

Chapter 4

Seeing Further and Increasing Professional Growth by Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: The Influence of Mentors

Christine Anne Royce

Shippensburg University, USA

ABSTRACT

Moving from teaching at the basic education level in grades K-12 to higher education is a journey that can take many different paths. The author examines the difference between role models, coaches, and mentors as well as co-mentoring experiences. The value of and guidance provided by mentors on the author's journey from deciding to become a K-12 educator to teaching science methods at the higher education level is examined in this chapter. Additional influences explored are those that come from professional networks. Through scenarios and reflection, lessons learned are considered with recommendations to be considered.

INTRODUCTION

Near the end of the first year in my first (and current) tenure track position at a regional public university, the then dean of the College of Education and Human Services stopped me to chat. In honesty, he caught me off guard. I was trying to take a shortcut out of the building through the mechanical room, which usually allowed me to avoid being stopped for small talk. But no, there he was, standing outside of the back doors taking a cigarette break.

The encounter went like this. He stopped me. He asked me how I was doing. And then he made a statement that went something like, *so you really hit the ground running, probably better than most first-year faculty members do – do you have any insight as to why? Or how to help others do that? At that*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-3460-4.ch004

point, I am sure the look on my face and my eye movement showing a review of mental thoughts made it quite apparent that I was trying to process all that was going through my mind and select something appropriate to state – or perhaps it looked like I was being contemplative of the moment and reflecting on the question. It was the first. What went through my mind initially was nothing that I could state. Finally, I paused and looked at him and said, “Um...could we chalk it up to some great mentors before coming here who have continued to look out for me?”

That experience has stayed with me for many reasons throughout the years. That comment was and still is probably one of the most important realizations and lessons of my professional career. *The lesson is that there were and are great mentors who, and experiences that, have helped me to see further, grow as a professional, reach for new challenges, and give back in similar ways.* I recognize that I had been fortunate to have mentors before moving to higher education who involved me in different opportunities. In my thinking, it is because of these people, and those experiences in which they involved me, that the transition from teaching at the K-12 education level to higher education was more manageable and provided a trajectory for my career.

For professionals, regardless of where they are in their career trajectory, the benefits and learning that accompany the mentoring process, including collaborating with other peers and developing a professional support network, are numerous and necessary. Finding those professional networks can occur both locally and at a distance through participation and involvement in professional associations. Once involved, there is a myriad of connections, each nested within other networks that can be made and many opportunities to seek out and be a mentor. This chapter will focus on how experiences such as those identified above, the reflections, and lessons learned can help an individual grow professionally.

THE EARLY YEARS

Becoming an Educator

“What I am to be, I am becoming.” – Benjamin Franklin

I am not sure when I decided to pursue teaching at the higher education level. Like many educators, my graduation from college with an education degree had set me on a path to teaching at the basic education level. I can, however, remember the moment that I was encouraged to pursue being a teacher. That decision was during my sophomore college year, at which point I had already changed my major from a precursor to forensics called medical technology to business. I liked science, just not standing at a bench all day. I was not thriving as a business major and still unsure of my choice. In hindsight, it is clear that having a mentor would have been a help, but I had grown up during a time when careers were not discussed, and shadowing didn't exist. Perhaps a survey inventory was taken for potential fields but exploring what one would do for the rest of their lives was not a conversation people had with teenagers. As many college students often do, I returned to the high school I attended to visit the band teacher who had also taught me private flute lessons for several years to say hello, catch up, and likely, in retrospect, return to a comfort zone. I can very clearly remember his question, of *Why aren't you going into teaching? You work at summer camps; you like kids.* Which I promptly rejected for one additional semester. However, he had a point, and I switched my major to education, and the rest is, as they say, history.

9 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/seeing-further-and-increasing-professional-growth-by-standing-on-the-shoulders-of-giants/301939

Related Content

The Impact of Psychological Empowerment on the Effectiveness of Performance: A Field Study on Three Higher Education Institutions in Saudi Arabia

Mona Hamid Abu Warda (2020). *International Journal of Teacher Education and Professional Development* (pp. 15-41).

www.irma-international.org/article/the-impact-of-psychological-empowerment-on-the-effectiveness-of-performance/243389

The Problem of Teaching the Science of Climate Change: A Call for Critical Thinking in Teacher Education and Professional Development

Isidoro Talavera (2024). *International Journal of Teacher Education and Professional Development* (pp. 1-14).

www.irma-international.org/article/the-problem-of-teaching-the-science-of-climate-change/347220

Using a Literacy-Based Classroom Partnership to Prepare Teacher Candidates for the edTPA

Jana Lynn Hunzicker, Cecile M. Arquette, Peter Olson and Douglas Atkins (2019). *Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Education: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 1419-1441).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/using-a-literacy-based-classroom-partnership-to-prepare-teacher-candidates-for-the-edtpa/215624

Teaching English Language Learners: A Mainstream Response to Rural Teacher Preparation

Kelly Moser, Daina Zhu, Ha Nguyen and Emily Williams (2018). *International Journal of Teacher Education and Professional Development* (pp. 58-75).

www.irma-international.org/article/teaching-english-language-learners/196556

Precarious Creativity and the [Im]possibility of the Radically Collegial Community

Natalie Joy Davey (2026). *Facing Precarity in Adult, Community, and Vocational Education: Role of Meaningful Work* (pp. 25-38).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/precious-creativity-and-the-impossibility-of-the-radically-collegial-community/388010