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Mentoring aspiring racialized leaders: A review of a pilot program in the Peel District School Board

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the initial outcomes of a mentoring program designed to increase the advancement prospects of racialized teachers to vice principal positions within a Canadian school district.

Design/methodology/approach – This program assessment documents evidence that challenges current school leadership paradigms rooted in western dominance and suggests new approaches to leadership informed by research on diversity, equity, and identity.

Findings – Survey data from 32 participants (13 mentors and 19 mentees) from Canada's second largest school district were analyzed thematically and showed that racialized mentees generally rated their satisfaction with the program lower than did mentors (both racialized and non-racialized), particularly as it relates to feelings of inclusion and in the program's potential to influence the recruitment and advancement of racialized employees in the district.

Research limitations/implications – The findings are limited to a single mentoring program for aspiring racialized leaders within a single, large school district but reinforce similar findings from research conducted in another large Canadian urban center, the USA and UK, and are of interest in other educational contexts where leaders from diverse backgrounds are underrepresented.

Originality/value – The paper reinforces findings from the small number of studies on targeted leadership mentoring for specific populations. While the findings support the practice of mentoring for leaders, the authors challenge the culture-free leadership paradigm that permeates Western education literature and question its role as an underlying barrier for aspiring racialized leaders in schools.

Keywords Mentoring in education, Educational leadership, Canadian schools,
Mentoring for racialized leaders, Teacher promotion

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The call to support the career aspirations of racialized persons stems from evidence that without this or other interventions, systemic discrimination toward racialized groups frustrates access to leadership positions of all kinds. Racialized is the term used to describe groups of people affected by a process that has created disadvantage for these groups based on their physical differences. This process creates categories that become socially significant for the purposes of exercising power (Galabuzi, 2012 in Maldonado, M.). For example, access to employment, or more importantly, levels of employment, is one such circumstance whereby racialized groups are known to face barriers to their social integration. This, in turn, limits the social inclusion of newcomers into the wider community by restricting their social, economic, and political mobility (Galabuzi and Teelucksingh, 2010; Omidvar and Richmond, 2003). As global migration results in increasing numbers of racialized people traveling and working in post-colonial, often white-dominant countries, the disproportionality of white dominance, particularly in positions of influence and power, has become more striking and subject to increasing criticism.

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Professional mentoring programs for career leaders are not new (Bolam *et al.*, 1995). More significant, however, are recent efforts in business and institutional settings to improve leadership outcomes by increasing the diversity of the leadership pool. The combination of these two constructs underpins the genesis of a pilot program in a large, highly diverse urban school district in the Greater Toronto (Canada) Area. The program was designed to, in the words of researcher Rosemary Campbell-Stephens, "create a professional space for those leaders to lead joyously, be authentic as well as effective and influence leadership practice" (Campbell-Stephens, 2009, p. 321). The purpose of this paper is to first describe the educational context in which the need for specialized support for racialized teachers aspiring to become vice principals in this district has arisen. Second, we report on the impact of the pilot program from the perspective of the mentor and mentee participants in order to suggest refinements to the program within the district. The first author of this study participated as a mentor, and the second author as one of the organizers of the pilot program for the school district. Both authors have extensive experience as school principals but now work at the district level as system administrators. While much of the research cited here specifically references mentoring for school principals, for the purposes of this paper the discussion of mentoring can be applied equally to individuals aspiring to vice or assistant principal roles.

Leadership mentoring in education

The current interest in mentoring for aspiring vice principals stems from the emerging connection between two well-established claims: that school leadership is second only to teaching quality in its effect on student improvement outcomes (Austin, 1979; Lipham, 1981; Leithwood *et al.*, 2008; Leithwood *et al.*, 2004), and that effective preparation programs for principals and vice principals, including mentoring, improve their leadership capability (Avolio, 2005; Bush, 2009; Daresh, 2004; Sackney and Walker, 2006). The mentoring of school leaders has become a focus for academic inquiry (Daresh, 2004) and increasingly viewed as a means to support aspiring and newly practicing principals and vice principals (Parylo *et al.*, 2012), especially in light of the rapidly changing contexts of schools (Bush, 2009). Mentoring for vice principals in particular has also gained attention as a key strategy for enticing teachers to aspire to school leadership roles, a significant concern as demographic changes predict an impending shortage of principals in western countries (Lovely, 2004; Sciarappa and Mason, 2014). Mentoring has also been viewed as a response to evidence suggesting that the attractiveness of the school leader's role has suffered due to increasing job complexities and performance accountability pressures (Bloom *et al.*, 2005; Villani, 2006). While research suggests that mentoring for school leaders is beneficial (Hobson and Sharp, 2005), shortcomings with the implementation of principal and vice principal mentoring programs have challenged sustainability since their inception. These have included politically driven motives, short-term financial commitments, and inadequate training for mentors (Daresh, 2004). Reyes (2003) noted that racialized principals and vice principals (especially African-American women) were particularly challenged in gaining benefit from formal mentoring programs.

Mentorship as socialization

Mentoring is conceptualized in many ways, and the mentoring relationship has been described as ranging from the role of peer, where the relationship is informal, to the role

of sponsor, where the mentor is authentically invested in the successful development of the mentee's career aspirations over time (Daresh, 2004). Furthermore, mentoring for principals and vice principals has been researched for different purposes. Leithwood and Steinbach (1990, 1995) investigated the potential of mentoring to influence changes in principals' cognitive development, in particular their decision-making and problem-solving capacities. Earlier research (Zey, 1984; Pascale, 1984) used mentoring as a means to explore principals' improvement in management skills, such as time management, organization, and overall efficiency. A more contemporary lens for viewing the benefits of principal mentoring stems from "a way to guide individuals in their assumption of new roles, new job identities, and organizational expectations […]" (Daresh, 2004, p. 497). Daresh describes this guidance as socialization, a description appearing consistently in recent research on principal mentoring, for example, Sciarappa and Mason (2014), Parylo *et al.* (2012), and Grogan and Crow (2004). Parkay *et al.* (1992) identify stages in socialization: survival, control, stability, educational leadership, and professional actualization, with increasing influences on school improvement as the principal or vice principal progresses through the stages. Mentoring provides the framework for both the mentor and mentee to reflect on shifting realities in schools, or in other words, to be socialized into the meaning, circumstances, and expectations of school leadership (Daresh, 2004).

Investigations of mentorship models for new and aspiring school leaders have revealed a range of findings that pinpoint the conditions that optimize the positive effects of mentoring relationships. In monitoring the effects of a national mentorship program for new head teachers in the UK, Bolam *et al.* (1995) found that role clarity for both mentors and mentees was essential. According to mentees, effective mentors worked to build trust and respect, demonstrated commitment to the relationship, allowed the mentee to lead the learning agenda, and possessed an inviting interpersonal style (p. 41). In an evaluation of the mentor training program offered by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) in the USA, Sciarappa and Mason (2014) found that a key element to successful mentoring for new principals included specific training for the mentors. These researchers acknowledge that "good principals do not necessarily make good mentors" (p. 65) and advocate routine in-service for mentors coupled with ongoing feedback from mentees to measure mentorship effects.

Apart from clear role expectations and specific training for mentors, other necessary conditions beyond the mentor–mentee relationships themselves have been identified for successful mentoring. Scott (2012) found that mentees, while satisfied with their mentorship experience, overwhelmingly agreed that the length of mentoring support they received was insufficient (six to ten months on average) given the challenges of their new roles. Most formal mentorship programs bear costs, either to remunerate the mentor, free up the mentee during the work day, or provide off-site learning opportunities such as conferences. As such, the degree of financial commitment to mentorship programs can affect the anticipated benefits to the mentees, mentors, and to the organization as a whole (Daresh, 2004). Another related necessary condition is maintaining focus. In their report on the implementation of a principal mentoring program in rural American schools, Della Sala *et al.* (2013) acknowledged that despite positive effects on mentorship participants in the program, without the support and ongoing involvement from the upper-level administration the focus on mentoring may have been usurped by myriad tasks required by principals in response to the persistent accountability agenda at their schools. In this case, these authors credit district senior

leaders/superintendents for their attention to financial support and their direct involvement in selecting practicing principals to be trained as participating mentors. In comparing an earlier wave of principal mentorship programs from the 1980s to 2004, Daresh (2004) suggests that the increasing pressure to address the chronic dearth of principal applicants has renewed districts' commitment to mentorship as a necessary condition in attracting potential leaders into principal and vice principal roles.

While the cumulative research on mentoring for aspiring and new-to-the-role school leaders is favorable (Sackney and Walker, 2006; Zhang and Brundrett, 2010), part of this success is attributed to the dynamic nature of the mentoring relationship and its responsiveness to mentee needs as they emerge (Della Sala *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, mentorship as an opportunity for emerging leaders to replicate the practices and thinking of their mentors (more akin to role modeling) is largely inconsistent with contemporary understandings of effective mentoring relationships. Mentorship requires an element of mutual enhancement (Kram, 1985) such that both mentor and mentee benefit from the developmental leadership growth of the mentee (Daresh, 2004). As schools respond to ever-changing social landscapes, mentoring relationships must seek to envision future leadership capacities, in particular, capacities that must respond to the call for greater accountability for the schooling outcomes of diverse populations, and redefine a leadership paradigm that has been developed during times of historically inequitable access to leadership roles based on social constructs such as race and gender.

The case for mentoring racialized leaders

While school districts and organizations continue to embrace mentoring as a key strategy in the recruitment, preparation, and retention of school leaders (Robinson *et al.*, 2009), coincident research points to circumstances where mentoring programs have fallen short in supporting the leadership aspirations of certain groups. What follows is a review of the literature documenting these claims and calling for the need for differentiated mentorship programs to counter ongoing systemic discrimination in leadership pursuits.

How leadership is conceptualized may account, in part, for why leadership programs, including mentoring, affect different leaders in different ways. Lumby and Morrison (2010) suggest that "the majority of [leadership theories] assumes that all 'leaders' are re-categorized into a homogenised group where what they do matters more than who they are" (p. 5). These researchers argue that current understandings of leadership, in education or other fields, purport a diversity-neutral stance, but are rather the intellectual bi-products of those sharing historical power and privilege, most notably whites and males (Shah, 2010). Popular Western perspectives of educational leadership include designs to influence the emotions, actions, and thoughts of others in a given direction but somehow assume that "others" represent a homogenous group (Lumby with Coleman, 2007). Such assumptions reinforce the existence of in-groups/out-groups, and visible/invisible differences, including their exclusionary effects. If the current leadership paradigm has indeed been constructed assuming that all would-be leaders will benefit equally by leadership preparation strategies such as mentoring, then corroborating evidence of this hypothesis would reveal equal distribution of successful advancement among leadership hopefuls. A growing number of studies, however, show this not to be the case, identifying reasons why mentoring programs do not provide equal advantage to all participants and calling for specialized mentoring programs in order to provide more equitable outcomes for aspiring leaders.

Bush *et al.* (2005) conducted a large scale study for the National College for School Leadership in the UK. One of their research aims was to "examine whether black or minority ethnic leaders would benefit from customized leadership development opportunities" (p. 3). Their survey and interview data were drawn from black and minority ethnic (BME) leaders at various stages of career advancement and identified patterns specific to this group: BME teachers are older than white counterparts when they assume leadership positions, BME teachers experience greater difficulty in leadership advancement if educated outside the UK, most BME leaders credit a key mentor in supporting their leadership aspirations, most BME leaders report examples of racism from a range of sources (enough to suggest systemic bias with examples of racism more prevalent in white schools than in those with diverse populations), and most BME leaders find themselves working in non-white schools. Interview responses reinforced some of the above patterns (e.g. the importance of a key mentor in initiating career advancement) but also identified barriers in the early stages of promotion: examples of discrimination and alienation from community members and colleagues, BME leaders being placed into largely multi-racial schools, nepotism, and exclusive, informal networks excluding BME leaders from advancing beyond their first leadership position. In summary, Bush *et al.* (2005) confirm findings by others (Wilson *et al.*, 2006; Mabokela and Madsen, 2005) that the path to leadership for aspiring BME leaders is not the same path as for their white counterparts. Remarkably, however, BME candidates held mixed views on the need for customized leadership opportunities. On the one hand, given their experience with colleagues' claims of favoritism in explaining their promotions, many BME leaders viewed specialized preparation programs as fodder for ongoing criticism. On the other hand, however, several leaders favored customized leadership training as a support in navigating the inevitable challenges and barriers they will face in their leadership pursuits. Without it, there seems little chance of significant change to the persistent imbalance between the numbers of successful white and BME school leaders.

Researchers investigating career trajectories in business have documented similar differences between the promotion pathways of white and non-white professionals. Thomas (2001) tracked the promotion patterns of managers/executives in three major US firms over three years. Thomas summarized his findings this way: "[The] stark difference in the career trajectories of white and minority executives suggests that companies implicitly have two distinct tournaments for access to the top jobs. In the tournament for Whites, contenders are sorted early on […] for minorities, the screening process for the best jobs occurs much later" (p. 5). Thomas identifies several disturbing assumptions that underlie these patterns: that non-whites will progress de facto more slowly than whites, that non-whites are willing to tolerate the additional preparation time required before they are allowed to enter the advancement process, and that the barriers that exist for non-whites are likely systemic in nature. These assumptions draw critical attention to the leadership preparation processes these firms use, including mentorship programs. They suggest that if such programs apply equally to all aspiring leaders, but the impact of such programs reinforces different career trajectories for individuals based on their race, then the preparation programs themselves are discriminatory. Most of Thomas' recommendations for change are directed at creating a corporate climate for equitable success, including support for "in-house minority associations, including networking groups" (p. 21).

Any challenge to longstanding traditions that, by design, favor groups in power is likely to be perceived as a threat to those same privileged groups (Lumby with Coleman, 2007).

Evidence of this abounds in the ongoing global struggles for civil rights and equitable treatment for all. While difficult, equity advocates in Canada and elsewhere are able to maintain their focus and motivation in this struggle from a constant stream of employment data that show persistent underrepresentation of racialized groups in leadership positions (Galabuzi, 2012 in Maldonado, M.). In the context of education in the Greater Toronto Area, 19 percent of principals and vice principals in publicly funded school districts self-identify as members of racialized groups whereas approximately 50 percent of the general population in those districts were racialized (Cukier and Yap, 2009).

Capitalizing on the potential strength of mentorship programs for aspiring leaders as discussed above, recent efforts have been made in the UK, USA, and Canada to provide customized mentorship programs for racialized groups. These represent a first step in challenging "the dynamic that is created when western processes and models meet black or global majority cultures in the form of the leader" (Campbell-Stephens, 2009, p. 323). While customized leadership programs for racialized groups remain controversial (Ogunbawo, 2012), these programs are seen as an important strategy in attracting racialized individuals into educational fields, developing their leadership capacities, and using their leadership positions to role-model similar career trajectories for future leaders (Bush *et al.*, 2005). Begun in 2004, Investing in Diversity is an early model for mentoring racialized (in this case, largely black) leaders in the Greater London Area. The program's key purpose is to "create a space for new leadership paradigms and new knowledge creators […] [and] to make explicit the 'additionality' that BME (Black and Majority Ethnic) can bring to their role" (Campbell-Stephens, 2009, p. 322). Even the use of the acronym "BME" repositions racialized groups from a traditional conceptualization as "have not" to one where they represent the majority of humans globally, arguably a position of relative power in circumstances where racial difference continues to play a role.

Formal mentoring programs for aspiring racialized vice principals

Investing in Diversity brings together BME leaders to serve as mentors for aspiring BME leaders. The program consists of regularly scheduled meetings between mentors and mentees over the course of a year. Mentors are selected based on their record of advocacy in BME communities and are drawn from education, business, and institutional sectors. The program curriculum is provocative and intended to push mentees to consider their positions on a host of educational and social issues framed by existing leadership paradigms of power and privilege that have traditionally excluded BME voices. Questions such as these form the basis of discussion in the program (Campbell-Stephens, 2009, p. 329):

- Do I have a position on exploitation and injustice; on mediocrity as opposed to excellence?
- What am I prepared to collude with in order to save my own skin and earn the dubious "acceptance" of the majority?
- Do I have a position on equity and the intrinsic worth of all human beings?
- What is it that really motivates me to want to be a leader?
- What expectations do I believe others have of me, including family and friends?
- How do I maintain my own equilibrium and stay focussed despite those often-conflicting expectations?

Investing in Diversity has undergone several program evaluations (Coleman and Campbell-Stephens, 2009, 2010; Johnson and Campbell-Stephens, 2012; Ogunbawo, 2012), each documenting favorable results. While not all participants experienced formal promotion to vice principal within their Investing in Diversity mentorship program, roughly two-thirds of the participants claimed the program to be a turning point on their career path. Key among the success factors of the program was mentorship provided by leaders whose personal identities mirrored their own, or at least did not represent the prevailing models in leadership positions they had experienced up to this point (Ogunbawo, 2012).

Leading for Equity. In 2010, the Centre for Leadership and Diversity at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, completed a report for the Council of Ontario Directors of Education entitled Leading for Equity (Singh, 2010). Leading for Equity was modeled after Investing in Diversity (Campbell-Stephens, 2009) and represented an early attempt to formalize a mentoring program for aspiring "Aboriginal and visible minorities in meeting the needs for succession planning [in education] through talent development" (Singh, 2010, p. 1) in the Greater Toronto Area. In the Canadian context, "Aboriginal" refers to members of Indigenous peoples living throughout Canada prior to European colonization; "visible minorities" is a collective term used to refer to non-white people. The project represented a direct response to the Ministry of Education's Ontario Leadership Strategy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009), to the longstanding and significant underrepresentation of minoritized leaders in all labor sectors, and to population trends in the Greater Toronto Area that have raised the proportion of non-whites past the 50 percent mark (Statistics Canada, 2011). Accounts from the 20 participating mentees echoed concerns similar to those in the extant literature in navigating a leadership trajectory that seemed unconcerned with identities or experiences as members of Aboriginal or visible minority groups. Of these concerns, the most prevalent was the issue of hiring, retention, and promotion and its relation to traditional leadership practices, perceptions of systemic racism, and lack of support for Aboriginal and visible minority leadership candidates (Singh, 2010). Specific challenges related to the promotion process were identified, namely, first, the practice of "tapping," or informal sponsorship by current leaders; second, the perception of hidden curriculum/criteria for selecting leaders; and third, the need to code-switch (using specific linguistic and social norms such as dropping local dialects, or engaging in self-promotion) in order to adopt the current leadership culture. But mentees also identified a particular set of skills needed to eventually lead a more effective equity agenda. Mentees recognized a need to adopt a consistent introspective stance, to share knowledge and experience with other racialized leaders, to cultivate a deep interest in the diverse school communities where they work, and to learn the institutional culture of the organization and its stance on equity. To address the hiring concerns and facilitate necessary skill development, mentees in Leading for Equity believed that a carefully crafted mentorship program would not only provide an effective platform to discuss career path plans, but would also foster a collaborative network for skill building.

Five key questions framed the evaluation outcomes of Leading for Equity: (1) What are the challenges and possibilities to the hiring, retention, and promotion of global majorities? (2) Which critical incidents are easier to address and which ones are more difficult? (3) What strengths do I bring to equity leadership and what do I still need to learn? (4) What knowledge, tools, skills, and attitudes are needed for equity leadership?

and (5) What topics should be included in equity leadership programs? (Singh, 2010). Feedback surveys from participants indicated strong satisfaction with the program with calls for expansion and further opportunities for discussions and networking. To that end, Singh recommended that the project sponsors implement specialized mentoring support for aspiring racialized vice principals across Ontario in order to "demonstrate a move from intellectualizing equity to the lived experience and demonstrative capacity to implement equity in leadership" (Singh, 2010, p. 18).

Background of the study

To date, the Peel District School Board (DSB) is one of very few Ontario school districts to have responded favorably to the recommendations in Leading for Equity by organizing a formalized mentoring program for racialized teachers aspiring to the vice principalship. The Peel DSB is Canada's second largest school district, situated on the western border of the city of Toronto, and home to one of the country's most diverse ethno-racial communities (Statistics Canada, 2011). In 2011, leadership candidates who had recently been promoted to positions of vice principal or principal were invited to participate in focus groups to share their experiences during the promotion process. As a research methodology, focus groups are useful in constructing knowledge over the course of the interview (Merriam, 2009) and particularly beneficial in providing a safe platform for participants to discuss topics of mutual interest with varying perspectives and personal stake (MacNaghten and Myers, 2004). Such focus groups have occurred in the past for similar reasons in an effort to enhance promotion procedures.

Additionally, this most recent review asked newly appointed leaders to self-identify as a member of a racialized group such that focus groups could be organized by such membership. One focus group consisted of eight leaders self-identified as racialized whereas two groups of ten leaders self-identified as non-racialized. Each focus group was conducted independently by a facilitator from the district's research department and used the same prompt questions. The content of participants' comments was coded into thematic categories to allow inferences to be drawn. Some themes were common across focus groups and pertained specifically to the promotion process within the Peel DSB. However, some themes were specific to those participants self-identified as racialized, and reinforced claims documented in Investing in Diversity (Campbell-Stephens, 2009) and Leading for Equity (Singh, 2010). These included the lack of existing racialized leaders who could serve as mentors, apprehension that promotion might be viewed as tokenism, code-switching to behave in a certain way, and a fear of being limited in their school placements to schools with like-race populations. Most worrisome, however, was the perception among racialized leaders of the difference between their various cultural norms and observed leadership norms of the district, and that this mismatch might signal that a candidate was ill-suited to a vice principal or principal role. Examples of cultural behaviors that might counter the existing leadership paradigm included speaking too quietly (a sign of weakness) or too loudly (a sign of forcefulness), the requirement to self-promote (seen as shameful in some cultures), and speaking with gestures (a para-linguistic norm in some cultures but outright discouraged during promotion interviews in the district). Racialized participants who speak English as a second language also shared their apprehension that the use of non-Canadian accents would be viewed as a leadership shortcoming. Together, the differences in perceptions of the leadership promotion experience between the racialized and non-racialized focus groups were sufficient

enough to consider the development of a pilot mentoring program designed to examine the issues raised by the racialized participants and provide additional support to future aspiring racialized leaders in the Peel DSB.

Aspiring Racialized Leaders Mentoring Program. A 2013 external review of hiring and promotion procedures identified perceptions of discrimination against racialized persons pursuing positions of responsibility. The review recommended that the district provide a forum for members of racialized groups to better understand the vice principal role (the typical entry level administrative position in Ontario) and, therefore, more successfully navigate the promotion process. As such, the Aspiring Racialized Leaders Mentoring pilot program was developed through the leadership development department of the district and began in April 2014. The program would support the district's strategic plan in recruiting and promoting vice principals from the widest pool of qualified applicants reflective of the district's diverse population. In Ontario, such specialized programs are further supported by the Ontario Human Rights Commission as a means for employers to meet their obligations in removing systemic barriers to hiring and advancement within their organization.

The program was advertised throughout the district in various ways, for example, meetings of principals and superintendents, leadership network meetings, word of mouth, the district's internet homepage, and through existing informal educator networks. Mentee applicants (all teachers) were informed that preference would be given to those seeking promotion within the next two to five years. In this district, as in many in Ontario, aspiring vice principals typically accumulate a range of school experiences as teachers and acquire additional university level qualifications in order to meet application requirements. Mentor applicants were selected from principal and vice principals who had shown particular interest in equity leadership and who had participated as mentors in the already established mentorship program for new vice principals. In the end, 25 mentors and 25 mentees were selected to participate. The following describes the mentor and mentee demographics:

- both groups were evenly split male/female;
- mentors were generally older with more experience in education than mentees, by approximately ten years;
- most mentors had been in their current leadership role for less than five years; mentees ranged in their role experience from two to 10+ years; and
- all mentees self-identified as racialized; approximately two-thirds of mentors self-identified as racialized.

The program curriculum was developed in collaboration with Anima Leadership, a Toronto-based organization that provides leadership training and consultative services to a broad range of public and private sector organizations in Canada. Two key goals informed the program content: first, to support racialized teachers' leadership capacity and their understanding of the school administrator's role as they aspire toward it; and second, to expand the pool of qualified leadership applicants to better represent the diversity in the district. The 15-month program committed mentors and mentees to come together as a group 11 times to learn about topics such as establishing mentoring relationships, skill sets in mentoring, self-identity, leadership paradigms, power dynamics, and bias identification. Each session included time for learning about program content areas but also to discuss questions

of interest to either mentors or mentees and for the mentoring pairs to revisit goals established at the program onset. Occasionally during group sessions, mentors and mentees met in like-role groups to discuss challenges and successes in their respective mentoring roles, or to explore program content more deeply from the like-role perspective. Mentors and mentees were also expected to meet and learn together at least once a month between workshop sessions.

Findings

Following the pilot, all mentors and mentees were invited to reflect on their experiences in the program by completing a survey, an online version that could efficiently reach the program participants and facilitate data analysis. Like other qualitative research methods, the survey was used to gather perceptual responses of participants (Fowler, 2014) to the various goals of the pilot program, and to seek feedback that would be helpful in designing possible future programs.

Each of the five survey sections (Process, Relationship, Learning, Program Administration, and General Impressions) began with a series of statements to which participants rated their degree of agreement, followed by open-ended questions to capture more context to the ratings given. In all, 13 mentors and 19 mentees responded to the survey providing an overall response rate of 64 percent (52 and 76 percent, respectively). Due to the small sample size, statistical analyses were not conducted on the responses. The research analyst, a member of the district's research and evaluation department, provided notes in the final report stating that while themes reported capture the general impressions of the entire group, some of the comments reported are specific to only a few respondents and should be interpreted accordingly. What follows is a summary of the findings by survey categories.

Process. The first section of the survey inquired about the structural process established between mentor and mentee, such as the frequency and productivity of meetings, and the ease of connecting in order to schedule/reschedule meetings as needed. In most cases, responses from both mentor and mentee groups were generally strong (agree or strongly agree), but with mentees expressing weaker agreement (between 10 and 30 percent of the time) with the frequency and productivity of meetings, and the timely scheduling of meetings with their mentors. No follow-up comments were provided in this section.

Relationship. When providing impressions of the mentoring relationship itself, strong agreement (strong or very strong) was expressed by both mentors and mentees. Based on the questions, this meant that positive mentoring relationships had been established, that open dialogue on many topics was achieved, that feedback provided and received was honest and constructive, that high levels of trust existed between mentor and mentee, that clear goals had been established, and that the outcomes of the relationship met expectations. Again, mentees expressed slightly weaker agreement on all items in this section (6–11 percent of the time) than their mentors. Both groups identified a number of positive elements in their mentoring relationship, most notably from mentors gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges of those planning to go through the promotion process, and from mentees better understanding the role by learning from someone currently fulfilling the role. Both groups, however, expressed shortcomings with their mentoring relationship, all related to a lack of time (e.g. not enough meeting time given competing demands of both mentors and mentees, time to job shadow during the day, and travel time needed to meet given geographic distance

between worksites of mentors and mentees). Lastly, participants were asked how they may have tried to influence the relationship to better suit their individual goals. Both groups indicated that effective communication (open, frequent, multi-modal) and working toward a symbiotic relationship (adopting a co-learning stance, being respectful of each other's time, asking questions, and expressing genuine interest in the other) were key strategies in maximizing the mentoring relationship for both parties.

Learning. The next section of the survey explored the learning experienced by both groups. It captured impressions of how participants extended their understanding of systemic issues and opportunities in the district, how they gained insight/developed skills and knowledge, how they progressed with their personal learning goals, the effectiveness of mutual feedback, and how their overall participation in the mentoring pilot program contributed positively to their professional development. Again, mentors expressed stronger agreement with the item statements than did the mentees (11-31 percent of the time). This section prompted more ambiguous (neither agree nor disagree) responses from both groups (8–50 percent of the time), possibly signaling a somewhat cautious response in attributing their learning on this topic to the mentoring experience itself. In the open responses, mentors and mentees reported details about their learning with understandable differences given their respective role distinctions. Some similar learning was noted, however, particularly as it pertained to understanding personal bias, the effects of unconscious bias, and increased self-awareness when interacting with those unlike oneself. Mentees indicated that their mentor contributed significantly to their professional growth and development, more so than did the mentees to the professional growth of the mentors. Not surprisingly, mentees (all teachers) also indicated more than the mentors (all principals or vice principals) that the mentoring relationship had a profound effect on their career aspirations. Mentors acknowledged, however, that the mentoring experience sharpened their appreciation for the challenges racialized leaders face in their career planning.

Program Administration and General Impressions. This section of the survey captured participants' reflections on a range of statements relating to the program's original goals and objectives. For example, participants were asked about the clarity of program goals, developing informal networks within the district, their sense of inclusion in the district, and the potential for this program to support their or others' aspirations to vice principal positions. Most mentors and mentees indicated strong agreement with how the program was organized to prompt reflection on their identities as racialized teachers aspiring to vice principal roles: For example:

> Becoming conscious of my own biases and perceptions also helps me to understand why I respond to certain people and situations in an automatic way. I have become more reflective and self-questioning.
>
> I realize that I need to consider the "colours" of the people I am interacting with to better understand their position and formulate my response.
>
> I'm now better equipped to quietly or sometimes vocally challenging systemic inequity that I observe.

However, the response data below invite further consideration by the program's organizers:

- approximately 25 percent of mentees indicated that the pilot program did not leave them with a greater sense of inclusion and future opportunity in the district;

- approximately 25 percent of mentees and mentors did not feel that this type of program would contribute to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of racialized employees in the district;
- approximately 20 percent of both groups indicated that this type of program would not contribute to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of top talent in the district; and
- approximately 40 percent of mentees indicated that participation in this pilot program had no influence on their desire to continue their career in the district.

From the less satisfied mentees, two comments show that at least one racialized teacher joined the pilot program feeling some degree of guilt over his/her identity; another completed the program with a despondent outlook:

> I now understand that there should not be guilt associated with my ethnic background — respecting that my background actually makes me a stronger leader than I thought.

> If anything, I've become more apathetic in my day-to-day responsibilities because I understand now how your pathway and opportunities in [the district] are so clearly defined by the relationship you have with administration. Working in this program has taught me that I, as an individual, do not matter.

In summary, the findings described above provided sufficient data to prompt considerable discussion among members of the senior leadership team in the district on the value of the pilot program as a strategy to support the recruitment and promotion of school leaders who reflect the ethno-racial diversity of the community.

Discussion

Many parallels can be drawn between the Aspiring Racialized Leaders Mentoring pilot program and its precedent initiatives described above (Investing in Diversity; Leading for Equity), each designed to address similar issues in different jurisdictions. First, in each program mentoring is generally seen as an effective approach in supporting employees as they prepare for leadership roles. Effective leadership represents a complex blend of specific skills and dispositions that demand considerable personal reflection and response to changing political and social trends (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003). As such, the symbiotic and long-term nature of mentorship provided a suitable platform in preparing for a multi-dimensional role and served as the framework to support racialized leaders as they contemplate roles typically held by members of the dominant white culture (Osler, 2006). Second, all three programs recognized the need for specific training for mentors that would distinguish the role from that of sponsor, coach, consultant, or peer. While the mentor's key purpose was to help the mentee clarify and refine his/her own perspectives, the mentoring relationship by definition was intentionally designed to avoid the mentee adopting the mentor's ways of knowing, doing, and being. Mentorship, then, fosters new possibilities and challenges leadership constructs that may themselves be barriers to "others" pursuing leadership prospects. Lastly, all three programs for racialized leaders provided testing grounds for rethinking the function of school leadership in the context of rapid diversification of the student population that is likely to accelerate with time. Favorable outcomes for both mentors and mentees in all programs provided not only evidence that such programs satisfy an organizational need, but challenge critics who argue that such programs are by nature undemocratic and constitute reverse discrimination (Bush *et al.*, 2005).

Formal mentoring programs for racialized leaders such as Investing in Diversity, Leading for Equity, and the Aspiring Racialized Leaders Mentoring Program are still in early stages of implementation and may not yet enjoy widespread acceptance for a number of reasons (Ogunbawo, 2012). First, the challenge in recruiting racialized teachers into leadership positions may be complicated by problems of "supply." Ryan *et al.* (2009) have documented the longstanding underrepresentation of racialized teachers in Canada – the pool from which all vice principals are drawn. Such research questions the teacher-hiring processes that may favor non-racialized applicants (Jack and Ryan, 2015) from the start, thereby creating a disproportionately smaller pool of racialized leadership candidates competing for leadership positions later on. Second, while racialized participants have generally favored their mentoring experiences in such programs, many are aware of the strained politics surrounding these programs. In the case of the Aspiring Racialized Leaders Mentoring Program, 25 percent percent of mentees questioned its value as a strategy to further their leadership aspirations, and similar proportions of mentees believed the program would not help the district with its recruitment of racialized leaders, nor that such a program will lead to a greater sense of inclusion within the organization – both strategic goals of the program itself. It may be useful for program organizers to contemplate reasons for these mentee responses by adjusting the content of the mentoring program to include critical research on leadership paradigms and their effects on career advancement in other work sectors. Furthermore, it may be useful to investigate the merits of providing extraordinary support for some underrepresented groups, but not for all groups with histories of systemic discrimination, such as members of the LGBTQ community, or individuals with physical disabilities. Nonetheless, one year following the Aspiring Racialized Leaders Mentorship Program pilot, two mentee participants/teachers were promoted to the role of vice principal, a number greater than expected given mentees' previously stated intentions to seek promotion between two and five years in the future.

Efforts to recruit and promote members of groups historically underrepresented in positions of leadership remain contentious in labor contexts, especially those that reinforce narrow meritocratic approaches to career advancement (Blackmore, 2010). Blackmore and others argue that merit-based promotion processes that reproduce historic patterns of glass ceiling advancement for certain ethno-racial, gender, religious, or other identities signal the presence of conscious bias in the process itself, or an uncritical bias in how merit is defined. More fundamentally, however, is a need to interrogate longstanding identity-blind theories of school leadership from a diversity perspective (Lumby and Morrison, 2010). In recognizing mentorship as a form of socialization (Daresh, 2004), mentorship holds the potential to socialize aspiring leaders into pre-existing leadership paradigms that may discount the experiences of individuals whose identities have been shaped differently. In the case of the Aspiring Racialized Leaders Mentorship Program pilot, it is too early to know if the program has accomplished its goal to increase the number of racialized teachers advancing to the role of vice principal. There are a number of reasons for this: first, the pilot was restricted to 25 teacher participants and it is known that a small number of aspiring racialized teachers not included in the pilot were promoted to vice principal during the same timeframe. Second, at this point, the district does not yet systematically collect identity-based data about its employees, leaving it difficult to determine whether or not the actual number of teachers aspiring to vice principal from any identity group has increased. Given the proportion of aspiring racialized teachers participating in this pilot who claimed the program did not leave them with a

greater sense of inclusion in the district or that this type of program would support the attraction and advancement of racialized vice principals in the district, further research is needed to explain these participants' misgivings. Such research should include robust inquiry into the social assumptions that underpin popular models of school leadership and the training curriculum in which leadership hopefuls typically participate. Without such investigations, changes to either the process or biases that sustain these patterns of leadership advancement are "a doubtful enterprise, and likely to meet with resistance" (Lumby with Coleman, 2007, p. 92). Periodically, however, public and private institutions are called on to intervene to facilitate necessary revisions to traditional practices in order to correct trends that show social exclusion, and to minimize potential political tensions between the established dominant cultures(s) and "others" (Shukra *et al.*, 2004). The Aspiring Racialized Leaders Mentoring Program pilot may represent an example of such intervention. To date, it has demonstrated sufficient success to continue in the Peel DSB for at least the next academic year.

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