

Chapter 17

Teacher, Mentor, and Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Mentorship varies based in one's personal experience, understandings of theory related to the field, and the practice of mentorship in a given context. This chapter reviews mentor and protégé experiences over a 20-year timeframe, beginning in high school and continuing through collegiate, credentialing, teaching, graduate school, and doctoral education. The authors maintained a friendship and mentor/protégé relationship from their initial meeting through their current professional collaboration. They argue that mentorship must move beyond traditional ideas commonly associated with the term and instead include authentic experience and intellectual reflection across human ways of being or understanding within a framework of unimpeachable friendship, trust, and respect.

INTRODUCTION

How one defines a mentor differs among organizations and scholars. Generally, mentorship is a developmental relationship in which a more experienced individual helps guide a less experienced individual toward new understandings of personal or social experience. In this paper, we argue this generally acceptable definition with a few added considerations. The mentor/protégé relationship is not a binary of opposites; it is rather a two-way experience in which both are cognizant of the humanity of the other. What we mean is in the traditional sense the apprentice or student is treated as an incomplete human being, their role is to receive information. As we see it, and as Freire (2000) might argue, one's incompleteness is not transformation of the physical self, it is an existential question in which teachers and students are

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engaged in understanding their world. That is to say teachers and students are guided by curiosity, what can we know about the world? Furthermore, how does the teacher-student relationship affect what we understand about our world?

This may mean the protégé receives professional and cultural knowledge, to which they would otherwise not be privy. More importantly however is ensuring the relationship is balanced considering the nature of the exchange as teacher and student reconsider knowledge shared via the teaching experience. We suggest the society in which the relationship exists must be examined within the context of the ideas considered. Mentorship typically means mere production in a capitalist enterprise or professional advancement toward an organizational position. In other words, common ideas of mentor are to succeed in an economy; the student received what is necessary to move across the next rung of a particular social experience. Mentorship however is not inherently quantifiable and must not be analyzed (if at all) across criteria used to measure a person's success tied to accepted cultural norms. More important is the student's re-humanization; to recapture their philosophical development toward understanding the world. Student and mentor then exercise the critical tradition, meaning there is a need for considering, deconstructing and then supporting the protégé in addressing new and potentially life-changing ideas.

OPENING STATEMENTS

Arturo

I met Matthew and Kevin in the autumn of 2001 when they dropped by the weight room of the high school where I taught in Sacramento, CA. On separate occasion, they asked if I would train them in the pre-season for wrestling and baseball. Since I was the weight and agility coach I agreed and began to provide them with a schedule that would improve their performance. As the days and weeks passed Matthew, Kevin and I would discuss different subjects, always lead by their intense curiosity and my willingness to engage whatever subject they might want to debate.

Our conversations eventually turned toward considering scientific problems and philosophical questions concerning existence. I therefore suggested some reading that might prove useful as they prepared for college this included some existentialist philosophy and some poetry. As the high school year closed I wished Matthew and Kevin luck as they graduated. I was confident they would be successful whatever path they chose.

Matthew

Education for me had been a mostly distant engagement until I met Arturo. Prior to meeting him I constantly sought the input from teachers and grown-ups who seemed too engrossed to mindfully respond to naïve questions. Arturo recognized the honesty in my naïve curiosity and the pangs of hunger for academic success. He recognized my frustration of being from a small-town, working class background and attending a high-profile Catholic school wherein such students were rarely given the benefit of the doubt on academic matters. Arturo clearly read this and connected my long-term questions about existence, academic success, and borderland politics (quite the topics for an ardent “underperformer”!) and introduced the most prescient of readings.

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