures related to school teaching activities. Cheng, H.-H. (2019) believed that the focus of mentor principals should be placed on the support of the teaching leadership of apprentice principals.

Wu Jun-xian and Lin Yi-jun (2014) believed that learning leadership was a key element of an effective school. All leaders who could promote students' learning were learning leaders. Learning leaders could help teachers obtain available resources, implement adaptive teaching and review results. Boylan (2013) believed that the necessary abilities of teachers and principals included mastering and providing the best learning environment for students. Wilson (2005) advocated that mentor principals should pay attention to the needs and learning of students and be an excellent learning leader.

Teaching leadership means that mentor principals use appropriate coaching skills to help the apprentice principal master teaching leadership strategies, so that every teacher can demonstrate Professional abilities. The main goal of promoting the measures of the mentor principals should help the apprentice principals to directly or indirectly lead the improvement of students' learning effectiveness and performance, as well as the sustainable improvement of school effectiveness; through curriculum and planning, improve teachers' knowledge, implement adaptive teaching and multiple assessments so as to assist the apprentice principal with the ability in guiding and evaluating teaching (Lin, M.-D., 2013; Chen, M.-J. et al., 2013). In addition, it focuses on strengthening the support system of the principal's teaching leadership and assisting the apprentice principal to become a teaching leader, so that every teacher can demonstrate professional abilities (Zhao, Q.-Y., 2018; Cheng, H.-H., 2019).

Wu, J.-X. and Lin, Y.-J. (2014) advocated that mentor principals should assist apprentice principals to improve teachers' adaptive teaching ability. In terms of learning leadership, it refers to creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning, through decentralized leadership, increasing leadership density, etc., aiming to strengthen the connection and influence of leadership and learning. Mentor principals should assist apprentice principals to improve teachers' adaptive teaching ability, review learning outcomes, and establish a learning support system for teachers and students, so that teachers can grow professionally and students can develop adaptively (Wilson, 2005; Boylan, 2013; Wu, J.-X. & Lin, Y.-J., 2014).

Based on the results of above analyses, this study proposes that focus on learning includes two dimensions of instructional leadership and learning leadership. Teaching leadership includes teaching planning, teaching implementation and teaching evaluation; learning leadership includes adaptive teaching, reviewing results and supporting systems.

2.4 Integrated Resources

Zhao, Q.-Y. (2018) believed that the integration of source competition and the establishment of personal connections were important issues for the new principal. Regarding the discussion of school resources, Chen M.-J. et al. (2013) pointed out that the mentor principals could assist apprentice principals in integrating resources, putting talents in appropriate positions, respecting and caring for staff, teachers and students, and communicating with parents, volunteer groups and community members, good interaction, establishing good relationships with relevant units, such as Education Bureau, social education institutions, etc., to maximize human, financial and material resources. Cheng, H.-H. (2019) pointed out that mentor principals should play the role of an intermediary, matching the principal and education bureau or other relevant resources that could assist the school in providing the principals with the necessary support and assistance. Hobson (2003) pointed out that the experience inheritance of mentor principals included the connection of resources, such as human, material and financial resources. Wilson (2005) advocated that mentor principals should have social and public relations skills, timely multi-marketing, inter-school strategic alliances, etc., so that students from different backgrounds could develop adaptively.

Equal educational opportunities should not only focus on the issue of resource allocation, but should be combined with the concept of needs, abilities, opportunities, and outcomes to respond to the complexity of the demands for equal educational opportunities, so that everyone can be taught and realize their dreams. Therefore, mentor principals should help the apprentice principals to integrate school and cross-community resources, put talents in appropriate positions, have good interactions with parents, volunteer groups and community members, and establish good relations with education bureaus, social education institutions and other relevant members, integrate human, financial, and material resources to achieve maximum efficiency (Hobson, 2003; Chen, M.-J. et al., 2013), so that students with different backgrounds can develop adaptively and develop diverse abilities. Chen, Q.-R. (2012) pointed out that the strategies of school marketing application in school operation included showing the school's characteristics, making full use of various educational marketing channels, implementing school strategic alliances, and operating school public relations. In addition, Sai, J.-T. (2011) pointed out that school marketing strategies included written information, more use of electronic signboards and the Internet to transmit information to teachers and parents at any time.

Based on the results of above analyses, this study proposes that the integration of resources includes two dimensions of resource application and school marketing. Resource applications include teaching staff, parent volunteers, and external resources; school marketing includes school characteristics, strategic alliances, and diversified marketing.

2.5 Professional Growth

Lin, M.-D. (2013) believed that mentor principals should be the best supporter of the apprentice principal and accompany him/her to learn and grow together. He pointed out that the measures to inherit the experience and wisdom of mentor principals do not replace the powers, responsibilities and services of the education administrative organ for the supervision and guidance of the principal's leadership.

The administrative supervision and assistance of the educational administrative organs must go hand in hand with the professional guidance and assistance of mentor principals, because the guidance of mentor principals is different from that of administrative inspectors. Chen, M.-J. et al. (2013) pointed out that mentor principals should learn for life and continue professional growth. For example, participating in the principal's professional group and

professional growth. Cheng, H.-H. (2019) pointed out that through the mentoring process of mentor principals, the learning and growth of the apprentice principal could be promoted. Wilson (2005) proposed that professional competence must be lifelong learning to keep pace with the times. Augustine-Shaw & Liang (2016) believed that lifelong learning was an important key to maintain the relationship between mentors and mentees. Mentor principals should be able to actively learn new knowledge, provide advice, and inspire apprentice principals to lead educational reforms and continuously improve school effectiveness. There is a “Model Principal supervisor” program in the development of presidents of Ohio University (Daresh & Playko, 1993), the main purpose is to train the model principal supervisor to become the role model of apprentice principals and to provide apprentice principals with advice on running the school.

Lifelong learning is an important key to maintain the relationship between mentors and mentees. Mentor principals should be able to keep pace with the times and take the initiative to learn new knowledge. In terms of professional development, it includes professional knowledge and skills; in terms of professional development, it includes sharing experience and providing advice, promoting the learning of apprentice principals, and leading educational reforms (Zhang, D.-R., & Jian, X.-C., 2001; Wilson, 2005; Chen, M.-J. et al., 2013; Lin, M.-D., 2013; Lin, T.-Y., 2014; Donna & Liang, 2016; Cheng, H.-H., 2019).

Based on above analysis results, this study proposes that the professional growth of mentor principals includes two dimensions of growth orientation and growth path. The growth direction includes professional knowledge, professional skills, and professional attitude; the growth path includes sharing experience, providing consultation, and accompanying growth.

Results

This study summarizes the enlightenment of pedagogy on the professional abilities of mentor principals and the empirical research on the experience inheritance of the mentor principals. The research results show that the professional abilities of mentor principals include five aspects: building trust, guiding practice, paying attention to learners, integrating resources and professional growth. Building trust includes two dimensions: the characteristics of mentor and coaching ability; guiding practice includes administrative leadership and cultural shaping; focusing on learners includes teaching leadership and learning leadership; integrating resources includes resource application and school marketing; professional development includes development orientation and development approaches, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1 Professional Abilities Framework for Mentor Principals

First level Core concept	Second level Dimension	Third level Key Concepts
A. Building trust	A-1 Personality Traits	A-1-1 Warmth
		A-1-2 Sincerity
		A-1-3 Commitment
	A-2 Tutoring Ability	A-2-1 Guided introspection
		A-2-2 Caring support
		A-2-3 Independent thinking
B. Guiding Practice	B-1 Executive Leadership	B-1-1 Vision Leadership
		B-1-2 Leadership Style
		B-1-3 Leadership Capability

	B-2 Cultural Modeling	B-2-1 Spontaneous and common good B-2-2 Positive B-2-3 Friendly and safe
C. Focusing on learner	C-1 Instructional Leadership	C-1-1 The Planning in Teaching C-1-2 Teaching for Implementation C-1-3 Evaluation of Teaching
	C-2 Learning Leadership	C-2-1 Inspection Results C-2-2 Adaptive Teaching C-2-3 Support System
D. Integrating resources	D-1 Resource Utilization	D-1-1 Faculty and Staff D-1-2 Parent and Volunteers D-1-3 External Resources
	D-2 School Marketing	D-2-1 school-running characteristic D-2-2 Strategic alliance D-2-3 Diversified marketing
E. Professional growth	E-1 growth Orientation	E-1-1 Professional Knowledge E-1-2 Professional Skills E-1-3 Professional Attitude
	E-2 growth Path	E-2-1 to share experience E-2-2 to provide consultation E-2-3 to accompany growth

Conclusions

Some concepts in the literature are closely related to the theme of this study, and these concepts are divided into three levels. The first level is the core concept, the second level is the dimension, and the third level is the key concepts. There is a close relationship among the levels toward forming the professional competence framework of the mentor principals. Therefore, this study is quite handy for researchers looking for mentor-principals literature for the first time. In addition, each paragraph had a summary to provide some basic information for future researchers.

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