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The Characteristics of Effective Mentoring Programs for At Risk Students as Perceived by Selected Georgia Principals

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THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE MENTORING PROGRAMS FOR

AT RISK STUDENTS AS PERCEIVED BY SELECTED GEORGIA PRINCIPALS

by

TUJUANA CARLENE BUSH

(Under the Direction of Walter S. Polka)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics of successful mentoring programs principals perceived most effective with at risk students. The research conducted intends to be a resource of organized support systems for students considered at risk for academic failure. As an educator, the researcher understands the value of mentoring programs and the support that mentors offer. Mentors create opportunities for students to build self esteem, connectedness, and make healthy decisions through guidance given by one on one or small group interactions.

Employing a research instrument composed of ten questions designed to elicit responses relating to two research sub questions, the researcher interviewed nine Georgia principals to ascertain their perceptions of effective mentoring programs serving at risk students. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for recurring patterns and themes by the researcher.

The data displayed in this study was gathered through the use of qualitative methodology. The primary instrument used for this investigation consisted of in depth interviews. The results from the analysis showed that principals view educators as playing a vital role in the success of at risk students.

Many viewed educators as role models for students that provide motivation in reaching high expectations set by school and system personnel.   The respondents believed there are students that fail despite the school's efforts. Each of them stressed the importance of developing an individualized instructional plan to meet the specific educational needs of at risk students.

The results of the study were viewed as being particularly valuable to educational stakeholders such as principals, parents, and students of schools who serve student populations where at risk students (subgroups) have not met adequate yearly progress (AYP) as determine by the Georgia Department of Education and No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

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INDEX WORDS: At risk students, Principal's perceptions, Mentoring programs, Dissertation, Thesis guidelines, College of Graduate Studies, Student, Graduate degree, Georgia Southern University

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DEDICATION

My dissertation is dedicated to my paternal grandmother Mrs. Edna P. Bush

for her 40 years as a teacher and her continued support of me throughout my life.

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I am grateful to many people. In particular I am grateful to my parents Dr. Robert Bush and Mrs. Virginia Bush who were my first teachers and spent over forty years of their career working in the public school system. I appreciate the time and care they took in developing me to be the best person I could possibly be. Because of my parents support and encouragement I have continued my education in the field of leadership.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The educational reform movement of the 1980s was characterized as focusing on the needs of all students, including those considered to be at risk (Welch & Sheridan, 1995). This movement, according to Welch and Sheridan, had as its base, a 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.* It is considered to be the foundation for the educational restructuring movement of the 1980s. In the report, the commission notes that "all children, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost" (Chandler, 1983, p. 9). The *Nation At Risk* report, according to Chandler, focused interest on the college bound student, especially those students who already had ability, ambition, and an understanding of how to work within the present educational system. Chandler urged that because of the focus of the report there was an inevitable corresponding neglect of different students or those who were not interested in the middle class mobility. In other words, Chandler states that "the commission's medicine for the public school had some unanticipated side effects for students who were considered 'at risk'" (p. 22). By the mid-1980s, another wave of educational reform focused on improving the quality of school organizations and teachers. During this reform, the needs of disadvantaged students were acknowledged. Reports such as *Children in Need: Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged* and *Time for Results: The*

Governors' 1991 Report were presented to the educational community. These reports called for the establishment of partnerships consisting of educators, business leaders, and policy leaders in order to create programs for students "at risk" (Welch & Sheriden, 1995). Moreover, in spite of all the efforts and time and resources, the educational performance of American students remained flat in the 1990s (Cooper, 2000). Among the 19 industrialized countries of the world, the United States ranked 7th in science, 12th in mathematics achievement, 16th in living standards among the poorest one fifth of children, 18th in the gap between rich and poor children, 18th in infant mortality, and 19th in the rate of low birth weight babies (Cooper, 2000). According to the Children's Defense Fund (CDF, 1997), data collected since *A Nation At Risk* was published, demonstrate that the condition of our children has worsened. The perplexing realization is that the condition has come about in spite of all the time, money, and effort expended toward "higher expectations" and "success for all learners" (CDF, 1997).

Not only is our nation at risk, but our children are at risk. Our children are at risk of not being included in the expectation of success for all learners. Cooper (2000) suggests that in order for the education slogan "success for all" to be meaningful, all children have to be included. These students' societal baggage must be examined and effectively dealt with by the adults in their lives. Research has indicated that children need positive relations with caring adults (Jekielek, Moore & Hair, 2002). Cooper (2000) found that educators within the school system must be a part of the group of positive adults who examine and deal with the inclusion of at risk students in the slogan, "success for all".

Educators play a vital role in meeting the needs of students identified as most at risk for school failure (Snow, 2003).

Today's schools need a range of program options to meet the diverse academic, social and emotional needs of their student population (Ryan, Whittaker, & Pinckney, 2002). These options are needed because traditional schools by themselves are ill equipped to deal with the underlying problems of cultural differences, poverty, lack of general health, and abuse (Cooper, 2000). Warren-Sams (2001) suggested that for all students to be successful, the importance of culture, race, disability, and socioeconomic status must be considered in processes and programs. Research has indicated that mentoring programs should be considered a valid option for addressing the diverse needs of at risk students. McGowan (1999) found that mentoring has been proven beneficial to improving achievement and retention rates for students' at all educational levels. According to Campbell and Campbell (2000) mentoring also provides sociological and emotional support.

Academic success of students cannot be guaranteed (Cooper 2000). The effort to assure every student the opportunity to learn and be successful, to the extent possible, within their individual capabilities, can be guaranteed. Data has shown that guaranteed opportunities to learn come when students are healthy, present, and immersed so that they not only learn from teachers, but also from their peers (Cooper, 2000). Marx (2001) reported that providing equal opportunity and closing the achievement gap among students are among the most demanding issues facing schools.

At-Risk Students

The term "at risk" came into wide use soon after the landmark 1983 proclamation of the *Commission on Excellence, A Nation At Risk* (Brandt, 1993). Since then there have been efforts made, by researchers, to gain a better understanding of what it means to be at risk. According to Woodlief (1997), no group is in greater need of support, nurturing and guidance than at-risk students.

Welch and Sheridan (1995) defined at risk as "any child who, due to disabling, cultural, economic, or medical conditions, is denied, or has minimum equal opportunities and resources in a variety of settings and is in jeopardy of failing to become a successful and meaningful member of his or her community". Researchers Kea, Trent, and Davis (2002) identified a more recent definition of at risk students as those who are unlikely to succeed in traditional school settings. This cause of failure, as studied by Kea and others, is based on two factors: the inability to learn and the lack of desire to learn due to school environment (Kea, et.al). These researchers addressed the need for schools to provide an environment conducive to learning. Many students fail, in spite of their ability, because they are not provided with the kind of school environment necessary to help them succeed (Kea, et al.).

Gulker (2003) discovered that in order to meet the academic needs of at risk students, it is important to first meet their emotional and social needs. Casteel (2000) found that as at risk students' self confidence and self esteem increased, these students were empowered to learn. Given the stresses the family system experiences the school has become a vital refuge for a growing

number of children. The school serves as a protective shield to help children withstand the multiple changes that at risk students can expect in a stressful world (Beard, 1993).

Researchers have shown that the key to educators improving success in school for at risk students is modifying the means to achieve learning outcomes, not changing the intended outcomes themselves (Gilbert & Gay, 1995). In order to promote student success, school personnel need to set the same high academic standards and expectations for at risk students that they set for all students. School personnel need to hold students strictly accountable for meeting those high academic standards (Cooper, 2000).

However, the means and methods used with other students are not necessarily appropriate for use with at risk students. Researchers have found that at risk students are typically children from low income, multi-ethnic neighborhoods who generally achieve more poorly, academically, as compared to their middle class counterparts (Faro, 2001). Therefore, improving the educational outcomes for students who are at risk for academic failure is an important issue for educators and policymakers (Hock, Pulvers, Deshler, & Schumaker, 2001). According to Gilbert and Gay (1995), teaching and learning are sociocultural processes that take place within social systems. According to Casteel (2000) the student must identify favorably with his teachers, or he will do very poorly in school (Casteel, 2000).

Most educators are familiar with a dominant perception of at risk students as disengaged from school, resistant and oppositional in the classroom, and not

valuing education and achievement (Coleman, Ganong, Clark, & Madsen, 1989). Howard's 2002 research indicated that this perception is applied to at risk students as a whole, regardless of socioeconomic background. However, this perception is most closely associated with low income inner city children.

A considerable body of research, according to Cawelti (1999), has shown various approaches or interventions that work to improve student achievement in the at risk learner. Examining at risk students' perceptions of their learning environment identified several strategies that promote high achievement. These strategies according to the students were: (1) teachers who established family, community, and home like characteristics, (2) teachers who established culturally connected caring relationships with students, and (3) the use of certain types of verbal communication and affirmation (Howard, 2002).

Investigating actions at high achieving schools is another way to find effective practices (Cawelti, 1999). Researchers have shown that the understanding that these educators and other human services professionals in high achieving schools posses regarding societal realities such as: single – parent homes and drug infested neighbors suggests interventions and preventive mechanisms that must be employed in schools (Cooper, 2000). One such intervention program is mentoring.

<div align="center">Mentoring Programs</div>

Mentoring programs have been advocated increasingly as a means of promoting the academic achievement of adolescents who may be at risk for school failure (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). Mentoring is most

commonly defined as a relationship between an older individual and a young person that lasts over a period of time and focuses on the younger person's developmental needs (Ryan, Whittaker, & Pinckney, 2002). These programs have been acclaimed as a solution to an array of educational needs. Research has conclusively shown that a "properly" mentored student will, over a short and continued period of time, out perform a "like" and "unmentored" student (Woodlief, 1997). Key to this effort, according to Woodlief, is the use of mentors who can create a greater connection in the student's mind between the skills and knowledge that are being taught in the classroom and the skills and knowledge that will be required to effectively deal with the societal experiences and expectations.

The benefits of mentoring are not only work related. Mentoring can provide individuals with opportunities to enhance cultural awareness, aesthetic appreciation, and the potential to lead meaningful lives (Kerka, 1997). Monitoring of direct contact between mentor and mentee is crucial in understanding the effectiveness of mentoring. What children need most, according to Ghezzi (2003), is a stable relationship with a caring adult. Research has shown that mentoring relationships transform children into better students (Kochan & Pascarelli, 2003). As a result of mentoring student performance was shown beneficial in improved achievement and retention rates, improved sociological and emotional support, enhanced skills and personal growth, and career advancement (Kochan & Pascarelli, 2003). A consistent and nurturing

relationship with a mentor fosters a child's ability to learn (McMillian & Reed, 1994).

The impact of the relationship with the mentor on the life of the mentee is best illustrated by a description of the positive change over time in multiple aspects of the mentee's life (Anda, 2001). The purpose of the mentor mentee relationship is to provide a supportive adult role model who will encourage student social and emotional development; help improve student academic achievement; career motivation; expand student life experiences; redirect students from at risk behaviors; and foster an improved student self esteem (Anda, 2001).

Mentoring has emerged as one of the most effective ways to reach at risk youth and to help them succeed at school (Moore, 1999). Studies have reported that schools can participate in many types of mentoring programs (Ryan, et al, 2002). Some mentoring programs focus on providing needy youth with a caring, consistent, adult role model. Other mentoring programs seek to help students improve their academic performance. Still other mentoring programs help students understand and prepare for the world of work by bringing them into the work place or bringing business people into the classroom. Many mentoring programs, according to Ryan, et. al (2002), target youth who (a) lack adult role models, (b) have academic difficulties, (c) are potential drop outs, (d) come from low income families, (e) lack self esteem or social skills, (f) are abused or neglected, or (g) have committed crimes, use drugs, or are involved in gangs.

According to Anda (2001), a mentoring relationship is meant to serve the developmental and emotional needs of youth participants. Mentoring has become viewed as a specific preventive intervention for at risk youth (Anda, 2001). Anda noted that mentors can provide at risk youth with both access to community resources, psychological and emotional support to foster behavioral and attitudinal changes.

<div align="center">Resilience: Nurturing Protective Factors</div>

Educators are continually challenged to find successful ways to meet the needs of students (Shepard, 2004). One means to support students is by identifying and enhancing protective factors or resilience (Shepard, 2004). Researchers have found that mentor programs that promote resilience in children share certain common factors, which support the mentor – mentee relationship (Ryan, et al 2002).

Resilience refers to a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Luthar, et al 2000). Cooper (2004) defines resilience as a set of qualities that facilitate a person's successful adaptation and functioning. This adaptation and functioning occurs in spite of facing one or more risk factors, without resulting in serious, long term harmful outcomes (Cooper, 2004).   According to McMillan and Reed (1994) resilient at risk students have temperamental characteristics that elicit positive responses from individuals around them. Much of the literature has designated a variety of skills, attributes, or abilities that resilient students possess (Cooper, 2004). Individual characteristics include tolerance for negative affect, self efficacy,

internal locus of control, sense of humor, hopefulness, strategies to deal with stress, an enduring set of values, balanced perspective on experience, fortitude, conviction, tenacity and resolve (Cooper, 2004). These characteristics, according to Cooper (2004), are the skills, attributes and abilities that all students possess, but are more developed in resilient students and can be learned.

Statement of the Problem

All students have the potential to succeed in school and in life. However, not all students are afforded the same opportunities to develop this potential to succeed. Research has indicated that there are certain factors that place students at risk of not being academically successful. These factors include: limited English proficiency, poverty, race, geographic location, or economic disadvantages. Considerable interest has been directed toward how these factors affect the schooling of at risk children.

The educational experiences schools traditionally offer do not impact most at risk students. However, mentoring programs present a viable alternative in addressing individual needs of students and building supportive relationships between students and adults. Mentoring programs have proven to positively affect students' attitudes toward school by helping them academically, behaviorally, and socially, thereby fostering the resiliency necessary for them to succeed, despite the presence of at risk social factors.

Mentoring programs vary greatly in purpose, mentee characteristics, and structure. A number of mentoring programs have been developed to address the educational needs of at risk students. The targeted population for this study is

principals in Georgia with existing mentoring programs at their schools. While a number of programs exist, relatively little is known about the characteristics of mentoring programs that these principals perceive most effective. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of successful mentoring programs principals perceived most effective with at risk students.

Research Questions

The overarching research question that guided the researcher in addressing mentoring programs available to at risk students is: What are the characteristics of mentoring programs perceived by principals as most effective for at risk students? The sub questions that will help the researcher are:

1. What factors do principals associate with successful mentoring programs?
2. What evidence of mentoring success can be articulated by the principal?

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this research is to identify the characteristics of successful mentoring programs principals perceived most effective with at risk students. This study is important because it will enable educational leaders to add to their database of knowledge. This additional knowledge will be the perceived effective characteristics of existing mentoring programs, and a resource of organized support systems for students considered at risk for academic failure. Also, the researcher's findings will be a valuable benefit to other educational stakeholders such as principals, parents, and students of schools who serve student populations where at risk students (subgroups) have not met adequate yearly progress (AYP).

As an educator, the researcher understands the value of mentoring programs and the support that mentors can offer. Mentors create opportunities for students to build self esteem, connectedness, and make healthy decisions through guidance given by one on one and/ or in small group interactions. Research indicates that at risk students need to feel supported and cared for in order to achieve. Direct and consistent contact with a mentor provides a sense of support that positively affects student achievement as measured by improved academics, achievement, social skills, and emotional adjustment during the school year.

It appears that at risk students need consistency. Therefore, mentors may need to be consistent in addressing student needs by meeting on a regular basis in order to accomplish success. Consistency appears to be the driving force that enables mentoring programs to build the necessary connection or rapport with at risk students. The data from this study will be useful to educational stakeholders in schools where the requirements of adequate yearly progress (AYP), as noted in the No Child Left Behind Act, have not been met and where schools are in the "Needs Improvement" status. This information will be a resource to educators and other stakeholders in recognizing programs that will assist in meeting the educational needs of students, especially those identified as at risk. An examination of effective mentoring programs and the characteristics that lead to their perceived success, by participating principals, will provide opportunities for additional help as academic standards continue to be a powerful force in our

society. The knowledge of such programs will be a valuable resource for educators in any community or school system.

<div align="center">Procedures</div>

Research Design

The researcher performed an in-depth exploration of mentoring programs with regard to at risk students. The overarching research question was designed to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perceptions of mentoring programs, while using related sub questions to generate data appropriate for responding to the overarching research question.

The researcher gathered data using qualitative methodology. Qualitative methodology allowesd the researcher to understand human behavior in its natural setting from the viewpoint of those involved (Nardi, 2003). Qualitative methodology is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).   It was the goal of the researcher to examine principals' perceptions of characteristics that make mentoring programs effective for at risk students. Qualitative methodology enabled the researcher to further investigate the study by allowing the use of descriptive research to provide basic information describing the research topic and participants.

Population

In order to draw the research sample, the researcher began by identifying Georgia principals with mentoring programs serving at risk students. Through consultation with The Georgia Department of Education the researcher secured a listing of schools with documented mentoring programs.

Sample

The target population was sent a questionnaire, demographic data sheet, and cover letter inviting them to participate in the study. Returned questionnaires and demographic data sheets indicated consent to further participation. The sample group then be purposely selected as participants for the study. Specifically, nine Georgia principals were selected from the returned questionnaires and demographic data sheets. Each consenting principal was assigned to a random table for selection. The researcher used a random selection process to select six schools designated rural, urban, and suburban. The principals were purposely selected from the following areas: three rural schools, three urban schools, and three suburban schools.

Instrumentation

Qualitative procedures were used to conduct the study.   This format allowed the researcher to assess perceptions of principals along with related demographic data. The questionnaire consisted of questions which will garner the principals' initial perceptions of the school's mentoring program. The questionnaire was validated using content validity.

Data Collection

Each participating principal was contacted to arrange an in-depth interview including structured and unstructured questions. The primary strategy was designed to capture the deep meaning of experience in the principals' own words (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Interview questions were tape recorded and then

transcribed by a professional legal transcriptionist. Before analysis all data was coded.

The qualitative methodology used provided a nonstatistical, written description of perceptions each program's effectiveness. The data collected provided textual descriptions of select mentoring programs and the characteristics that principals perceived to be most effective. The demographic data sheets provided information on student demographics and data supporting the principal's perceptions of their mentoring program. The researcher used detailed descriptions from participants as a means of answering the overarching researcher question.

Data Analysis

The data analyzed by the researcher, included information relating to principal's perceptions of the effect of their mentoring programs in areas such as: attendance, discipline, and standardized test scores. This provided a structured foundation for the study. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data; it builds grounded theory (Stauss & Corbin, 1997). Specifically, in using interviews and data analysis the researcher gained a more in-depth understanding of the principals' perceptions. All data was analyzed to identify emerging themes, categories, and patterns using the process of triangulation.

The methodology used permitted the researcher to access information from participants in order to determine the perceived effective characteristics of mentoring programs with respect to at risk students. The researcher attempted

to limit bias in the presentation of data as well control validity and reliability through the process of triangulation and the use of a second reader. Data was conveyed the way it is presented. The researcher had no control over "what is" and only measured what already exists in regards to mentoring programs.   The data from the study was compiled and presented qualitatively.

<div align="center">Definitions</div>

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are formally defined from *The Georgia Department of Education's* website: http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/support.

At Risk Students – Commonly defined as students placed "at risk" of failure due to certain factors. Such factors as: limited English proficiency, poverty, race, geographic location, or economic disadvantage.

Mentee – A mentee is any student who is receiving mentoring from a mentor.

Mentor – A mentor is any successful adult who applies the principles of mentoring to a mentee.

Mentoring Programs – One on one or small group relationship settings between an older individual and a younger person to address developmental needs.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) – A reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 – the principal federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. NCLB is designed to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps. States are required to develop challenging academic standards, to educate all students to 100 percent proficiency by 2014, and to create and implement a single, statewide accountability system.

Resilience – Ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.

Stakeholders - Educational stakeholders, in regards to this research, are

principals, parents, teachers, and students.

Student Record – An annual record that provides cumulative information about a

student for the school year, such as education history and demographics. This

information contains LEA, school, and student level data that can be used for

both state and LEA reporting and analysis.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

The understanding educators and other human service professionals

posses regarding societal pitfalls facing today's students, may suggest that

interventions and preventive mechanisms be employed in schools. According to

researchers for education to be "successful" - all children must be included.

There is research to support students' societal baggage being examined and

effectively dealt with by the adults in their lives. Those adults may most

commonly be the educators in their lives. Researchers also identify the possible

need for addressing the basic physical and psychological needs that children

have before successful education can take place.

Education methods may need to adapt to the changing times.

Researchers support a curriculum for the future being inclusive to all students

using a variety of instructional methods. It was the intent of the researcher to

provide serious consideration of the effectiveness of mentoring programs for at

risk students. This consideration may be valuable for educators and policy

makers.

Based on the findings of researchers, educators are fighting an uphill battle because the problems faced, relative to teaching and learning, perhaps have not been correctly identified for many children and therefore might not have targeted the correct solutions. Mentoring programs may be an important part of the solution. The service they provide possibly enables students to build a rapport with a "stable adult" that creates an opportunity to learn through a one on one or small group relationship. Researchers indicate this type of setting could promote a sense of family and community that fosters communication and "connectedness". It may be necessary for at risk students to feel a sense of belonging and "connectedness" in order for the process of learning to be facilitated.

This study was designed to examine the characteristics of effective mentoring programs for at risk students as perceived by selected Georgia principals. By examining these perceptions, this research may help educators understand perceived effective mentoring programs targeting at risk students. This increased understanding may provide opportunities for at risk students.

The researcher used qualitative research methods to address the overarching question and gain a deeper understanding of the topic through: demographic information, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews. All data was analyzed to identify emerging themes, categories, and patterns. The use of qualitative methodology permitted the researcher to access information from participants in order to determine the perceived effective characteristics of mentoring programs with respect to at risk students.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE

In 1983 The National Commission on Excellence in Education convened and released a report entitled *A Nation at Risk* to "review and synthesize the data and scholarly literature on the quality of learning and teaching in the nation's school with special concern for the educational experience of youth" (U.S. Department of Education, 1983a). The National Commission's report stated part of what is at risk is the promise first made on this continent: all, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost (U.S. Department of Education, 1983a). This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself (U.S. Department of Education, 1983b). In the report, the commission suggested that the country's educational institutions had lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling and of the high expectations and discipline effort necessary to attain them (Hammer, 2003). The commission called for a demanding set of expectations in American schools (Cavanagh & Carroll, 2004). Based on these expectations, education became an issue of national priority and helped change public perception about the role and importance of education (Hammer, 2003). *A Nation at Risk* paved the way for today's federal mandates aimed at improving the nation's schools and has become a reference point for

other reform movements and federal lawmakers (Cavanagh & Carroll, 2004).

Studies like *A Nation at Risk* have made legislators more aware of low

achievement levels of children and in schools (Hammer, 2003).

Since 1983, recent legislation has helped to improve the country's school

system (Dobbs, 2003). In 2002 President George W. Bush signed into law the

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which reauthorized the Elementary

and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Jorgensen, 2003). The new law reflected

an unprecedented, bipartisan commitment to ensuring that all students,

regardless of their background, receive a quality education (U.S. Department of

Education, 2005). This new law also reflected a commitment for an education

established to increase the academic achievement of socially and economically

disadvantaged students (Chaifetz, 2003). With NCLB, a new era began where

accountability, local control, parental involvement, and funding what works

became the cornerstone of the nation's education system (Jorgensen, 2003).

This act is an historic attempt to impose a result based accountability regime on

public schools across the nation. Its goal is to boost overall student achievement,

narrow a host of learning gaps, and assure that every student receives a highly

qualified teacher (Finn & Hess, 2004). The stated focus of NCLB "is to see

every child in America – regardless of ethnicity, income, or background – achieve

high standards" (U.S. Department of Education, 2003a). All means all,

especially those considered at risk for school failure. Data reporting required

under NCLB must describe the learning journey of each student and the

effectiveness of every school in that effort (Jorgensen, 2003). According to

Stein, Ferguson, and Wisman (2000) this data reporting holds especially true for at risk students.

<div align="center">The At-Risk Student</div>

At risk encompasses a wide range of definitions. According to Robert Morris (2004), the meaning of the term at risk is never very precise, and varies considerable in practice. One generally accepted definition indicates at risk students may be those who are at risk due to several risk factors. These risk factors include: low achievement in school, retention in grade, behavior problems, poor attendance, low socioeconomic status, and attendance at schools with large numbers of poor students (Morris, 2004). Researchers Kea, Trent, and Davis (2002) define at risk students as those who are unlikely to succeed in traditional school settings. The Georgia Department of Education and The Federal Government references *No Child Left Behind* in terms of defining at risk students. According to NCLB the term at risk, when used with respect to a child, youth, or students, means a school aged individual who is at risk of academic failure, has a drug or alcohol problem, is pregnant or is a parent, has come into contact with the juvenile justice system in the past, is at least one year behind the expected grade level for the age of the individual, has limited English proficiency, is a gang member, has dropped out of school in the past, or has a high absenteeism rate at school (section 1432 of NCLB).

The need to help students at risk of school and life failure is indisputable (Morris, 2004). Researchers indicate that improving the educational outcomes for such students is an important issue for educators (Hock, 2001). Specifically,

if educators and school districts are to achieve greater educational successes with students at risk, they must go beyond the more traditional approaches. At risk students need multiple resources in order to succeed. Through appropriate professional development, educators should improve their capabilities of instructing children who are more difficult to educate and considered at risk for school failure (Morris, 2004).

Research suggests that children who are considered at risk are vulnerable to an increased risk for academic or social problems given the presence of specific conditions or demographic characteristics that predict future problems (Stormont, Espinosa, Knipping, & McCathren, 2003). Multiple risk factors can clearly create greater vulnerability in children (Stormont, 2002). According to Kelly (2003) there are factors that lead to academic failure which originate from several sources, including the student, the student's family, the school, and the classroom teacher. Several characteristics within each source are likely to contribute to school failure. For each student, a multitude of factors either promote or discourage academic achievement (Kelly, 2003).

Mentoring

Mentoring is an increasingly popular approach to dealing with the needs of at risk students (Dawson, Gray, & Hester, 2004). Mentoring is generally defined as an one on one relationship between a youth and an older person who is established, and built up over a period of time for the purposes of providing consistent support, guidance and concrete help as the younger person goes through challenging or difficult periods of life (Woodlief, 1997).

According to Carr (1999) mentoring has a long history dating back almost 5000 years in Africa. At that time, mentors were seen as guides to younger people, responsible for their social, physical, intellectual, and spiritual development (Carr, 1999). Still today it appears to hold great promise in assisting at risk youth.   Effective mentoring programs have been linked to improved school outcomes and reduced delinquency (Tierney & Grossman, 2000). According to Kuehr (1997), researchers have produced several studies, particularly within the last decade, to determine the role of mentoring in the lives of those identified as at risk. However, very little research has emerged to sort out the variables or a characteristic that validates or refutes mentoring's positive impact (Kuehr, 1997).

Though mentoring has a long history, it has just recently begun to mature as a field to provide a research base of "best practices" for program development (Dappen & Iserhagen, 2005). Today, educators are looking for ways to better connect with students, particularly those at risk, and mentoring programs are one way to do so (Dappen & Iserhagen, 2005). In particular, there is a growing body of research indicating how mentoring can positively impact youth and target many at risk behaviors (Dappen & Iserhagen, 2005). For example, Tierney and Grossman (1995) found that mentoring programs were linked to improved students' grades, improved relationships with others, and a reduction in drug and alcohol use. Mecca (2001) reported that mentoring can increase the likelihood of students staying in school, deter teen pregnancy, and lessen the probability of gang membership. Curtis and Hasen-Schowoebel (1999) found that mentoring

resulted in a young person who is more likely to trust teachers, achieve a more positive attitude toward school, maintain better attendance, perform higher academically, posses higher self-confidence, express feelings, and experience improved relationships with adults and peers. Jekeilek et al. (2002) found that young people involved in mentoring programs had fewer incidences of hitting and violence towards others, less drug and alcohol use, reduced likelihood of becoming a teen parent, and improved relationships with parents.

Others have found mentoring to be equally effective in rural and nonrural (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2002), as well as urban and nonurban settings (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2003), and with boys as well as girls (Isernhagen & Dappen, 2003; Reed, McMillion, & McBee, 1995, Tierney & Grossman). In reviewing a number of studies, Herrara (1999) emphasized that school based mentoring results in strong relationships that can develop within the school context and these relationships can make a difference in the lives of youth. Although some have criticized the research of mentoring programs because of the lack of rigorous peer reviewed studies (Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, Bogart, Edelman, & Galasso, 2002), a meta-analysis by DuBois, Holoway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) of peer reviewed articles meeting specific evaluation criteria provided support for the effectiveness of mentoring, particularly when best practice is followed and strong relationships are formed.

Researchers suggest that the mentor's attention, support, and guidance helps at risk students feel better about themselves, negotiate problems more effectively, and engage in more appropriate tasks (Keating, et al, 2002). The

exposure to prosocial activities, both through individual interaction and group activities helped to promote a healthier lifestyle (Keating, et al, 2002). Mentoring serves to teach at risk students more effective ways of managing their problems, provide a sense of community, and show them that other students have similar problems they are trying to overcome (Keating, et al, 2002).

There continues to be growing evidence that student mentoring is beneficial for students (Curtis & Hansen-Schowobel, 1999; DuBois et al., 2002; Jekeilek et al., 2001; Mecca, 2001; Rhodes, 2002; Tierney & Grossman, 1995). *The Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program* may be the best known volunteer mentoring program in the United States, matching at risk students with adult mentors (Woodlief, 1997; Keating, et al, 2002). Since the inception of *Big Brothers/ Big Sisters*, numerous mentoring programs have been developed to serve the needs of at risk students and rural students of this nation (Woodlief, 1997).

There are many theoretical reasons to expect that mentorship will help at risk students, mostly within a social support framework (Keating, et al, 2002). Stein, Ferguson, and Wisman (2000) found that at risk students who reported lower levels of social support were more withdrawn, hopeless about their future, inattentive, and harmful to others than were students who reported higher levels of social support. Mentoring provides some of this social support and improves at risk student's functioning (Keating, et. al, 2002).

Federal funding to support the growth of mentoring programs is more readily available and is likely to increase according to Dappen and Iserhagen

(2005). Because of this increase available funding and the universal success of mentoring over other forms of mentoring has resulted in those of authority in school systems seeking out the services of such mentoring programs (Woodlief, 1997).

Mentoring programs for at risk students are growing at a rapid pace across the United States (Keating et al., 2002). Mentoring programs can offer resources such as: curriculum modifications, remedial instruction, parental involvement, student support services, and community support services.

In one of the largest studies in the field, Tierney and Grossman (1995) examined several broad areas that mentoring might affect: antisocial activities, academic performance, attitudes and behaviors, relationships with family, relationships with friends, self concept, and social and cultural enrichment. Researchers have found mentoring to be successful in helping to decrease problematic behaviors, suggesting that exposure to caring adults help at risk students to feel better about themselves and to engage in less destructive behaviors toward themselves and others (Keating, et al, 2002). Tierney and Grossman (1995) concluded that high intensity programs can work. High intensity programs are those with more one on one contact.   Typically these programs meet three times per month for four hours per meeting, with additional contact by phone. These researchers suggested that without intense contact, mentoring is not effective.

The literature supports the importance of building a trusting relationship between mentees and mentors. This trusting relationship is characterized by

mutual sharing of personal information (Dappen & Iserhagen, 2005). Benard (1991) asserted that an adult role model that can demonstrate unconditional love facilitates development of resiliency in children, which, in turn, serves as the basis for mentoring. The researcher further indicated the importance of the presence of at least one caring person, who conveys an attitude of compassion, who accepts the child regardless of the child's behavior, and provides support for healthy development and learning (Benard, 1995).   Work related to resiliency suggests that a caring adult can be the difference in a young person's success (Benard, 1991).   Mentoring relationships can fill the void and provide the caring a person is often lacking, particularly in the lives of at risk students (Dappen & Iserhagen, 2005).

Mentors can serve as models with whom at risk students might identify, leading to increased socially appropriate behavior and reduced delinquent behavior (Keating, et. al, 2002). Researchers have found that increased self esteem, a sense of positive school, peer, and family connectedness reduces negative behaviors in students (King, Vidourek, Davis & McClellan, 2002).   A consistent and nurturing relationship with a mentor fosters a student's ability to learn (Ghezzi, 2003). Researchers indicate that students in unstable environments are left with two physiological responses: fight or flight (Ghezzi, 2003). Only emotional stability allows brain function to improve and learning to take place (Ghezzi, 2003).

Resilience

One of the most compelling priorities on the national educational agenda is to close the achievement gap between those students who are academically successful and those who are at risk of failure (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003). One area of research that has important implications for the educational improvement of students at risk of academic failure is focused on resilient students, or those students who succeed in school despite the presence of adverse conditions (Waxman, et.al, 2003). Nettles, Mucherach, and Jones (2000) reviewed several studies that examined the influence of social resources such as parent, teacher, and school support on students' resilience. These researchers found that access to social resources such as caring parents, participation in extra curricular activities, and supportive teachers were beneficial to students' academic achievement (Nettles, et. al, 2000). The resiliency literature suggests that students who are most likely to survive abusive and neglectful upbrings are those who seek healthy relationships outside the home (Stein, Ferguson, & Wisman, 2000). Mentoring may provide resilient students with such relationships. These relationships transform students (Ghezzi, 2003).

Researchers have made considerable advances in understanding the theory of resilience. The continued investigation of risk and protective processes provides useful avenues for intervention with at risk students (Luthar, et all 2000). The theory is based on the belief that every student has the ability to overcome adversity if important protective factors are present in that student's life (Krovetz, 1999). This theory is founded on the proposition that if members of one's family,

community, and school care deeply about an individual, have high expectations, offer purposeful support, and value a person's participation in the group, that person will maintain a faith in the future and can overcome almost any adversity (Krovetz, 1999). Researchers have found that students who feel supported and cared for are more efficacious in making healthy, informed decisions and display features of resilience to potential life stressors (King, Vidourek, Davis, & McClellan, 2002). The theory of resilience is based on defining the protective factors within the family, school, and community of the student who receives intervention (Krovetz, 1999).

Researchers of school based intervention identify that programs offering safe environments, encouragement and support, empowering activities, and specific guidelines for appropriate behavior contribute to increased self esteem (King, Vidourek, Davis, & McClellan, 2002). Resilient students have four attributes: (1) social competence or the ability to elicit positive responses from others and establish positive relationships with both adults and peers; (2) problem solving skills or the ability to plan, based on seeing oneself in control and on being resourceful in seeking help from others; (3) autonomy or a sense of one's own identity and an ability to act independently and exert some control over one's environment; (4) sense of purpose, have goals, educational aspirations, persistence, hopefulness, and a sense of a bright future (Krovetz, 1999). Many people have these four attributes to some extent. Mentoring programs that successfully incorporate resiliency building activities are associated with student improved attitude toward school, healthier behavior,

fewer absences, detentions, and suspensions (King, Vidourek, Davis & McClellan, 2002).

Whether the attributes are strong enough within a person to help him or her bounce back from adversity depends on whether certain protective factors exist in that person's life (Krovetz, 1999). School based programs can enhance student self esteem by focusing on academic achievement, and connectedness in school, with peers, and within the family (King, Vidourek, Davis & McClellan, 2002).

Krovetz (1999) identified the following as key protective factors needed within the family, school, and community: (1) a caring environment – at least one adult knows the child well and cares deeply about the well being of that child; (2) positive expectations – high, clearly articulated expectations and the purposeful support necessary to meet those expectations exist for the child; (3) participation – the child has responsibilities and other opportunities for meaningful involvement with others.

Schools, in general, do not promote resiliency (Krovetz, 1999). Most schools and most classes are too large, and the school day too harried, for teachers and administrators to consistently provide the three protective factors needed for a resilient environment (Krovetz, 1999). As a result, many students disconnect themselves from school.

Krovetz (1999) identified three main school situations that cause students to give up. Students gave up first because of classroom learning. Many students find classroom learning irrelevant to their lives. Some alienated

students are behind in their academic skills, primarily reading skills. Other students are gifted but bored by the nature of the classes. Both groups of students feel shamed by their teachers for not doing homework, for not performing well, and for their poor grades. These students attend school less regularly. The second reason students give up is physical education classes. Although some alienated students are not athletic, many are excellent athletes.

The Learning Environment

The research of Roberts and Trainor (2004) defined learning as a natural process of pursuing personally meaningful goals; it is a process of discovering and constructing meaning from information and experience, filtered through the learner's unique perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. In other words, personally relevant classroom work contributes directly to student achievement (Roberts & Trainor, 2004). Students must actively construct meaning in order to effectively learn (Roberts & Trainor, 2004). Curiosity, creativity, and high order thinking are stimulated by relevant, authentic learning tasks of optimal difficulty and novelty for each student (Roberts & Trainor, 2004).

Tomlinson (2002) found that students care about learning when their teachers invite them to learn. Teachers extend students invitations to learning when they strive to meet students' need for affirmation, contribution, purpose, power, and challenge in the classroom (Tomlinson, 2002). The American Psychological Association (APA) emphasizes a strong research base supporting the social aspect of learning. The APA research asserts that learning and self esteem are heightened when individuals are in respectful and caring

relationships with others who see their potential, genuinely appreciate their unique talents, and accept them as individuals (Roberts & Trainor, 2004).

Teachers extend learning invitations in many ways (Tomlinson, 2002). Such invitations exist in the way that a teacher addressees students, in the learning environment, in classroom procedures, and in student work that provokes both engagement and understanding (Tomlinson, 2002). According to the research of Stormont, Espinosa, Knipping, and McCathren (2003), successful schools have in common the establishment of positive classroom relationships. The researchers found that these relationships are powerful influences and tend to promote high achievement of all students. Pianta (1999) stated that this approach can be especially important for students living in high risk circumstances where relationships are often compromised.

Philosopher Mortimer Adler argued that American classrooms could be made simultaneously more rigorous and more inclusive (Roberts, 1998). At risk students are challenged when teachers hold high expectations for them (Tomlinson, 2002). Teachers that convey learning invitations through their words and their actions infuse both the learning environment and instruction and make academic content engaging for students (Tomlinson, 2002). In other words, educators could raise intellectual standards while at the same time engaging more students through the use of learning invitations (Roberts, 1998). Adler described three types of teaching and learning: didactic instruction to transmit information, coaching in academic skills, and seminar discussion of ideas and values (Roberts & Billings, 1999). Adler believed that didactic, teacher centered

instruction dominated American classrooms at the expense of the other types of

teaching and learning (Roberts & Trainor, 2004). In schools that closed or

eliminated the achievement gap for at risk students teachers had a basic

commitment in getting students to read (Bell, 2003). According to the Third

International Mathematics and Science Survey, U.S. students whose scores

place them in the bottom quartile were very good at doing the basic (Gordon,

2002).   Results of the survey suggest that students remain at the bottom quartile

because their teachers assume that they are not capable of doing more. Schools

that focus on the basics only for at risk students perpetuate a never ending class

of bottom quartile students (Bell, 2003).

In extensive research with at risk students, one of the most pernicious

problems that at risk students have to overcome is the inability or unwillingness

of their teachers to review material that the students missed, particularly on

quizzes or tests (Bell, 2003). Most at risk students do not "get it" the first time

(Bell, 2003). In successful schools, according to Bell (2003), individual teachers

established a system to automatically reteach information using a different

approach or strategy. Teachers who call only on those who raise their hands are

neglecting the students who need to participate the most (Bell, 2003). Several

random systems of questioning can help teachers make sure all students stay

alert and involved (Bell, 2003). Best practices indicate the importance of the

expectation of all students, especially those at risk for school failure, to use

complete sentences when answering questions (Bell, 2003).   The best learning

takes place when people are passionate about the topic.   Model teachers use methods to involve students emotionally (Bell, 2003).

Closing the achievement gap is a process (Bell, 2003). No single step, activity, or workshop alone provides the final answer.   In general, however, students have at least five needs that teachers can address to make learning irresistible: affirmation, contribution, purpose, power, and challenge (Tomilson, 2002).   Educators must demonstrate patience and persistence (Bell, 2003). Bell (2003) found one factor to be more essential to closing the achievement gap than any other strategy or technique. That one essential strategy is establishing a good relationship with every student. When at risk students sense the relevance and authenticity of classroom work they will commit to the real labor of learning (Roberts & Trainor, 2004). At risk students must sense that academic content is significant, meaningful, relevant, and learning is purposeful (Tomlinson, 2002). All students can learn when they are challenged in a way that they accept as authentic (Roberts & Trainor, 2004). For at risk students, once teachers demonstrate caring they can take their teaching to inspirational teaching, the highest level of teaching. The learning environment is key to meeting student needs (Tomilson, 2002). The mode of instruction is key (Tomilson, 2002). The learning environment and instruction work in tandem to invite, inspire, and sustain student learning (Tomilson, 2002).

Social Support

Children are most certainly social beings. One of the central problems for educators is to decide how children learn to live socially with each other and with

adults (Arthur & Davison, 2000). Tomlinson's (2002) research indicated that student's feel affirmed when they believe that they are accepted, they are safe in the classroom, and that they are cared about by their teacher and peers. Further more, students think of themselves as classroom contributors when they believe that they make a difference and bring unique talents and abilities to the group (Tomlinson, 2002).

According to Arthur and Davison (2000) there are two distinct ways children live socially. The first way is normative and communal. From their culture, children learn customs that provide them with a guide to act in ways that minimize conflict. The second way children live socially is pragmatic and individualistic. The social order of children is created by explicit and implicit agreements entered into by self seeking individuals to avert the worst consequences of their selfish instincts (Arthur & Davison, 2000). The positive relationship between social support and an individual's physical and mental well being has provided the impetus for a great deal of research on the clinical utility of social support for individuals and groups (Richman, Rosenfeld & Bowen, 1998).

Social support has been widely studied as a variable specifically designed to promote the developmental and adaptation of children and adolescents. Support has been indicated in research as useful for working with adolescent depression, improving academic and behavioral adjustment, supporting high risk youth and their families, and reducing delinquent behaviors that correlate highly with poor school performance (Richman, Rosenfeld & Bowen, 1998).

Researchers indicate high self esteem serves as a protective factor for at risk

students (King, Vidourek, Davis & McClellan, 2002). Furthermore, the literature

on risk and protective factors and educational resilience clearly endorses the

primacy of the supportive role provided by the family, the peer group, the school,

and the community in predicting positive outcomes for students (Benard, 1991;

Bogenschneider, 1996; Richman & Bowen, 1997; Wang, Haertel & Walberg,

1994).

At risk students seek affirmation that they are significant in the classroom

(Tomilson, 2002). When that sense of affirmation is lacking, learning is at risk

(Tomilson, 2002). In the school environment, high levels of self esteem increase

the likelihood that youth will connect positively to peers, teachers, and the school

as a whole. These are important determinants of academic success (King, et al,

2002).

Social support is often less present in the lives of children and youth who

are at risk of school failure (Richman & Bowen, 1998). By understanding

provider networks, students' support patterns, and the effect of support on school

performance outcomes, implications may be drawn for the use of social support

as an intervention strategy for children and youths at risk of school failure.

Analyses of school outcomes data from the research of Richman and

Bowen (1998) found particular types of social support were associated with

desirable school outcomes. School satisfaction was affected by the receipt of

three different types of social support: emotional support, emotional challenge

support, and reality confirmation support. Other effects were unique to each type

of social support. Grades were affected by listening support. This is thought to impact grades because students who feel listened to have a greater sense of educational self efficacy. Prosocial behavior by personal assistance and attendance by technical challenge support are also postulated to affect desirable school outcomes (Richman & Bowen, 1998). No research analysis indicates negative consequences for students who received social support (Richman & Bowen, 1998). Researchers consistently indicate that the receipt of social support is related to some positive school outcome.

Characteristics of Effective Mentoring Programs

Increasing pressure on schools to improve academic performance and meet academic standards has compelled educators to look for ways to help students succeed (Herrera, 2000). According to researchers, mentoring could help fill this need (Herrera, 2000). Mentoring provides students with one on one attention based on their specific needs (Herrera, 2000).

Summary

The publication of the 1983 *A Nation At Risk* led to an education reform wave known as the "excellence movement". Many researchers have credited this prominent report as the catalyst for nation-wide education reform movements. According to the report, part of what was at risk was the promise first made on this continent. It included a promise that all, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can

hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself.

Students considered at risk for school failure are included in the promise for all children. Researchers have found that while society is changing, demographics are changing, and so, too, must educational beliefs and practices change. Conditions are such that schools play a major part in the rehabilitation of children. Rehabilitation can be done by assisting the present generation of students, many of whom are at risk, through effective mentoring programs within or linked to the schools. It is from this realization that the impetus comes to create schools that indeed work for all children, especially children considered at risk for school failure.

The understanding educators and other researchers share regarding societal pitfalls facing today's students suggest mentoring programs as an appropriate intervention to be employed in schools. Researchers suggest that mentoring programs speak to the necessity of addressing the basic physical and psychological needs that children have. They have found that mentoring programs address needs that must be met before successful education can take place for many at risk students.

Mentoring appears to hold great promise in assisting at risk students. Researchers have produced several studies to determine its role in the lives of those students considered at risk. This study represented an effort to determine the characteristics of effective mentoring programs for at risk students as

perceived by selected Georgia principals. Table 2.1 indicates the major literature review analysis in regards to the study.

Table 2.1

Major Literature Review Analysis

Author / Year	Major Finds from Study	Type of Study
Bonny, Britto, Klostermann, Hornung, & Slap, 2000	School disconnectedness	quantitative
Cooper, 2000	Interventions in schools to support societal changes	qualitative
Dappen & Iserhagen, 2005	The need for significant adults in the lives of at risk students	qualitative
Dawson, Gray, Hester, 2004	Program evaluation: creating a caring environment	qualitative
DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002	Best practices for mentoring programs	quantitative
Horn & Adelman, 1997	Positive role intervention plays In helping at risk students	qualitative
King, Vidourek, Davis, & McClellan, 2002	Self esteem and school connectedness	quantitative
Kuehr, 1997	Mentoring relationships associated with improved grades, attitude, and self esteem	qualitative
Turner, 2004	Successful students display characteristics of resilience	quantitative
Waxman, Gray, & Padron 2003	Classroom learning environment factor contributing to school success	qualitative

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research study was designed to explore the effective characteristics of mentoring programs for at risk students as perceived by selected Georgia principals. This particular section of the study was devoted to presenting a description of the design and methods used in conducting the study. There are five major topics addressed in this section: (1) design, (2) data collection / research design, (3) participants, (4) instrumentation, and (5) data analysis. The five major topics were used to answer the overarching research question and sub questions in the form of qualitative methodology. It is the intent of the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the effective characteristics of mentoring programs as it relates to at risk students through the use of qualitative methodology.

Research Questions

The study is designed to answer the following major research question: What are the characteristics of mentoring programs perceived by principals as most effective for at risk students? The related sub questions that were used to aid the researcher are:

3. What factors do principals associate with successful mentoring programs?

4. What evidence of mentoring success can be articulated by the principal?

Procedures

Research Design

The following research design was used in an exploration of mentoring programs with regard to at risk students. The overarching research question was deliberate in order to gain a deeper understanding of the selected principals' perceptions of mentoring programs, while using the related sub questions to generate data appropriate for responding to the overarching research question.

Given the limited research about successful mentoring programs for the at risk student the researcher gathered data using qualitative methodology. Based on the literature, qualitative methodology permitted the researcher to understand human behavior in its natural setting from the viewpoint of those involved (Nardi, 2003). Researchers have found qualitative methodology to focus on the pragmatic, interpretive, and lived experiences of people (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Given this knowledge, the benefits of this form of methodology provided strength to the study in elaborating on research that delves in depth into complexities and processes. This design allowed the researcher to elicit in depth information from the participants themselves.

It can be difficult to understand human actions without understanding the meaning that participants attribute to those actions – their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive worlds. The specific aspects of this study lended itself to qualitative design. Therefore, the researcher aimed to understand the deeper perspectives captured through face to face interaction (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In depth interviews will provide this valuable interaction.

The researcher used in-depth interviews as a primary means of gathering data in order to identify emerging themes, patterns, and categories. The purpose of the interviews will be to have selected principals reflect on their perceptions of the effective characteristics of mentoring programs in regards to at risk students.

Historically, methodologists have described three major purposes for qualitative research: (1) to explore, (2) to explain, and (3) to describe the phenomenon of interest (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Qualitative methodology proved to be valuable to understanding, to developing, or to discovering individual's feelings and perceptions. It enabled the researcher to show a relationship between principals' perceptions of mentoring programs and at risk students as well as the meaning this relationship has on at risk students' school performance.

It was the goal of the researcher to identify selected principals' perceptions of characteristics that make mentoring programs effective for at risk students. Qualitative methodology enabled the researcher to capture the richness of the study by allowing the use of descriptive research techniques to provide data describing the research topic and participants perceptions from their lived experiences.

Population

In order to draw the research sample, the researcher began by identifying Georgia principals whose schools mentoring programs have designed for at risk students. Through consultation with The Georgia Department of Education, the researcher secured a listing of schools with documented effective mentoring

programs targeting at risk students based on student achievement. This group

then served as the research sample.

Participants

The researcher used a purposive sampling procedure to select nine

schools. Schools will be chosen based upon meeting the criteria of addressing

at risk students and also successful by measure of student achievement. The

selected schools were designated as rural, urban, or suburban. It was the intent

of the researcher to purposely select three rural schools, three urban schools,

and three suburban schools. Specifically, nine Georgia principals were selected

from the returned questionnaires and demographic data sheets.

Instrumentation

Qualitative procedures were be used to conduct the study. This format

allowed the researcher to assess perceptions of principals along with related

demographic data.   In depth interviews were the primary means for data

collection. These in depth interviews consisted of a variety of questions which

will garner the principals' initial perceptions of the school's mentoring program.

The questions followed the format of open ended, unstructured, and closed. The

researcher was ultimately be able to identify trends in the perceptions and

opinions expressed. The in depth interviews were validated using content

validity which uses the consensus among researchers to evaluate its measures.

Content validity was used to ensure that the in depth interviews measure what it

says it will measure. It was the intent of the researcher to ask meaningful

questions that provide sufficient coverage of the research question and sub

questions. Interview questions were reviewed by a panel of experts in the field of education. The subjective opinion from such experts established the face validity of the interview questions.

Data Collection

After the study was approved by the Georgia Southern University IRB, a list of schools with documented mentoring programs by the Georgia Department of Education was obtained. Each identified school's principal was mailed a questionnaire, demographic data sheet, and cover letter developed by the researcher, inviting them to participate in the study. Returned questionnaires and demographic data sheets indicated consent to further participation.

The researcher purposefully selected nine principals with mentoring programs, as a sample group, targeting at risk students. The sample group represented three rural schools, three urban schools, and three suburban schools. Each participating principal was contacted to arrange an in-depth interview including structured and unstructured questions. The primary strategy was to capture the deep meaning of experience in the principals' own words (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Interview questions were tape recorded and then transcribed by a professional legal transcriptionist. Before analysis all data was coded.

The qualitative methodology used provided a nonstatistical, written description of perceptions of the program's effectiveness. The data collected consist of textual descriptions of selected mentoring programs and the characteristics that principals perceived to be most effective. Demographic data

sheets provided data on student demographics and data supporting the principal's perceptions of their mentoring program. The researcher used detailed descriptions from participants as a means of answering the overarching researcher question and sub questions.

Data Analysis

The data to be analyzed included information relating to principals' perceptions of the effective characteristics of their mentoring programs in areas such as: attendance, discipline, and standardized test scores. This information provided a structured foundation for the study. According to Stauss and Corbin (1997) qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data. It builds grounded theory. Specifically, in using in depth interviews and data analysis, the researcher gained a more in-depth understanding of the principals' perceptions. All data was analyzed to identify emerging themes, categories, and patterns.

The methodology permitted the researcher to access information from participants in order to determine the perceived effective characteristics of mentoring programs with respect to at risk students by measure of student achievement in areas such as: attendance, discipline, and standardized test scores. The researcher attempted to limit bias in the presentation of data through the use of a second reader. Data was conveyed the way it is presented. The researcher had no control over "what is" and only measured what already exist in regards to mentoring programs. The data from the study was compiled and presented qualitatively.

Summary

The study was designed to examine the perceptions of selected Georgia principals in regards to the effective characteristics of mentoring programs for at risk students. Qualitative methodology was used to guide the researcher. The overarching research question and sub questions was addressed the major research topic in order to generate appropriate data. The researcher used in depth interviews as a primary means of collecting data. A purposeful sample of nine Georgia principals were interviewed using structured and unstructured questions. Through the use of demographic data forms the researcher ensured that the demographics of the purposefully sampled group will resemble the overall demographics of the state of Georgia. Chapter 4 will report the detailed findings of the research study.

CHAPTER 4

REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This study examined the characteristics of effective mentoring programs

for at risk students as perceived by selected Georgia principals. The questions

asked in this study centered on gaining a more in depth understanding of

principals' perceptions of mentoring programs targeting at risk students. The

fundamental research question of the study was: What are the characteristics of

mentoring programs perceived by principals as most effective for at risk

students? Additionally, two sub questions were designed to explore the

fundamental research question:

1.   What factors do principals associate with successful mentoring programs?

2.   What evidence of mentoring success can be articulated by the principal?

This chapter gives an analysis of the data collected through scheduled in

depth interviews. A qualitative approach was used to give a deeper

understanding of the perceptions of these principals to tell their stories, which are

rich in experience and knowledge. This chapter represents an analysis of the

data collected through the use of in depth interviews. The in depth interview

questions were designed to answer the research questions identified by the

investigator. Through the use of qualitative research the investigator was able to

draw on an inductive process in which themes and categories emerged through

the analysis of data collected. Participating principals were designated as

respondents 1 through 9. All respondents were asked the same questions in the

in depth interview, without deviation, to aid in the validity and reliability of their responses. When brief responses were given, respondents were probed for more information.

The in depth interview questions were based on themes that emerged from the review of literature concerning mentoring programs for at risk students. The in depth interview questions were designed to gather information on the following:

1. Academic and behavior needs of at risk students

2. Role educators play

3. Addressing needs through mentoring

4. Benefits of mentoring programs

5. Closing the achievement gap

6. Failure of at risk students

7. Key to improving success of at risk students

8. Characteristics of an effective teacher

9. Characteristics of an effective mentoring program

10. Factors associated with success and evidence of success

Table 4.1 reflects a qualitative research item analysis of each in depth interview question. The qualitative item analysis aided the researcher in the interpretation of participant's responses as they specifically related to the findings of other researchers. These findings will be discussed later in Chapter 5.

Table 4.1

Qualitative Research Item Analysis

_____

Item	Researcher	IQ	RQ

_____

Item	Researcher	IQ	RQ
1. Academic / Behavior	Kuehr, 1997	1	2
2. Educator's Role	Waxman, Gray & Pardon, 2003	2	1,2
3. Addressing Needs	Bonny, Britto, Klostermann, Hornung & Slap, 2000	3	1,OA
4. Benefits of Programs	Dawson & Iserhagen, 2005 DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002 Terney & Grossman, 1996	4	1,2
5. Achievement Gaps	Cooper, 2000 Waxman, Gray & Pardon, 2003	5	1,2
6. Student Failures	Bonny, Britto, Klostermann, Hornung & Slap, 2000 Cooper, 2000 Dappen & Iserhagen, 2005 Turner, 2004	6	1,2,OA
7. Improving Success	King, Vidourek, Davis & McClellan, 2002 Kuehr, 1997 Turner, 2004 Horn & Adelman, 1997	7	1,2
8. Characteristics of Effective Teachers	Waxman, Gray & Padron, 2003	8	1
9. Characteristics of Effective Programs	Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002	9	1,2, OA
10. Evidence of Success	Dawson, Gray, Hester, 2004	10	2

*IQ = interview question
  RQ = research question
  OA = overarching question

Nine participants were chosen by purposive sampling and contacted by email and phone to arrange interview appointments. All of the principals were interviewed in their respected offices.

All nine respondents had direct experience in working with at risk students. The amount of knowledge and experience each respondent expressed in relation to mentoring programs and at risk students varied. In addition, each respondent addressed the specific needs of at risk students differently within the school setting. For example, one respondent addressed mentoring through a boys and girls forum. While two respondents used teachers within the school to adopt a child. Other respondents indicated they had an established mentoring program within their school setting.

The respondents' leadership experience varied from two years up to eleven years in his or her current school. The designation of location was intended to be equally divided among the three categories of suburban, rural, and urban.   However, the participants consisted of 100% of those returning the required demographic data profile consenting to participate. These participants represented two categories of suburban and urban designations of location. Three of the participants in the study were from small elementary schools whose student enrollment ranged from 405 to 507 in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Four of the participants were from medium to large size middle schools whose student enrollment ranged from 535 to 943 in sixth through eighth grade. Two of the participants represented large high schools whose enrollment ranged from 980 to 1100 in ninth through 12th grade.

Table 4.2 illustrates data received from each participating principal's school demographic profile. Table 4.3 reflects demographic data for each principal.

Data Analysis

After refining the research tool by reviewing the research design with the researcher's supervising committee, the principal's or participant's perspective was chosen as the most appropriate manner by which to conduct in depth interviews of respondents. The interview consisted of 10 questions. Nine interviewees were chosen by purposive sampling consisting of all nine principals who returned the demographic data sheet. Each was contacted by email and phone to arrange interview appointments. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed into a word processed format. After reviewing the informed consent documentation each respondent granted final written permission to allow the researcher to use the data from the interviews for the present study.

The responses to the in depth interview questions were sorted by the two research sub questions in order to establish a foundation for the analysis. This formed the core of the researcher's qualitative inquiry in regards to the study. It also set up the framework for identifying the common themes, behaviors, and practices that may have contributed to the success of mentoring programs targeting at risk students.

The purpose of the in depth interviews was to guide the investigator in generating appropriate data to answer the overarching research question and sub questions as well as capture the lived experiences of each participants. In

Table 4.2

Demographic Profile of Schools

Respondent	Level	Number Of Students	Location of School	Largest Ethnic Population
R1	Elementary	430	Suburban	90% Black
R2	Middle	943	Urban	92% Black
R3	High	980	Suburban	94% Black
R4	Elementary	507	Urban	100% Black
R5	Middle	535	Urban	95% Black
R6	Elementary	405	Urban	99% Black
R7	Middle	597	Urban	100% Black
R8	Middle	865	Urban	81% Black
R9	High	1100	Urban	86 % Black

Table 4.3

Demographic Data of Principals

Respondent	Gender	Degree Level	Ethnicity	Years as Principal
R1	Female	Ed.D	Black	7 years
R2	Male	Ed.S	Black	3 years
R3	Male	Ed.S	Black	11 years
R4	Female	Ed.S	Black	3 years
R5	Male	Ed.S	Black	2 years
R6	Female	Ed.D	Black	2 years
R7	Female	Ed.S	Black	7 years
R8	Male	Ed.D	Black	5 years
R9	Male	Ed.D	White	4 years

depth interviewing has been best described by Marshall and Rossman (1999) as "a conversation with a purpose". The research design allowed for participants' perspectives on the characteristics of effective mentoring programs for at risk students to unfold as the participant viewed it, lowering bias from the researcher's perspective. In depth interviews allowed the participant to convey understanding and knowledge about their experiences with mentoring programs targeting at risk students.

<div align="center">Editing the Text</div>

Each respondent was assigned a number 1, 2, 3, etc…, according to the order of their interview date and the remarks of each are represented by that assigned number throughout the findings of the data analysis. In the citations for the quotes by the respondents, the respondents are designated as R1, R2, R3, etc. The researcher edited the contents by omitting any references to actual persons, actual school districts, geographic locations in Georgia, etc. with generic terms to insure the respondent's confidentiality. Passages were edited to avoid repetition or to circumvent comments that were not pertinent to the primary focus of the interview question by using ellipsis (…) instead of the actual text of the transcripts.

The full transcripts were too lengthy to incorporate in their entirety in the present study. Therefore, the researcher felt a professional requirement to make the raw data available to other researchers who might want to validate the findings of the study or to use the data in investigating related or tangential issues not addressed herein. Accordingly, copies of the transcripts, edited for

confidentiality of the respondents, will remain on file in two locations: the office of

the researcher at the address listed on the informed consent documentation; and

the office of the Professor Walter Polka at the Department of Leadership,

Technology, and Human Development, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro,

Georgia.

Demographics

Education statistics for the school districts served by the nine participants

in this study was obtained from The National Center of Education Statistics and

The Georgia Department of Education and published in 2005.

Table 4.4 illustrates specific demographic information about the school

district of the participants. The source of this data was taken from The National

Center for Education Statistics and The Georgia Department of Education.

Research Question 1

What factors do principals associate with successful mentoring programs?

The researcher sought to identify factors principals associated with successful

mentoring programs with regard to at risk students. Despite the fact that there

did not seem to be a mutually agreed upon factor or factors among researchers,

respondents did point out several factors that they considered successful for

mentoring programs. These factors were much the same as those mentioned by

researchers and educators throughout the related research. With this view in

mind, the researcher designed in depth interview questions 1 through 5 to

examine the following areas: academic and behavioral needs of students,

Table 4.4

the role educators play, addressing student needs through mentoring, the benefits of mentoring programs, and closing the achievement gap for at risk students.

Academic and Behavioral Needs

In depth interview question 1: *How does your school address the academic and behavioral needs of at risk students?* Despite the fact that researchers were not in clear agreement with regard to addressing the academic and behavioral needs of students, several characteristics were revealed in the interviews conducted by the investigator.

A breakdown of the like responses from the participants reveals the following categories: respondents 5, 7, 8, and 9 addressed the needs of at risk students through differentiated learning, individual student success plans, and behavior intervention plans. They emphasized:

> "…98% are minority students 99.5% are on free and reduced lunch so we have a tremendous at risk population; Many coming from housing projects and many from shelters. How we work with our student's academic achievements we have individual student plans so we know their strengths and weaknesses and what we need to work on in those areas. With our behavior plans we work with students on different issues as far as behavior is concerned with behavior contracts." (R5)

> "Most of our students have a student instructional plan. And that is where teachers give a pretest to see where their needs are. Once they are given that pretest we are suppose to differentiate instruction based on what the students' need…. As far as behavior some of the students have a Behavior Intervention Plan. And right now we're working on pyramids of intervention. You know that's the new thing within the past year we've been learning about… We are doing the different tiers to meet the at risk needs with academics and behavior before just testing the child for special education. We are trying to put some interventions in place using the pyramid of interventions and student instructional plans." (R7)

> "We address our at risk students in a number of ways… We use a large amount of different strategies like differentiated instruction. We use individual success student plans and we use mentoring. The mentoring

component also leads into our discipline component where we use a rewards based system as a motivator to help students who are not behaving get on the right track." (R8)

"We address the needs of our students through appropriate assessments. We emphasize the importance of differentiated learning and looking at data to drive the learning needs of our students. Behaviorally we address problems through behavior intervention plans, through student support team meetings, and through conferences with parents or care givers regarding the child. We also have incentives here at the school to encourage or motivate students to do well in school….Once behavior is managed learning begins by meeting their individual needs." (R9)

Next, respondents 1, 3, and 4 used Saturday School Programs, After

School Programs, and other testing data to meet at risk student's needs. They

reported the following:

"…we have the EIP Program, we have Saturday School, and we have After School. Identification techniques we use are things like the testing data, CRCT, Iowa testing, teacher observation, report card – anything that's going to give us an account of what we need to do in order to get them on level. The benchmarks we use all of that as well." (R1)

"…we use test scores to find out basically where the students are. Specifically the Criterion Reference Test that when students come from middle school we look at those scores. And what we do is assign them to selected teachers that we know are able to work with at risk students…we also go into the community and get volunteers or mentors to come in and work with out students on Saturday and After School…" (R3)

"We currently have an assessment program with our core reading program that we assess weekly. We also have Saturday School, and it's a Saturday scholar program to address students who are below grade level. And we also have an After School Program. Students are picked by certain criteria: below 300 on the CRCT test, teacher made test, and also a referral from a teacher." (R4)

Respondent 2 found co-teaching along with good teaching strategies and

good plans beneficial in addressing at risk students.

"For academics we use inclusion – co teaching method. We find that students learn better when they are all together in an inclusive environment – a least restrictive environment. The at risk students and

also the students with behaviors must be addressed and it must be addressed early by having good strategies and good plans to prevent a lot of disruptions in school." (R2)

However, respondent 6 assigned at risk students to a strong teacher in terms of discipline and instruction so that their needs were better met. This respondent stated:

"Academically we try to spread them out so that all the bad children won't be in one class – that's the first thing. Second thing is we usually get them with the stronger teacher as far as discipline and instruction – because when you are dealing with instruction the less time they will have to misbehave. Also we partner with the Boys and Girls Club and other male mentoring programs to work with at risk children." (R6)

Role of Educators

In depth interview question 2: *What role do you feel educators play in the education of the at risk students?* An examination of the responses for in depth question 2 revealed the following categories: respondents 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 felt that educators play a vital part in the lives of at risk students. These seven principals had similar responses in feeling educators should serve as role models and motivators that set high expectations for at risk students.

"We play a very important part. I think the main part is the motivator. We Need to get them motivated and get them believing in themselves and we have to have high expectations. So I think if we set parameters and set the bar high for our at risk students." (R1)

"I think at risk students need role models. They don't always have family Members who have gone beyond high school or they my have dropped out of high school. Several of my students live in public housing areas. I am lucky to have four young males that work here and they play a good role as far as providing good role models….giving the students encouragement motivation that they can succeed and get out of the projects and get a job….they need responsibility and someone to believe in them and that helps them have hope." (R4)

"I believe you are only as strong as your weakest link and if the principal is not strong in supporting at risk students and trying to find instruction and activities to keep them involved then it's not going to work. You have to set high expectations all the time….you can't lower the bar and make them think it's okay and keep passing them on." (R6)

"The educator's role is the most important role. As I tell my teachers we've got to pretend none of them have a parent. Because we can't control what goes on at home; even though it is technically the home's responsibility we can't depend on that. I think out role is the most important role there is especially when it comes to students that would be normally thrown away by somebody…as educators we've got to know I may be the only person that will ever be able to touch a child's life. And why is there such a phrase as "at risk"? As educators we need to get rid of that and we can only do it through our attitudes and actions toward the students. So if we really make them feel loved and let them know we care and want them to learn…when you motivate kids and really make them feel "I know I can do it" those children will produce for you…." (R7)

"Educators play a tremendous role in educating at risk students, primarily because an at risk student is probably going to have most of their difficulties come from outside the school community. Therefore, it is imperative that school officials, educators, or anybody in charge – bus drivers, lunchroom personnel – anybody that works in a public school is pretty much duty bound to help the at risk students, because if they don't help them now then they will end up having to help them later." (R8)

"Educators play a very important role in educating all students and at risk students in particular. They are the motivators. They are the role models for at risk students. Educators give students hope by working with them unconditionally every day. You hear of unconditional love – well educators must posses that to some extent. At risk students need someone in their lives who show they care about their well being. Once a student knows and feels that you care for them, they will work hard at gaining your praise…Educators must be willing to take a student from where they are and move them to where they want them to be. This can be done through patience and high expectations…" (R9)

Two of the seven respondents emphasized the fact that educators must demonstrate love for their students. These two respondents stressed that at risk students must "feel" that you care about them individually in order for them to begin to value education.

Respondents 2 and 3 stated the importance of educators understanding the

whole child. Being able to understand at risk students enables you to educate

them better, according to these respondents.   They commented to the effect,

> "You must understand the whole child. From a counselor's perspective
> you need to understand the level of the child's maturity that you're dealing
> with. In my case, middle school is a very difficult period for children. You
> must be able to comprehend and understand that it's just not that child this
> is a developmental stage. We all go through developmental states in our
> lives and the middle school child has a difficulty time during the adolescent
> period. So you must understand the adolescent child in order to address
> this child." (R2)

> "They play a major role, because first of all you have to be able to
> understand at risk students and be able to deal with at risk students. If
> they are not able to deal with students, they are not going to be able to
> help them to be successful in the academic progress and in school
> whether that be middle school or high school on any level." (R3)

Addressing Needs of Students

In depth interview question 3: *Do you see mentoring programs as a valid*

option for addressing the diverse needs of at risk students? If so, what are its

benefits? Every respondent felt that mentoring programs was a valid option for at

risk students. Specifically, principals viewed mentoring programs beneficial in the

following ways: providing students with field trips or exposure to different

experiences, affording students with a consistent one on one caring adult to bond

with, and offering support and resources to at risk students. One respondent

made reference to research in terms of mentoring programs by stating:

> "Research will show you that mentoring programs are an excellent way to
> address the needs of at risk students. The problem with mentoring
> programs in addressing the needs of the students is like anything else in
> education – special education or anything else – are you addressing the
> right students in the mentoring program? Do you have the mentoring
> program to address the needs of the students? And most importantly do

you have the right staff members in those problems to deal with the right students?" (R8)

Other respondents stated:

"You can never have too much support and too many resources for a child who's at risk. A mentoring program is just another avenue, another resource, another way to reach that child, another door that can open to hopefully get them over some things and through some things. So I see mentoring programs as very beneficial." (R1)

"There are many strategies that you can use. Mentoring is one of them. Having a mentoring program or an advisee type program is part of our middle school program. The middle school concept was designed to help those students get through the middle stages. A lot of people do not take advantage of counseling and mentoring and parental involvement, but it is very crucial and essential for a school to be successful." (R2)

"Yes, I do and it is not an option. It is something that will assist the educational process with the students here at school and also in the community." (R3)

"Yes, absolutely mentoring plays a key role. The thing with mentoring programs is that we are who we are because of the experiences that we have and what mentors bring to the table are those experiences that they have had so that our students can see through their eyes those kinds of things that or experiences that the mentors have and also to involve students in those types of experiences – take them on field trips…so yes mentoring programs are a very valid option." (R5)

"Yes, when you have a strong mentoring program with people that are Committed to the program and don't have aspiring agendas…."(R6)

"If the mentor is actually going to be a part of the child's life, yes because the mentor can play a parenting role. Not take the place of mom or dad, but can pick up in those weak areas that mom or dad may lack…A mentor can pick up that piece where the child is actually lacking the parent part. And I think a good mentor would take the child and expose them to areas that they may not every been exposed to before, not just dining – I mean the arts, cultural things. Those mentors can be beneficial." (R7)

"Mentoring programs can help students by giving them a consistent adult or person to build a rapport with and talk with about issues in school and outside issues as well. Students tend to see mentors as an "outsider" and to some extend that helps them open up about issues at home or school. An "outsider" won't hold it against them in the classroom – while a teacher

may. The "outsider" has some experiences that are similar to the student's experiences and can guide them in making good decisions about what they are going through. It is very important that mentors are a positive force in the lives of students. Mentors and mentoring programs provide the much needed support that students need all around them." (R9)

Benefits of Mentoring Program

In depth interview question 4: *Has your mentoring program been beneficial to improving achievement and retention rates for at risk students? What evidence or data can you share to support your answer (attendance records, grades, and discipline records)?* The information gathered with this interview question allows the researcher to gauge the awareness of each respondent with regard to how their mentoring program impacts student achievement. All nine respondents have observed improved student results in regards to attendance, discipline and grades of those targeted for school based mentoring program. All nine respondents attributed this improvement to the mentoring program. In terms of discipline one respondent indicated:

> "In the area of discipline – it has helped the discipline. We've seen a tremendous drop in the number of referrals. Also, when we look at those two areas (attendance and discipline) naturally we don't know if the mentoring program is a direct result or has a direct impact on student grades and academic. But, we do know that having students' suspended less, in trouble less, and in school more has had an impact. So I guess you can say all the way around that the mentoring program is successful in addressing all those areas (attendance, grades, and discipline)." (R8)

Other respondents indicated:

> "…her behavior improved… she had some problems and so she still had some suspension, but I don't think she would have had so few had she not had a mentor…." (R7)

> "…they feel accepted in the school. Their attendance has improved. Their behavior has definitely improved, because they don't want to be

removed from the mentoring program; And their grades as a result of improved attendance and behavior has improved…" (R9)

"…attendance is really good and I think a lot of that is because sometimes this is the only safe place that they have… So it (mentoring program) improved retention, discipline and grades." (R4)

"Almost immediately when students became involved with other individuals there was a marked decrease in behavior. There was more of an effort to do well academically and it goes to students feeling that someone cares…but we have some increased improvements in academics and decrease behavior." (R5)

Closing the Achievement Gap

In depth interview question 5: *What efforts have been most successful in helping your staff to close the achievement gap among at risk students?* The information found in this area was also used to examine research question number 1. This information allowed the researcher to have a better idea of how each school addressed the specific needs of at risk students. Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 used tutoring, extra time on task through extended learning periods during the school day, use of supplemental services such as - After School and Saturday School Programs, and teacher professional development in the area of the at risk child.

"The EIP Program is an excellent way to work on closing the achievement gap…Our EIP teachers are very strong and the go into the classrooms. They pull children out as well…we've even had our paraprofessionals work with some of the children who didn't make benchmark or having problems. We've had parents to come in….We've done some home visits…We've tried to have parents come by and do workshops with them to tell them about things they need to work on at home…" (R1)

"Well, giving them extra… It's called time on task. The only way you are going to do it is by giving them more by having additional classes. Now this is a thing where you give extended learning periods. We made our classes 80 minutes long where they are traditionally 55 minutes. All our academic classes: math, language arts, science, and social studies are 80

minutes long…Time on task by having required more concentration in that academic area. If they (students) don't get it the first time, they get a second chance. That's not totally all of it. Then we go to our After School Program…Now students can be in a program where they get extra help one on one with a very small ration (teacher student ratio)… The newest program is our transition program for 5th graders coming to 6th grade. This is exclusive for 5th graders who will be 6th graders the summer before and all year during that 6th grade year. They get extra mentoring, counseling… There is where they get the most mentoring. We have psychiatrist, we have a social worker, counselor, and we have all kinds of physical activities and academics. This is so that they will make that adjustment and transition into middle school. And to prevent them from becoming a statistic and being a problem child." (R2)

"We have programs for After School Program. We also have Saturday School Programs. We also have the rising Freshmen Program. The rising Freshmen Program identifies those students who are quote unquote at risk. Then we have during the summer where we give them different classes on organizational skills, social skills, and also give them an opportunity to view the school and facilities here so they want be really lost once they get in the shuffle with the others." (R3)

"At the beginning of the year we had a staff celebration. We set goals for the whole school. Staff members volunteered them planning time to tutor students to make sure they were prepared for the CRCT. We have teachers that work Saturday School and these are our best teachers. They are concerned about the students and they want them to be successful. We have professional development and book studies on reading. So staff members recognize the importance of not only *Leave No Child Behind*, but they recognize the importance of making children more successful." (R4)

"We have tutoring. What we started is having teachers to tutor during their planning time so that during the school day there is additional tutoring that goes on here for the students. Also, being a Title I school supplemental services are provided so there is Sylvan Learning and there's DeJour Learning and other agencies that pick the students up after school and those types of things that assisted in closing that achievement gap." (R5)

Three respondents addressed closing the achievement gap through

individualized student instructional plans, differentiated learning opportunities for

students, students interacting with technology, reviewing student and school wide

data to meet instructional needs, setting and monitoring student progress through

timely benchmarks, learning focused instruction, and teachers using multiple

teaching strategies to deliver instruction. Respondent 6 felt diversity training in

particular would help staff members "understand how to deal with the kids in their

population". This respondent went on to stress that "just because you worked in

an inner city or at risk school all these years does not mean you know what

you're doing."

> "First of all we've been in diversity training so that they can understand
> how to deal with the kids in our population…Because I explained to them
> (teachers) that just because you worked in an inner city or at risk school
> all these years doesn't mean you know what you're doing…we have had
> someone come in and talk about diversity and developing relationships. A
> lot of our teachers develop relationships with the kids outside of the
> school. They take them out to ear for honor roll…So it's a couple of things
> that we do and I just see an overall love for the children from most of the
> faculty, not all… because they build those relationships outside the
> classroom which helps." (R6)

<p align="center">Research Question 2</p>

What evidence of mentoring success can be articulated by the principal?

The researcher sought to gain each participant's knowledge of evidence of

successful mentoring within their school setting. With this view in mind, the

researcher designed in depth interview questions 6 through 10 to examine the

following areas: at risk students' failure despite efforts of the school, the key to

improving success in school for at risk students, types of teachers who work best

with at risk students, characteristics of effective mentoring programs, and

evidence to illustrate successful mentoring programs.

Student Failure

In depth interview question 6: *Are there at risk students who fail despite*

the school's efforts? If so, what reasons can you give? There were a variety of

answers to this particular question. Respondents 1, 4, 5, and 9 stated that they

believed at risk students failed despite efforts of the school due to a breakdown

in the home and community / neighborhood or peer pressures. These four

respondents felt that these reasons created barriers to achievement in school for

at risk students. While respondents 7 and 8 stressed the following during their

interview in regards to at risk students failing despite the efforts of the school:

> "…we don't live in a utopia and no matter how much we (educators) try or how hard we try or how many people try – we are going to have that handful of students that are not going to listen to anybody….who honestly will not be motivated… who honestly until they make the decision that I'm going to do better, nothing that anybody says or does will help them. And it's going to be that way until the end of time. So that part doesn't really bother me. It bothers me that we (educators) don't try…" (R7)

> "Well, that's one of the fallacies of *No Child Left Behind* in that 100% of the kids will do 100% of anything… so of course you are going to have some students that are not going to meet the academic mark nor the discipline mark. .. also a large amount of at risk students, especially minority at risk students, are improperly placed in special education programs. And an improper placement causes more detriment to the child being successful…." (R8)

Other respondents suggested additional reasons for at risk students failing in

school despite efforts of the school. Respondent 2 felt that students failed

"because they did not participate exclusively in the mentoring program or either

they had some underlining factors" that the school was not aware of.

Respondent 3 alleged at risk students failed despite school efforts due to a

possible learning disability. However, respondent 6 believed students failed due

to being "lazy or just not caring".

Key to Improving Success

   In depth interview question 7: *What do you suggest would be the key to educators improving the success in school for at risk students?* Similar responses were given from respondents 1, 4, 7, 8, and 9. These principals described the following as being the key to improved success in school for at risk students:

   "Everyone being on the same page…the home, the school, the community, and even the church… Plus the child has to want to be apart of that too and willing to accept the help." (R1)

   "Carrying them under your wings and giving them responsibility….realizing hat children need role models…" (R4)

   "Educators changing their own attitude…It's our attitude that makes the difference; And I told the teachers that the family that everybody deserves is the family that they should get when they come to our school. Our attitude is what makes the difference." (R7)

   "The first and most important key would be the proper identification of at risk students. The second would be the proper use and putting together of the faculty that can actually address those needs. You have to make sure you have the right people on the bus…." (R8)

   "The key would be building a positive relationship with the child and their family. Relationships can bridge the gap that at risk students need. They need support – support from home and school in order to succeed. Educators can provide the support through appropriate relationships that foster high expectations." (R9)

The remaining participants, respondents 2, 3, 5, and 6, had a variety of responses to the key to improving the success of at risk students. There responses included: celebrating small student achievements and recognizing accomplishments, providing a caring teacher, establishing smaller class sizes, using appropriate personnel resources (school social worker, etc…), and

delivering instruction through a multiple means of strategies that meet cognitive

needs and social needs. They each stated:

> "Everyone wants to be successful. No one wants to fail. Students must
> know what's required to be successful. Given all the elements and all the
> Ingredients to be successful then a child will be successful. Success
> breeds success. We take it step by step. We want them to be successful
> and accomplish small items and then as they continue to grow and be
> successful then success will lead to more success. And let's always
> celebrate small achievements and recognize accomplishments at every
> step." (R2)

> "I feel the key is the caring of the teachers and also if students themselves
> Put forth the effort. They know what they need and we show them what
> they need. They also have to play a role in that themselves." (R3)

> "There is no silver bullet. I think that smaller class sizes working closer
> with students is the key. More social work interventions so that if there is
> a truancy problem at the school then you have a social worker dedicated
> to your school that knows the kids knows the parent – that can go our and
> find what's going with the kid why isn't that kid coming to the school – but
> small classes and a social worker to work on family interventions." (R5)

> "Modifying and differentiating your instruction to meet their cognitive need
> and their social need…kinesics (bodily kinesics) because everybody is not
> paper pencil – sit down listen to a lecture so doing those math groups,
> hands on projects, using computers, research projects – that seems to
> work…The kids love it so they do what they are suppose to do to
> continue." (R6)

Effective Teacher

In depth interview question 8: *Are there certain types of teachers that work

better with at risk students?* This question was asked to garner specific

perceived characteristics of which a teacher should possess when working with

at risk students.   Respondents 3, 4, and 9 felt teachers who were caring, fun,

flexible, held high expectations for students, good classroom managers, and

built a rapport with students and their parents worked better with at risk

students. While respondents 5 and 7 felt teachers who addressed differentiated

instruction, collaborated with other staff members, and had good classroom

management skills appeared to work better with at risk students. In addition,

respondents 1 and 2 expressed the importance of pairing students with

appropriate teachers based on student needs. Specifically, respondent 1 stated:

> "…there are certain children we pair up with teachers, if we get a class roll
> and I find child A is in teacher's A class and it's not a good mix – then we'll
> change it out because you know there are certain kinds of teachers who
> need to deal with an at risk child…." (R1)

While respondent 2 replied:

> "…at risk students you have to want to work with them. In our inclusion
> model we carefully select our teachers to be our inclusion teachers. And
> then we make sure they receive all of the training and understanding of
> the at risk child…." (R2)

Other respondents 6 and 8 answered this question differently. Respondent 6

stated "the teachers who recently graduated from college and were younger

were able to relate better to the students". According to the principal, these

teachers used their youthfulness to their advantage in "reaching the students".

The principal specifically stated:

> "I found on my staff that my ones that just recently graduated from college
> and they are younger and from this hip hop generation are able to reach
> them better. They know the lingo. They understand what their going
> through. They understand the fads. They use it to their advantage
> instead of talking about them (at risk students)." (R6)

Respondent 8 shared his knowledge of the term "with-it-ness" in respect to

teachers who work better with at risk students. This respondent stated the

following:

> "…in the textbook they have a thing called with-it-ness that they describe
> each teacher must have. And to be a successful teacher you must have
> the with-it-ness, but more importantly to be a successful mentor you
> definitely have to be flexible and have that with-it-ness quality so that you

can meet the student's where they are… to take them to the level you want them to be..." (R8)

Effective Mentoring Programs

In depth interview question 9: *What characteristics of mentoring programs do you perceive as most effective with at risk students?* This question is the basis of the research study. Each principal's response will aid the researcher in gaining their perception of those specific characteristics that make mentoring programs successful for at risk students. Respondents 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8 shared their perceptions of most effective characteristics of mentoring programs for at risk students. These respondents felt the following would be most effective for at risk students: having patience, being a good listener and communicator, demonstrating care, being flexible, having high expectations for students, and acting as a liaison between the school and home. Respondents 1, 5, and 9 shared similar thoughts in regards to it being important that the mentoring program was consistent and children had a sense of "buy in" to the program. They each emphasized the significance of mentoring programs having consistency and student involvement. Specifically, respondent 5 stated "when you act as a mentor the student should know for a fact that you are definitely going to be here and be here for them. Mentors need to be sure they do what they say they are going to do….if not then they are yet another adult in a long line of adults that have failed the student." From a different perspective respondent 6 expressed the importance of the mentoring program possessing the characteristic of "being hands on" for at risk students. This principal felt as though "it's easy for somebody to come in, but if you are not showing them (at

risk students) and explaining to them what you're doing and being hands on….

It's easy to come in and make a speech…."

Factors and Evidence of Success

In depth interview question 10: *What factors do you associate with*

successful mentoring programs? What evidence can you share that illustrates

the success of mentoring programs? All nine respondents shared the same

response when answering this question. All nine principals felt as though

behavior or improved discipline was a factor associated with a successful

mentoring program. Principals shared similar feelings in regards to a reduce

number of discipline referrals in the office. Principals observed improved

relationships between the child, teacher, and parent. This was a consensus

among the nine respondents. One principal stated mentoring program gave at

risk students "a sense of belonging in the school" which played a major factor in

the program's success.   Other responses were as follows:

> "…we had several students who used to stay up here (the office) all the time, but now they are proud of themselves…we're talking about students who were below grade level in every subject…mentoring has helped…test scores, discipline referrals, and just my general observation of seeing the children interact and become happy children…" (R4)

> "I think of the students' behavior over the last two years. When those veteran type teachers and mentors set those high expectations – set behavior expectations and all of us support it from the front office we have seen improved behavior". (R6)

> "…we saw a tremendous shift….not only in those (mentored) students – we saw a ripple effect where it affected the entire building….Prior to us implementing the mentoring program the attendance at the school did not meet the qualification of No Child Left Behind. We had more that 15% miss 15 days or more. This past year – well two years ago after

implementing this program we went from over 15% missing days down to 8%..." (R8)

"In the area of discipline it (mentoring) has helped the discipline. We've seen a drop in the number of tribunal offenses. And we have seen a drop in the number of front office referrals." (R5)

"….from the students that were targeted in the mentoring program, we have improved attendance, grades and discipline data. As a result of this data we will continue the program next year." (R9)

Summary

This study utilized a qualitative methodology to investigate the

perceptions of selected Georgia principals with regard to perceived

characteristics for effective mentoring programs for at risk students. The

participants in this study consisted of nine school principals located within the

Central Savannah River Area (CSRA). From a review of related literature, ten

open ended in depth interview questions were designed to garner information

about principals' perceptions of mentoring programs and its relation to at risk

students. The researcher used the in depth interview process to collect data

from each principal. The data gathered was analyzed to find repeated

responses and patterns from which categories and themes developed.

In analyzing the results of the in depth interviews respondents conveyed

their knowledge about mentoring programs and what makes them effective.

Ten in depth interview questions were asked of each participant. All

respondents were asked the same questions without deviation to aid in the

validity and reliability of their responses. Each interview question correlated to

the related research questions for the study. Striking similarities were readily

apparent in the perceptions offered by these educators who had served at risks

students with in their school district. The similarities began to emerge immediately with the first question, which was designed to set the stage for a discussion of the impact of addressing the academic and behavioral needs of at risk students.

In expressing their perceptions about the role educator's play in the education of at risk students, five of the participants said educators are role models. They emphasized at risk students often times do not have family members who are able to guide them. Therefore, it is imperative that educators step in with a positive attitude and take a student from where they are to where they need to be. According to these principals, this can be done through high expectations and a caring educator or mentor being involved in an at risk student's life.

When asked the question of whether mentoring was a valid option for at risk students many of the principals felt that mentoring provided many benefits for the at risk student. These benefits were: (1) provision of additional resources, (2) provision of an understanding and caring adult, (3) provision of social and life skills for students, (4) exposure to different experiences, and (5) ability to meet the specific needs and interest of students. All of the participants agreed that mentoring was a valid option for at risk students.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

Many agree that children benefit from having positive adult figures in their lives. The larger question is the extent to which the benefits of mentoring can be measured. Does having a mentor mean automatic success or improvement to the life of the child? Will the child automatically become successful in school? The obvious answer to these questions is no, however it is mutually agreed that mentoring can have a positive effect.

Many successful people give the credit for their success to their mentors. Great mentor relationships throughout history include athletes whose coaches encouraged them along with political leaders who contribute their success to mentored relationships. The Reverend Jesse Jackson is one of many who were mentored by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who helped mold him to a famous civil rights career.

The importance of a mentor for bonding with a child and that child's ability to bond with the school and community is unrefuted. Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers agree that youth need positive, consistent relationships with adults to support their development. In a study done on Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, the oldest and best known mentoring program in the United States, Tierney and Grossman (1996) found that participants in the program were (1) less likely to start using drugs and alcohol, (2) less likely to hit someone, (3) improved school attendance and performance and attitudes toward completing

school work, and (4) improved peer and family relationships. Those in the

program who had mentors skipped half as many days when compared to those

who were on the waiting lists. Those students with mentors also felt more

competent about doing school work, skipped fewer classes and showed modest

gains in their grade point averages.

The purpose of this study was to explore the characteristics of effective

mentoring programs for at risk students as perceived by selected Georgia

principals. The researcher conducted this study through the use of a qualitative

methodology which consisted of the use of in depth interview questions.

Employing a research instrument composed of 10 questions designed to elicit

responses relating to two research sub questions, the researcher interviewed

nine principals to ascertain their perceptions of mentoring programs targeting at

risk students. The study was descriptive rather than predictive and used a

qualitative approach to tell the stories of these principals.

Based on a state data base a list of schools with mentoring programs was

provided by the Georgia Department of Education. The researcher used this list

to mail a cover letter and demographic profile to potential participants. Nine

demographic profiles were returned which confirmed participation in the research

study. These selected demographic profiles represented nine participating

principals from urban and suburban locations, and attempted to draw the

greatest amount of diversity. The researcher interviewed the nine principals

based on availability at the times she could conduct the interviews. The data

collections consisted of scheduled in depth interviews with nine principals. The transcriptions were analyzed and coded for anonymity.

As the researcher examined data gathered during the in depth interview process categories and themes emerged. As patterns began to emerge, principal's perceptions were grouped into categories and then placed into themes. This led to the identification of the characteristics of effective mentoring programs for at risk students as perceived by selected Georgia principals. Chapter 4 provided a discussion of the findings for each of the above areas.

In the present chapter, the researcher used the findings related to the overarching research question and the research sub questions in order to draw conclusions and to consider the implications from the study. The overarching research question was as follows: What are the characteristics of mentoring programs perceived by principals as most effective for at risk students? The related sub questions used to aid the researcher were:

1. What factors do principals associate with successful mentoring programs?
2. What evidence of mentoring success can be articulated by the principal?

Analysis of Research Findings

The research was designed to garner the characteristics of effective mentoring programs for at risk students as perceived by select Georgia principals. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore principals' perceptions of those characteristics of mentoring programs they consider effective for at risk students. The qualitative approach allowed the researcher to delve into the wealth of stories and lived experiences shared by principals in the

interview process. The following major findings had implications for the conclusions of this study: (1) the effects of school disconnectedness, (2) interventions in schools to support societal changes, (3) the need for significant adults in the lives of at risk students, (4) the importance of program evaluation and creating a caring environment, (5) best practices for mentoring programs, (6) positive role intervention in helping at risk students, (7) self esteem, (8) mentoring relationships, (9) resilience, and (10) how the classroom learning environment contributes to school success. The related literature correlated to the in depth interview questions and the overarching research question and sub questions.

The researcher explored each of the two sub questions by analyzing the responses of the nine principals to the 10 interview questions. These results were reported in Chapter 4. In this chapter, the researcher used the findings related to each research sub question to discuss the findings, to draw conclusions and to consider the implications from the study.

<div align="center">Research Question 1</div>

What factors do principals associate with successful mentoring programs?

The respondents' answers to in depth interview questions 1 through 5 were used to answer this sub research question. Below is a discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 4.

Discussion

There is a growing body of research indicating how mentoring can positively impact students and target many at risk behaviors. Tierney and

Grossman (1995) found that mentoring programs were linked to improved students' grades, improved relationships with others, and a reduction in drug and alcohol use. More recent research by Dappen and Iserhagen (2005) supports mentoring relationships as being able to fill the void and provide the caring a person is often lacking, particularly in the lives of at risk students. The major perception of the respondents found by the researcher closely resembled those found in the literature of Grossman (1995) and Dappen and Iserhagen (2005). Respondents felt students improved academically and behaviorally after receiving a mentor. All nine respondents agreed that mentored students demonstrated improvement academically and behaviorally. These principals also believed the overall attitudes of the students changed for the better after being paired with a mentor. The results also reflected that all nine respondents saw evidence of improved student school attendance after being in the mentoring program.

In the past decade, mentoring programs for at risk students have received serious attention as a promising approach to enriching children's lives, addressing their need for positive adult contact, and providing one on one support and advocacy for those who need it. Participants in this study supported this notion as they recognized mentoring as an excellent way to use volunteers to address the problems created by outside school barriers such as poverty and lack of parental support. Kelly (2003) identified school barriers or factors that directly lead to academic failure which originate from several sources, including the student, the student's family, the school, and the classroom teacher. These

barriers were likely to contribute to school failure. For each student, a multitude of factors either promote or discourage academic achievement. Several responding principals expressed through a mentoring relationship adult volunteers and participating students developed relationships devoted to personal, academic, and social growth. These relationships resulted in students feeling better about themselves and engaging in more appropriate task. This discovery by participating principals supported the research of Keating (2002) in that mentoring serves to teach at risk students more effective ways of managing their problems, provide a sense of community, and show them that other students have similar problems they are trying to overcome.

The interrelatedness and magnitude of at risk factors or outside barriers demand that educators support strategies to address at risk student's multiple needs within the context of the school and often times the community. In interviewing the participating principals they shared similar responses in terms of at risk students being strategically paired with an effective teacher who demonstrated a sincere interest in their success. This interest would in turn create a caring environment within the classroom setting. Roberts and Trainor (2004) discovered that learning and self esteem are heightened when individuals are in respectful and caring relationships with others who see their potential, genuinely appreciate their unique talents, and accept them as individuals. Their research matched the feelings of the participating principals who recognized the importance of the teacher in the classroom of an at risk child.

Principals found that those teachers who genuinely built a positive student rapport along with setting high expectations promoted high achievement for all students. Principals discuss the following strategies as being most effective in the classroom for at risk students: (1) differentiate learning, (2) one on one help, (3) small group learning, (4) Saturday School and After School Programs, (5) and the appropriate use of other school resources such as augmented Early Intervention Teachers (EIP) along with specialized transition programs for in coming 6th and 9th grade students. These strategies, as discussed by participating principals, assisted in closing the achievement gap for students at their schools. Bell (2003) recognized that closing the achievement gap is a process. There is no single step, activity, or workshop alone that provides the answer. However, according to the research of Tomilson (2002) there are five needs that teachers must address to make learning irresistible: affirmation, contribution, purpose, power, and challenge. Although the participating principals did not mention these strategies in their interview, they appeared knowledgeable of the importance of at risk students receiving a connectedness to the school environment which in turn promotes affirmation, contribution, purpose, poser, and challenge.

Schools across the country have long been focused on ensuring that students succeed in life and participate effectively in society. Through the participating principal's thoughts, although expressed differently, it has been gathered the same focus remains at their respective schools as they address the needs of at risk students through mentoring programs. A recent longitudinal

study conducted by Bonny and others (2005) demonstrated that interventions designed to increase school bonding had enduring effects in reducing at risk behaviors. Interventions included parental education, teacher training, and skills training for children. These researchers like the participating principals found that intervention students or mentored students demonstrated better school bonding and school commitment.

Researchers indicate high self esteem serves as a protective factor to student involvement in at risk behavior. In the school environment, high levels of self esteem increase the likelihood that students will connect positively to peers, teachers, and the school as a whole, important determinant of academic success (King, et.al., 2002). Similar to these researchers respondents to this study felt a sense of self esteem along with a sense of positive school, peer, and family connectedness or feeling that one "fits in" and "belongs" protects students from engaging in negative behavior. This is evident in the principals' responses to in depth interview questions 1 through 5.

Research Question 2

What evidence of mentoring success can be articulated by the principal?

The respondent's answer to in depth interview questions 6 through 10 were used to answer this sub research question. Below is a discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 4.

Discussion

In depth interview questions 6 through 10 were used to answer sub research question 2.   The work of mentoring programs can have far reaching

benefits to both the child and the community. Studies have shown positive

effects on the children who participate in these programs as mentees.

Respondents to this study expressed a definite tendency towards positive

outcomes of evidence of successful mentoring programs. Participants quoted

evidence such as increased standardized test scores, decrease in discipline

referrals, increase of student attendance, and improved report card grades.

There are students, however, who fail despite the efforts of the school. Many of

the principals contributed student failure to improper placement in special

education, negative circumstances at home and in the community, and lack of

personal motivation. However research states and respondents agreed that the

key to educators improving the success of at risk students is found in the

classroom teacher. Overwhelmingly principals felt providing a caring teacher

with high expectations for students set the stage for success for all students.

A study done by Hon and Shorr (1996) showed similar results as the

respondents in regard to mentoring programs and evidence leading to their

success. Of the 19 students who were assigned mentors in their study. 79%

demonstrated improvement in their work habits and grades. Their study also

showed 89% of the participating students showed improvement in their

attendance. An additional study done by Moore (1999) showed that all 15 of the

teachers that responded in the study answered yes to the question of: do you

believe that the students' involvement in the mentoring program had been

beneficial for that student? Respondents to this study reflected similar results in

their documentation of student success evident of mentoring programs. These

respondents provided a variety of evidence supporting student success.

Evidence included classroom interventions along with a well established school

based mentoring program. Each respondent viewed mentoring programs as

beneficial to students and the community. They contributed documented

improved student attendance, grades, discipline, and test scores to the school

based program which targeted mentoring for at risk students. In addition,

respondents stated the following as evidence of success in the classroom

setting: celebrating student achievement, providing a caring teacher, establishing

smaller class sizes, using appropriate personnel resources (social worker, etc…),

and delivering instruction through a multiple means of strategies that meet

cognitive needs and social needs. Instruction includes student participation in

Saturday School and After School Programs, differentiated learning, small group

learning, one on one support, and extended time on task within the classroom.

Post's (1986) study demonstrated similar results about mentoring. She

did a study of the Chippewa Valley Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring program.

She compared children matched to mentor, the big brother or sister, to those

children who were not matched. The matched group had higher scores in self

confidence, school performance, attitudes toward school, and trust issues. Post

surveyed the mentors, parents, and teachers of the children in the program. A

five point scale was used in the surveys where five was the highest rating. The

mean scores in self confidence for the matched group were 3.55 compared to

2.52 for the unmatched group. The mean score in school performance was 2.93

for the matched group compared to the 2.30 for the unmatched students. The

attitudes toward school survey question resulted in a 3.64 mean score for the matched students compared to 2.77 for the unmatched students. The overall trust of other survey questions resulted in a mean score of 4.11 compared to 3.60 for the unmatched group. The results in Post's study show a definite benefit in mentoring.

The research in this study presents encouraging evidence that caring, thoughtful relationships between adults and youth can be beneficial to the children involved. Although the results may not have been conclusive, they did show a positive effect and a resoundingly positive response by principals who participated.

<div align="center">Conclusions</div>

Conclusions drawn from the results of the study are discussed in relation to each research question and then the overarching research question of principals' perceptions.

1.   The subjects of this qualitative study were nine Georgia principals from the Central Savannah River Area who had an average of five years experience in their current position. Contained within this sample were nine schools classified as suburban and urban with two schools having less than 500 students (small), six schools having more than 500 but less than 1000 students (medium), and one school having more than 1000 students (large). Four participants of this sample were female and eight were African American. From the information gathered, it can be concluded that principals, in this study, perceived mentoring programs

to be a valid option for at risk students.

2. Principals addressed the academic and behavioral needs of at risk students through a multitude of strategies. They used Saturday School Programs, After School Programs, differentiated learning, student support teams, Early Intervention Programs, increased instructional time, and mentoring programs to meet the needs of this population.

3. Principals view educators as playing a vital role in the success of at risk students. Many viewed educators as role models for students that provide motivation in reaching high expectations set by school and system personnel.

4. Mentoring programs were reviewed as being a valid option for at risk students. Many of the principals cited their school based program as being beneficial in improving standardized test scores, student attendance, report card grades, and discipline referrals.

5. Responses to interview questions indicated that efforts have been made to close the achievement gap among at risk students. Principals stressed that at risk students need to feel connected by knowing that an adult cares about them. Then developing an individualized instructional plan to meet their specific educational needs.

6. Principals believed there are students that fail despite the school's efforts. Each of them concluded that there were factors that led to student failure. These factors were: lack of home support, lack of personal motivation,

improper placement in special education, and negative community pressure.

7. From the responses of the principals, it can be concluded that the key to educators improving the success in school for at risk students is properly matching students with adults who are capable of addressing their needs. Several of the principals expressed the importance of having adults who can build a positive relationship with the at risk child and their family within the school setting. Another key to success is identifying resources that meet the instructional needs and social needs of at risk students.

8.   In characterizing the role of the teacher, the respondents shared their perception of the type of teacher that worked best with at risk students. Respondents felt teachers who had classroom management skills and maintain high expectations coupled with being able to relate worked better with at risk students.

9. Many of the principals viewed specific characteristics of mentoring programs to be most effective in working with at risk student. They expressed the following general characteristics: mentoring programs who had mentors who were consistent, mentoring programs that exposed students to outside experiences, mentoring programs whose mentors shared a commonality with the student, mentoring programs that communicated with school officials and were on the 'same page" as the school, and mentoring programs where students had "buy in" to its objectives. Several principals mentioned the importance of a mentor

being able to demonstrate patience, be a good listener, and have the ability to analyze and synthesize situations.

10. Participating principals provided evidence that illustrated the success of their school based mentoring program. Principals stated documented increased student attendance, standardized test scores, discipline referrals, and report card grades as evidence associated with the success of mentoring programs.

11. Table 5.1 represents a template of the effective characteristics of mentoring programs for at risk student as perceived by participating principals. This table provides the basis of information representing the perceptions of this study's participants and adds to the body of research presently available to policymakers, educators, and the community.

Table 5.1

Participants' Perceived Effective Characteristics of Mentoring Programs for At-Risk Students

_____

1.   The program should have the ability to be flexible for the at risk student.

2.   The program should be meaningful to the at risk student.

3.   The program's atmosphere should be relaxed and non-threatening.

4.   The program should have a set agenda or objective.

5.   The program should be consistently involved with the at risk student.

6.   The program should be on the same page as the school.

7.   The program should expose students to real life experiences / field trips.

8.   Mentors should demonstrate patience and be a good listener.

9.   Mentors should have good communication skills.

10.   Mentors should be able to relate to the at risk student.

11.   Mentors should be able to build a positive rapport with the at risk student.

12.   Mentors should maintain high expectations of the at risk student.

13.   Mentors should be a positive role model for the at risk student.

14.   Mentors should be carefully matched or paired to an at risk student.

Implications

The findings of the study will add to the body of knowledge of mentoring programs for at risk students. Based upon the findings of the study, the following should be considered:

1. Local school boards and superintendents should consider mentoring programs as a valid option for at risk students within the school system. Their efforts should be focused on improving student achievement by supporting a monetary incentive for mentors at Title I schools.

2. Practicing principals should recognize that they must develop and evaluate innovative programs that specifically target the needs of at risk students.

3. University leadership programs should develop course work that focuses on the at risk child at both the system and school levels and that is designed to define the role of principals and teachers in the school improvement process.

4. University teacher education programs should include more information on the at risk child and interventions that support their success in school.

5. The Georgia Department of Education should be made aware of the perceptions of principals on mentoring programs targeting at risk students and become more active in supporting Title I schools in meeting state standards.

Recommendations

The researcher suggests the following recommendations for principals and relevant policy makers. Due to the limitations of this study expressed in an earlier chapter, the researcher acknowledges that the information is not the only study that can be used to help educators and policy makers in regard to mentoring programs targeting at risk students. However, the researcher addressed the following areas in an attempt to give educators, policy makers, and possibly future researchers information in regard to selected Georgia principals' perceptions of characteristic of effective mentoring programs for at risk students. The researcher accomplished this by examining the factors principals associated with successful mentoring programs along with the evidence of mentoring success articulated by the principals. Therefore, the researcher suggests the following recommendations for fellow researchers:

1. Replicate the qualitative study in 2012 to determine any changes in in the perceptions of effective characteristics of mentoring programs for at at risk students by principals.

2. Replicate the qualitative study including suburban, urban, and rural designation locations to determine any differences between these areas including neighborhood structure and services available to at risk students.

3. Use the same qualitative format to interview principals within different regions of the state that are experiencing more success with at risk student populations.

4. Use the same qualitative formation to interview principals that have recently graduated from school leadership preparation programs.

5. Conduct a combined quantitative and qualitative study to ascertain the relationship between mentoring programs and student achievement.

6. Decrease the impact of the limitations mentioned earlier by addressing the limitations placed upon this study because of time, perspective, location, and size. By addressing these limitations, perhaps, the researcher may find that expanding the scope of this research increases the amount of data produced.

7. The views of the children involved should also be conducted. This might demonstrate the greatest research of mentoring programs.

8. The opinions of the students can be compared and contrasted to that of their principals and mentors.

9. A longitudinal study could be done to see long term effects. Track the results of students' academic performance and attendance through middles and high school. This could help document the long term effects of mentoring.

10. Provide a monetary incentive for mentors who remain consistent with their assigned student through principal's use of Title I funds.

11. Provide teacher training and parental workshops within the school and system level on meeting the specific needs of at risk students. Discuss research based programs that have proven to show positive results in student achievement for at risk students.

Dissemination

The results of the study should be reviewed by both practicing and prospective principals. The principals who were interviewed for the study provided a wealth of information and insight on mentoring programs targeting at risk students. Their stories are great resources for anyone aspiring to develop a school based mentoring program for at risk students.

The researcher chose to write specifically to general practitioners (principals). This study will be bound and published for reference purposes in the library of Georgia Southern University. The investigator has safely stored all transcripts and data used to produce this body of research and will destroy all information six months after completion of the study. A copy of the completed dissertation will be made available to Dissertations Abstracts International. Furthermore, the researcher welcomes the opportunity to convey the information to all persons of interests. The researcher intends to present this body of research at state or national conferences held throughout the summer, such as the annual summer Georgia Association of Educator's Conference at Jekyll Island, Georgia. The researcher would appreciate an opportunity to present this information to school boards experiencing challenges in meeting the needs of at risk students also to seek publication in local, state, regional, or national educational publications.

Concluding Thoughts

This examination of selected Georgia principals was designed to gather information about the perceived characteristics of effective mentoring programs

for at risk students. This qualitative study consisted of nine principals with two or more years of experience as a principal at his. The researcher conducted in depth interviews to determine their perceptions of mentoring programs targeting at risk students. The study was of particular interest to the researcher while serving as an elementary school principal in Georgia at the time of the research. With the study, the researcher attempted to capture the richness and complexity of mentoring programs targeting at risk students and to convey the sense of dedication and level of commitment of those who work toward their success in school.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL FORM

Georgia Southern University	
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs	
Institutional Review Board (IRB)	
Phone: 912-681-5465	Administrative Annex
	P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-681-0719 Ovrsight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Tujuana Bush
          312 Hogan Way
          Evans, GA-30809

CC: Dr. James Burnham
          P.O. Box-8131

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
            Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
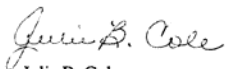   (IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: January 26, 2007

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H07117**, and titled **"The Characteristics of Effective Mentoring Programs for At Risk Students as Perceived by Selected Georgia Principals"**, it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior to** initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

Julie B. Cole

Julie B. Cole
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER

GEORGIA SOUTHERN
UNIVERSITY

College of Education
Department of Leadership & Human Development
P.O. Box 8131
Statesboro, Georgia   30460
Phone: (912) 681-5307   Fax: (912) 486-7104

Informed Consent

Title of Project:
The Characteristics of Effective Mentoring Programs for At Risk Students as Perceived
by Selected Georgia Principals

Principal Investigator:
Tujuana C. Bush
312 Hogan Way
Evans, Georgia
tcbush@hotmail.com

Advisor:
Dr. Walter Polka
wpolka@georgiasouthern.edu

Purpose of Study:
The purpose of this study is to examine the characteristics of effective mentoring
programs for at risk students as perceived by selected Georgia principals.

Procedures to be Followed:
Each participant (school principal) will be asked open ended questions in regard to
mentoring and at risk students. Each response will be taped recorded and coded for
confidentiality.

Discomfort and Risks:
There is minimal risk involved in participating in this research.

Benefits:
The information gathered in this research will serve as a body of research that adds to
existing research on school based mentoring programs as they relate to at risk students.

Page 1 of 2

Duration:
The interview session will last less than an hour.

Statement of Confidentiality:
Only the researcher will be aware of the identifying information and she will be solely responsible for storing and maintaining records.

Right to ask Questions:
You can ask questions about the research. The person in charge of this research is Tujuana C. Bush. She can be reached at (706) 860-2191. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 486-7758.

Compensation:
There is no compensation for participating

Voluntary Participation:
There is no penalty for deciding not to participate or withdrawing early.

You must be 18 years or older to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date. You will be given a copy of this consent form for keep for your records.

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

_____   _____
Investigator Signature   Date

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA PROFILE

Georgia Principals' Demographic Data Profile

School Name: _____

Number of Students: _____

Location (select one): _____ Suburban _____ Urban _____ Rural

What percent of each group is represented in your school?
_____ White   _____ Black   _____ Asian

_____ Hispanic   _____ American Indian   _____ Multi-Racial

Respondent Information

Gender (check one): _____ Male   _____ Female

Race/Ethnicity (check one): _____ White   _____ American Indian
                            _____ Black   _____ Asian
                            _____ Hispanic _____ Multi-racial

Years as Principal of this School _____

Total Number of Years as a Principal _____

**By returning this information to the researcher, each respondent
agrees to further consideration as a possible in this study.**