MENTORING BY THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROFESSOR: ONE ROLE AMONG MANY

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MENTORING BY THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROFESSOR: ONE ROLE AMONG MANY

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The process of mentorship in relationship to the community college professor and the potential to improve and enhance the teaching and learning process is explored in this article. This article suggests that not all community college professors are psychological or intellectually disposed to being or becoming a good mentor. It is put forth that mentoring is a subrole of the community college professor. A framework for understanding the “complete mentor” process, as developed by Cohen (1993), is presented. Implications for practice are offered in a manner that connects the community college professor as mentor with enhancing the instructional process through the nurturing teaching perspective.

The teaching and learning process is an art form and enterprise that is rich in human interaction. The mode and complexity of the teaching and learning process is confined in the individually and idiosyncracies of those who take on the role of teacher and learner. It is a dynamic, complex, creative, and fluid process. Good teaching is about being skillful, communicative, reflective, responsive, motivated, and committed to both one’s discipline and the learners who community college professors help in their intellectual journey (Galbraith, 2004). The ultimate purpose is to understand the complexity of community college learners and assist them in becoming self-directed, autonomous, and critically reflective thinkers who can contribute to the growth and demands of a changing society. Bess and Associates (2000)

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suggest that college teachers engage in a multitude of tasks. They raise the question of whether one individual has the talent, expertise, competencies, and psychological disposition to carry out equally well all the required roles (i.e., curriculum developer, researcher, lecturer, discussion leaders, assessor, and so forth) assigned to them as a faculty member. Elsewhere, Bess (2000) states that “few, if any, faculty members are so broadly talented and psychologically disposed as to engage in all of the roles . . . [therefore] what is needed is all . . . reclassification of the different kind of college teaching subroles.” (p.21).

One subrole for a faculty member is that of mentor. Not all faculty members are psychologically or intellectually disposed to being or becoming a good mentor. Zachary (2002) posits that, “Some teachers gravitate quite naturally toward mentoring . . . others find themselves uncomfortably thrust into the role” (p.27). Galbraith (2001) provides information concerning mentor development for community college faculty and makes it quite clear that mentoring is far more than giving advice. It is important to note that from the framework of the community college professor as mentor discussed in this article, true mentoring is a complex process that supports a mutual enhancement of independent and critically reflective thinking. Not all teachers or learners desire to engage in such a mutual endeavor. Mentoring is a time consuming and labor intensive undertaking for both the faculty member and college learner (Galbraith, 2001).

Mentoring is an old idea relevance and meaning in today’s community college educational environment. The term “mentor” has a long and distinguished history where it has been used synonymously to mean a wise teacher, guide, and friend. It is the mentor who often makes the difference between success and failure through a life journey (Galbraith & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2000). With that understanding, mentoring is assuming national importance as a vital and essential component in the personal, educational, and professional experiences of learners in community colleges.

The literature offers numerous definitions of mentoring, yet a single, widely accepted operational definition of mentoring is absent. Jacobi (1991, p.505) suggests that this “definitional vagueness is a continued lack of clarity about the antecedents, outcomes, characteristics, and mediators of mentoring relationships despite a growing body of empirical research.” Galbraith and Maslin-Ostrowski (2000) state that, “mentoring is a process of intellectual, psychological, and affective development based on meetings of relative frequency scheduled over a reasonably extended time-frame [and that] mentors accept personal responsibility as competent and trustworthy nonparental
figures for the significant growth of other individuals” (pp. 136–137). Galbraith and Zelenak (1991) contend that mentoring is a unique one-to-one teaching and learning method that incorporates the basic elements of collaboration, challenge, critical reflection, and praxis. Daloz (1986) points out that mentoring has to “do with growing up, with the development of identity” (p. 19).

The ideal mentoring relationship can be characterized as a series of mentor-mentee dialogues noted for collaborative critical thinking and planning, mutual participation in specific goal setting and decision-making, shared evaluation regarding the results of actions, and joint reflection on the worth of areas identified for progress. According to Galbraith and Maslin-Ostrowski (2000), “the premise of mentoring as one-to-one developmental learning is that an important professor/student relationship will be formed that enables mentees to take appropriate risks, deal better with stress and uncertainty, develop more self-confidence, make more informed decisions, and thus allow for more likely attainment of current and future personal, educational, and professional objectives” (p. 137).

It has been suggested that there are themes imbedded in the concept of mentoring. Golian and Galbraith (1996) identified the following set of common themes that suggest mentoring is a process within a contextual setting; involves a relationship between a more knowledgeable and experienced (perhaps older) individual and a less experienced individual; provides professional networking, counseling, guiding, instructing, modeling, and sponsoring; is a developmental mechanism (personal, professional, and psychological); is a social and reciprocal relationship; and provides an identity transformation for both mentor and protege. They acknowledge that numerous definitions do not recognize the essence of a good mentoring relationship, such as the necessity of a reciprocal and developmental process for both the mentor and mentee.

Effective mentoring holds great promise to enhance the teaching and learning process. A major element to that success is the professor’s ability to practice effective mentorship. The community college professor is engaged in a multitude of tasks and various subroles. If the proportion is accepted that multiple roles comprise the community college professor and one role is mentoring, then its is essential to explore the elements of mentorship and its potential to improve the instructional and learning process. This article profiles the complete mentor and the associated six interrelated functions of mentorship. To understand the complete mentor profile, some desired attributes of the “good” mentor and mentee will be presented initially as well as a brief examination of the roles of mentorship. Finally, implications for
improving the community college teaching and learning practice as a result of connecting the community college professor and the mentoring subrole is detailed.

MENTOR AND MENTEE ROLES AND ATTRIBUTES

A mentor often assumes multiple roles within the mentorship process to bring about the enhancement of the mentee’s professional, personal, and psychological development (Cohen, 1995a; Daloz, 1998; Galbraith, 2001; Galbraith & Cohen, 1995, 1996, 1997; Murray, 1991). Depending upon the situation, the mentor may be a role model, advocate, sponsor, advisor, guide, developer of skills and intellect, listener, host, coach, challenger, visionary, balancer, friend, sharer, facilitator, and resource provider. In addition, to these roles come a responsibility to consider the psychological dimensions of the relationship, such as accepting, confirming, counseling, and protecting. Galbraith and Maslin-Ostrowski (2000) believe that, “the role that best describes the mentor may be decided as a result of how well the mentor understands the total mentorship process” (p.145).

Community colleges can have an enhanced educational and open academic climate when they take advantage of the benefits realized from a strong community college professor and adult learner mentoring relationships. An array of attributes, characteristics, and dispositions that each partner in the mentoring relationship must possess for it to be successful have been identified (Galbraith & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2000).

An effective mentor possesses respect for the mentee, strong communication skills, and a capacity to encourage, motivate, and develop others. The community college professor as mentor would respect differences in opinions and challenge ideas not people, plus have a genuine interest in helping others flourish in the community college setting. Good mentors demonstrate a wide range of professional skills and an awareness and access to resources, along with the willingness to share these with mentees. Beyond such attributes, the mentor must have the will to invest time and effort in developing an effective professor and adult learner relationship.

The mentee also must possess certain attributes, characteristics, and dispositions within the mentorship process if it is to be successful. Mentee characteristics and attributes include a desire to work towards an academic goal, learn new things, and an openness to different points of view. These seem to be reflective of what many, if not most, adult learners entering the community college already possess. This means that most students already have the disposition and capability.
to engage in a mentoring relationship. Once this is recognized, the mentee must be willing to accept help and seek advice from the professor, be cooperative, and carry out mutually determined obligations and activities. The mentee extends the benefits of the mentorship process if they can engage in good listening and communication skills, have a positive attitude, and the ability to handle setbacks. Mentees must be mature in how they approach the relationship, for example, use discretion, be diplomatic, and show appreciation when working with mentors. Finally, it is essential that the mentee work hard and juggle several tasks at once (Galbraith & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2000).

Some foundational information in which to view the community college professor in a mentor role stems from understanding the definitions, themes, roles, and attributes of the mentorship process. It is essential to remember that one subrole, that is, one role among many roles in which the community college professor engages, is being addressed. To comprehend the full extent of the subrole of community college professor as mentor, an understanding of the complete mentor, and associated behavioral functions framework is fundamental. By understanding the conceptual framework presented below, it becomes evident the mentorship process is much more than just advising. It is a process that encourages an educational journey in the community college setting that promotes self-direction, independence, critical thinking, and reflective practice.

THE COMPLETE MENTOR FRAMEWORK

The concept of “complete mentor” indicates that not all relationships are considered to be mentoring because they do not fit into the framework that is presented here. Very distinct functions and processes comprise the complete mentor. These functions and processes are the essence of the community college professor who engages in the subrole of mentor. To assist in understanding the complete mentor framework, an examination of the functions associated with the mentoring process is detailed as well as the tasks that comprise each function area. The complete mentor is grounded in the work of Cohen (1993, 1995a) and is extended through the writings of Cohen and Galbraith (1995), Galbraith (2001), Galbraith and Cohen (1995, 1996, 1997), and Galbraith and Maslin-Ostrowski (2000).

Few scholars have designed valid and reliable instruments to measure mentor effectiveness. Cohen (1993, 1995a, 1995b), has accomplished this developing the principles of the Adult Mentoring Scale (PAMS), which is based on a composite profile of the complete mentor role. It is a self-assessment instrument designed primarily for
use by professionals who have consciously assumed mentoring responsibilities in their relationships with learners. The scale assesses the mentor functions and behaviors that experts in postsecondary education agree are most likely to be significant in relationships between mentors and mentees, such as faculty and students. As a baseline reference point, the scale offers faculty the opportunity to compare and contrast privately their current or probable mentoring style with the behavioral profile of an effective mentor. PAMS evaluates 55 specific mentor interpersonal behaviors relevant to establishing and maintaining an evolving mentoring relationship. The primary purpose of the scale, according to Cohen (1995b), is to “help mentors better locate themselves on the map of their mentoring relationship, so they can contribute as much as possible to the meaning of the journey for the mentee” (p.23). The mentor role is based on a “synthesis of those mentoring behaviors in the adult and higher education literature that are considered essential for the development of meaningful mentor-mentee relationship” (Cohen, 1995a, p.23).

Mentoring is viewed as a blend of six interrelated behavioral functions, each with a distinct and central purpose: (1) Relationship Emphasis—to establish trust; (2) Information Emphasis—to offer specific advice; (3) Facilitative Focus—to introduce alternatives; (4) Confrontive Focus—to challenge; (5) Mentor Model—to motivate; and (6) Mentee Vision—to encourage initiative (Cohen, 1995a, p.3). An explanation of each of the six functions, which are collectively labeled the compute mentor role, are presented next, along with specific behaviors that the mentor would perform.

**Relationship Emphasis**

The mentor conveys through active, empathetic listening a genuine understanding and acceptance of the mentee’s feeling as a focus of the relationship emphasis function. The purpose is to create a psychological climate of trust that allows mentees (who perceive mentors as listening and not judging) to share and reflect honestly upon their personal experiences (positive and negative) as adult learners in education or the workplace. The mentor practices responsive listening (verbal and nonverbal reactions that signal sincere interest), asks open-ended questions related to expressed immediate concerns about actual situations, and provides descriptive feedback based on observations rather than inferences of motives. Also, the mentor uses perception checks to ensure understanding of feelings, and offers nonjudgmental sensitive responses to assist in clarifying emotional states and reactions.
Information Emphasis

The mentor, in information emphasis, directly requests detailed information from and offers specific suggestions to mentees about current plans and progress in achieving personal, educational, and career goals. The purpose is to ensure that the advice offered is based on accurate and sufficient information of individual mentees’ differences. The mentor asks questions that are aimed at assuring factual understanding of the mentees’ present educational and career situation, reviews relevant background to develop an adequate personal profile, and asks probing questions that require concrete answers. The mentor additionally poses directive-type questions about present problems and solutions that should be considered, makes restatements to ensure factual accuracy and interpretive understanding, and relies on facts as an integral component of the decision-making process.

Facilitative Focus

In the facilitative focus function, the mentor guides mentees through a reasonably in-depth review of their interests, abilities, ideas, and beliefs relevant to academia. The purpose is to assist mentees in considering alternative views and options while reaching their own decisions about attainable personal, academic, or career goals. The mentor poses hypothetical questions to expand individual views, uncovers the underlying experiential and information basis for assumptions, and presents multiple viewpoints to generate a more in-depth analysis of decisions and actions. Additionally, the mentor examines the seriousness of commitment to goals, analyzes reasons for current pursuits, and reviews recreational and vocational preferences.

Confrontive Focus

The mentor, in this function, respectfully challenges mentees’ explanations for or avoidance of decisions and actions relevant to their development as learners in the educational setting. The purpose is to help mentees attain insight into unproductive strategies and behaviors and to evaluate their need and capacity to change. In the confrontive focus function, the mentor uses careful probing to assess psychological readiness of the mentee to benefit from different points of view and openly acknowledges concerns about possible negative consequences of constructive and critical feedback on the relationship. The mentor also employs a confrontive verbal stance aimed at the
primary goal of promoting self-assessment of apparent discrepancies, focuses on the most likely strategies and behaviors for meaningful change, and sparingly provides feedback for impact. Finally, the mentor offers comments before and after confrontive remarks to reinforce belief in potential for mentee growth beyond the current situation.

**Mentor Model**

The mentor, in the mentor model function, shares with mentees appropriate life experiences and feelings as a role model in order to personalize and enrich the relationship. The purpose is to motivate mentees to take necessary risks, make decisions without certainty of successful results, and continue to overcome difficulties in their own journey toward educational and career goals. The mentor draws on personal experiences as well as experiences with other mentees in order to share thoughts and genuine feelings that emphasize the value of learning from unsuccessful or difficult experiences (perhaps portrayed as trial and error leading to self-correction, not as growth-limiting failures). The mentor also provides a direct, realistic assessment of the mentee’s ability to pursue goals, expresses a confident view of appropriate risk-taking as necessary for personal, educational, training, and career development, and makes statements that clearly encourage mentees to take action to attain their stated goals.

**Mentor Vision**

In mentor vision, the final function, the mentor stimulates mentees’ critical thinking with regard to envisioning their own future and to develop personal and professional potential. The purpose is to encourage mentees to function as independent adult learners, to take initiatives to manage change, and negotiate constructive transitions through personal life events. The mentor in this context makes statements that require the mentee to reflect on present and future educational, training, and career attainments. The mentor also asks questions aimed at clarifying positive and negative perceptions, reviews individual choices based on a reasonable assessment of options and resources, and expresses confidence in carefully thought out decisions. In addition, the mentor discusses and shows respect for mentees’ capacity to determine their own future and encourages them to develop their talents and pursue dreams.

All six function areas are required to constitute the complete mentor. The primary focus must be toward moving through the
functions in an effective manner. While not all community college professors will have the same effectiveness in all areas or functions, it is imperative that all functions are addressed throughout the mentorship journey.

MENTORSHIP IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPROVING INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

Mentorship goes well beyond the role of advising. While advising is a short-term process where the focus is on giving information and guidance to the learner, mentoring is a more intricate long-term one-on-one relationship that goes well beyond providing information. Mentoring, in its true form, is a complex process between community college professor and college learner that supports a mutual enhancement of critically reflective and independent thinking. The primary goals of mentoring are directed toward enhancing personal and professional growth through the development of the learner’s self-concept and self-efficacy efforts.

Mentorship in its completeness has a natural connection to the teaching and learning process. It has a major impact on a selected teaching perspective. Pratt and Associates (1998) provide a detailed analysis of five teaching perspectives (Transmission, Apprenticeship, Developmental, Nurturing, and Social Reform) through an examination of indicators of commitment that include actions, intentions, and beliefs. It is their belief that once these indicators are examined, a specific perspective on teaching emerges. They make it clear that a teaching perspective is not the same thing as a teaching style. A teaching perspective give is direction to the teaching process. It is in the nurturing perspective that mentoring is closely linked and assimilated.

The nurturing perspective on teaching in the community college and mentoring share the belief that learning is most affected by a learner’s self-concept and self-efficacy. As Pratt (1998a) suggests, “learners must be confident that they can learn the material and that learning the material will be useful and relevant to their lives” (p. 49). He goes on to say that, “a nurturing relationship is neither permissive nor possessive ... it is professional and demanding, characterized by a high degree of reciprocal trust and respect, and always seeks a balance between caring and challenging” (p. 49). As in the mentorship process, the goal of the nurturing perspective is to help people become more confident, critically reflective, and self-sufficient learners. T’Kenye (1998) states that to nurture is to sustain and aid in the growth, much like the role of the mentor. The mentoring and nurturing perspectives
share the guiding principle “that mastery of content, is considered secondary to the way in which mastery is achieved” (T’Kenye, 1998, p. 161). The major role from these two perspectives is to facilitate healthy interpersonal development in conjunction with learning encounters.

Mentors and nurturing community college professors have much in common. In fact, professors who have the nurturing perspective are probably good candidates for becoming good mentors. T’Kenye (1998) points out that “many qualities associated with nurturing education are traditionally thought of as “feminine”: empathy, sensitivity to others’ emotional needs, practice of “intuitive” understanding of others’ emotional states, and an ability to offer support during emotional crisis and so forth” (p. 163). These same qualities are found in the mentoring task associated with teaching in the community college. What Pratt (1998b) suggests about the primary responsibilities of the nurturing educator also holds true for the mentor role such as fostering a climate of trust and respect, engaging empathetically with individual needs, promoting and enhancing learners’ self-esteem, guiding students through content to build confidence, promoting success in learning, providing encouragement and support, encouraging expressions of feelings, reinforcing effort as well as achievement, focusing evaluation on individual growth or progress, and challenging people, while also caring about them. This description closely mirrors the behavioral functions of the complete mentor mentioned above. While nurturing is concerned with the emotional wholeness of the learner, mentoring finds that as primary as well. Mentoring and the nurturing perspective are concerned with “power-with” not “power-over” in the teaching and learning process. Pratt (1998b) states that while this “may not be easy, it also means never doing for learners what they can do for themselves” (p. 246). The challenge is to find a balance between caring and challenging and believing in learners and then helping them achieve what they must achieve.

The community college professor as mentor can foster in learners the ability to identify and test assumptions about themselves and the world around them. A natural complement to the goals of teaching, true mentoring is a complex process between professor and community college learner that supports a mutual enhancement of critically reflective and independent thinking. In addition, mentors help facilitate the cognitive and affective growth of learners. When community college professors and learners engage in a mentoring relationship they are literally immersed in a mini learning community in which they are learning from one another. They are involved in an ongoing process of praxis that is characterized by reflection, action, analysis, questioning, and additional reflection.
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON MENTORSHIP AND INSTRUCTION

Good mentorship is a distinctive and powerful process that enhances intellectual, professional, and personal development through a special relationship characterized by highly emotional and often passionate interactions between the mentor and mentee. Although we can assume that all professors in the community college engage in some level of instructional activity, it cannot be suggested that all are involved in mentoring. The complete mentor role does not fit all faculty and many are not able to willing to take on this role, and if required to do so would be incomplete mentors. Yet the essence of mentoring is grounded in the concept of one-on-one teaching. If one is engaged in mentoring, one is engaged in teaching.

Understanding the role of the complete mentor can be a template for the good instructor, even if all instructors are not mentors. The functions of the effective mentor include building a relationship, providing information, being facilitative and challenging, serving as a role model, and co-constructing a vision. By examining the role of a skillful instructor, it will become clear that there is a high correlation between the two roles. Those interested in being effective instructors in the community college setting should be concerned with creating a conducive climate for learning, designing and developing useful course syllabi and materials, encouraging learners to be critically and reflectively thoughtful, challenging learners to think and act differently, serving as role models in authentic and credible ways, and reating a vision for what could be relative to students personal and professional potential. Regardless of the academic discipline or subject, the instructional process can be enhanced by understanding and incorporating aspects of the complete mentor role (Galbraith, 2003).

Community college professors as mentors, according to Daloz (1998), provide a balance of support and challenge such that learners feel safe to move. They must have a vision that places their journey in a larger context and invokes purpose from their lives. Mentors support their students, challenge their students, and help their students construct a vision to further their educational journey. Complete mentors work in a truly responsive and interactive way with learners that allows for a profound affirmation of both teaching and learning in the community college environment.

As Galbraith (2003) suggests, the professor as mentor role within community colleges “holds great promise in the mutual enhancement of the teaching and learning process” (p. 18). Before a level of comfort
can exist, college community professors must engage in new learning that involves a sense of challenge and risk-taking. The result and value, however, of such a bold endeavor will be the creation of a new perspective that renders a mutually rich teaching and learning environment within the community college.

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