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Eugene M. Anderson and Anne Lucasse Shannon

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What is This?

Toward a Conceptualization of Mentoring

Leadership

Eugene M. Anderson
Anne Lucasse Shannon

Anderson and Shannon argue that effective mentoring programs must be grounded on a clear and strong conceptual foundation. Such a foundation includes a carefully articulated approach to mentoring which would include delineation of: a definition of the mentoring relationship, the essential functions of the mentor role, the activities through which selected mentoring functions will be expressed, and the dispositions that mentors must exhibit if they are to carry out requisite mentoring functions and activities.

Articles about mentoring beginning teachers have pervaded educational journals during the past few years. Most have discussed responsibilities of a mentor (Nuefield, 1987; Huffman and Leak, 1986; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, McKee, and Braxton, 1978), detailed the development of mentor programs within a school district (California mentor teacher program, 1983), or provided a review of the current literature on mentoring (Galvez-Hjornevik, 1985; Merriam, 1983). Few, however, have provided the field of education with a clear conceptualization of the act of mentoring (Merriam, 1983). This lack of clarity has created problems for school districts and collaborating schools of education that have wanted to develop teacher mentor programs around a sound conceptual framework.

This article establishes a conceptualization of the mentoring process that is rooted in historical reference and serves as a model for use by those who design and implement teacher mentor programs. In the discussion that follows, we (a) review the historical development of the term "mentoring," (b) examine the problems inherent in current concepts of mentoring, (c) propose what we believe to be the essential characteristics of mentoring, and (d) discuss implications of the proposed mentoring model for development of teacher mentor programs.

Historical Perspectives

The term "mentor" has its roots in Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*. In this myth, Odysseus, a great royal warrior, has been off fighting the Trojan War and has entrusted his son, Telemachus, to his friend and advisor, Mentor. Mentor has been charged with advising and serving as guardian to the entire royal household. As the story unfolds, Mentor accompanies and guides Telemachus on a journey in search of his father and ultimately for a new and fuller identity of his own. At times, throughout the story, Athene, goddess of wisdom, who presides over all craft and skillfulness, whether of the hands or the mind, manifests herself to Telemachus in the form of Mentor.

The account of Mentor in *The Odyssey* leads us to make several conclusions about the activity which bears his name. First, mentoring is an *intentional process*. Mentor intentionally carried out his responsibilities for Telemachus. Second, mentoring is a *nurturing process*, which fosters the growth and development of the protégé toward full maturity. It was Mentor's responsibility to draw forth the full potential in Telemachus. Third, mentoring is an *insightful process* in which the wisdom of the mentor is acquired and applied by the protégé. Clawson (1980) asserts that it was Mentor's task to help Telemachus grow in wisdom without rebellion. Fourth, mentoring is a *supportive, protective process*. Telemachus was to consider the advice of Mentor, and Mentor was to "keep all safe."

It is also reasonable to conclude from Athene's activities in *The Odyssey* that role modeling is a central quality of mentoring. Taking human form, Athene provided Telemachus with a standard and style of behavior which he could understand and follow. Athene helps us comprehend that mentors need to make themselves available to protégés as role models and to understand how their modeling can stimulate perspective, style, and a sense of empowerment within the protégé.

A New English Dictionary (Murray, 1908), documents various uses of the term "mentor" dating from around

Anderson is Associate Professor and Shannon is a graduate student, College of Education, University of Minnesota.

1750. These uses confirm the historical meaning of mentoring and further imply that a mentor may be a person or a personified thing. It has not been until the last ten to fifteen years, however, that much about mentoring has appeared in the professional literature. Clawson (1980), for example, identifies the mid 70s when mentoring for a professional career became a topic of research. Eng (1986) suggests that this emphasis on mentoring coincided with the Human Resources Development Movement in business. Since the mid-70s, mentoring has increasingly been used to describe a variety of functions in a variety of vocational fields. Yet no commonly accepted meaning of the term has been developed (Speizer, 1981).

Current Concepts of Mentoring

There is a relatively small number of studies on mentoring, and most of these have centered on career development in the field of business (Alleman, 1986; Murphy, 1986; Zey, 1984; Phillips-Jones, 1982; Levinson et al., 1978). Within these studies various definitions of mentoring have been offered.

Phillips-Jones (1982) defines mentors as influential people who significantly help protégés reach their life goals: "They have the power — through who or what they know — to promote . . . welfare, training, or career" (p. 21). She identifies six types of mentors: *Traditional mentors* are usually older authority figures who, over a long period of time, protect, advocate for, and nurture their protégés. They permit their protégés to move up the organizational ladder on their coattails. *Supportive bosses* are persons in a direct supervisory relationship with their protégés. Like traditional mentors, supportive bosses teach and guide, but they function more as coaches than as long-term protectors and advocates. *Organizational sponsors* are top-level managers who see that their protégés are promoted within the organization. Unlike traditional mentors and supportive bosses, they do not stay in day-to-day contact with their protégés. *Professional mentors* comprise a variety of career counselors and advisors. Protégés pay for services from these mentors. *Patrons*

are persons who use their financial resources and status to help protégés prepare for and launch their careers. *Invisible godparents* help protégés reach career goals without their knowing it. They make "behind the scenes" arrangements and recommendations (pp. 22-24, 79-89).

Alleman (1986) stipulates that a mentor is a person of greater rank or expertise who teaches, counsels, guides, and develops a novice in an organization or profession. Expanding on her definition, she identifies nine mentor functions: (a) giving information, (b) providing political information, (c) challenging assignments, (d) counseling, (e) helping with career moves, (f) developing trust, (g) showcasing protégés achievements, (h) protecting, and (i) developing personal relationship/friendship (pp. 47-48).

Levinson et al. (1978) and Zey (1984) represent contrasting views of mentoring. Levinson et al. (1978) view mentoring as:

> One of the most complex, and developmentally important, a man [sic] can have in early adulthood. The mentor is ordinarily several years older, a person of greater experience and seniority in the world the young man [sic] is entering. No word currently in use is adequate to convey the nature of the relationship we have in mind here. Words such as "counselor" or "guru" suggest the more subtle meanings, but they have other connotations that would be misleading. The term "mentor" is generally used in a much narrower sense, to mean teacher, adviser, or sponsor. As we use the term, it means all these things, and more. (p. 97)

In contrast to this personal, relatively broad and informal view of mentoring, Zey (1984) defines a mentor as:

> a person who oversees the career and development of another person usually a junior, through teaching, counseling, providing psychological support, protecting, and at times promoting and sponsoring. The mentor may perform any or all of the above functions during the mentor relationship. (p. 7)

In this definition, mentoring is viewed as a formal process within an organization that promotes the career development of the protégé to the benefit of the organization and the individual.

Those within the field of education have also provided us with definitions of mentoring. Fagan and Walter (1983)

very simply define a mentor as "an experienced adult who befriends and guides a less-experienced adult" (p. 51).

Similarly, Klopf and Harrison (1981), conceptualizing mentoring as an enabling process, state that mentors are "competent people who serve as teachers, advisors, counselors, and sponsors for an associate, who may be younger and of the same or different sex" (p. 42). Klopf and Harrison go on to say that the mentor and associate mutually gain "insight, knowledge, and satisfaction from the relationship" (p. 42). They stipulate that all of the processes or functions found within this definition must be enacted for mentoring to occur.

Daloz (1983) draws upon a travel metaphor when he characterizes a mentor as a guide on a journey. During the trip the mentor carries out three functions: (a) pointing the way, (b) offering support, and (c) challenging.

While additional definitions from business and educational literature could be cited, we believe that these definitions serve as a representative sample from which we can express several concerns.

First, some definitions of mentoring, by their generality, are too vague or ambiguous to be helpful to teachers assuming a mentor role. An example of vagueness is found in Fagan and Walter's conception of a mentor as "an experienced adult who befriends and guides a less-experienced adult" (p. 51). Such definitions do not give mentors enough specific direction for what they are to do or how they are to do it. Further, it is difficult from studying the definitions as a group to know whether mentoring involves a set of functions that are conjunctively or disjunctively joined. This ambiguity is found in the contrasting definitions of Zey (1984) and Klopf and Harrison (1983). While Zey indicates that mentoring may be expressed within *any or all* of a number of mentoring functions (i.e., teaching, counseling, supporting, protecting, promoting, and sponsoring), Klopf and Harrison (1983) emphasize that all processes or functions of mentoring (i.e., teaching, advising, counseling, sponsoring, and modeling) must be present or the role being enacted is not mentoring. The question

is, must the mentor exhibit, or have the disposition to exhibit, all of the designated mentoring functions within a particular mentoring context, or can the mentor specialize in only one or another of the designated mentoring functions to the exclusion of the others? We will return to this point.

Second, while we recognize the complexity of the mentoring process, we are concerned by the lack of conceptual frameworks for organizing the various mentoring functions and behaviors found within the definitions of mentoring. For example, Alleman (1986) cites four mentoring roles and nine mentoring functions without establishing a clear relationship between the two sets. Lack of a rationale for and relationship among these thirteen variables constrains what contribution they might make.

Third, while most of the definitions of mentoring indicate that a mentor should promote the professional and/or personal development of the protégé through a set of mentoring functions, they do not highlight as much as we think they should that (a) mentoring is fundamentally a nurturing process, (b) that the mentor must serve as a role model to the protégé, and (c) that the mentor must exhibit certain dispositions that help define the process. In summary, most definitions do not provide what we believe to be the essence of mentoring in light of its etymological and historical derivation.

A Proposed Concept of Mentoring

In light of the problems expressed above, what constitutes a fruitful concept of mentoring for those who wish to develop and implement mentor programs for new teachers? We will respond to this question by offering a basic definition of mentoring, discussing five mentoring functions and related behaviors, delineating some basic mentoring activities, and specifying some necessary dispositions of mentors.

First, we believe that mentoring can best be defined as:

> a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and/or

personal development. Mentoring functions are carried out within the context of an ongoing, caring relationship between the mentor and protégé. (Anderson, 1987)

The essential attributes of this definition are: (a) the process of nurturing, (b) the act of serving as a role model, (c) the five mentoring functions (teaching, sponsoring, encouraging, counseling, and befriending), (d) the focus on professional and/or personal development, and (e) the ongoing caring relationship. A brief discussion of each of these attributes will provide a better context for their inclusion.

Nurturing implies a developmental process in which a nurturer is able to recognize the ability, experience, and psychological maturity of the person being nurtured and can provide appropriate growth-producing activities. The concept of nurturing also implies several notions embedded in the "gardening" metaphor. The nurturer helps provide an environment for growth, considers the total personality of the person being nurtured in deciding how best to be helpful, and operates with a belief that the person being nurtured has the capacity to develop into fuller maturity.

Closely related to the nurturing process is the act of serving as a role model. Mentors provide the protégés with a sense of what they are becoming. Protégés can see a part of their adult selves in other adults (Levinson et al., 1978). By their example, mentors stimulate growth and development in their protégés.

We view the five basic mentoring functions as *conjunctive*, (i.e., a mentor must stand ready to exhibit any or *all* of the functions as the need arises). We take this position for two reasons. First, the five functions as a group historically have been associated with a person called a mentor. Second, requiring a mentor to engage in all five functions carries with it the potential for better discriminating who is and is not mentoring and assigning more potency to the role.

Mentoring can focus on professional and/or personal development. We allow this option because we believe, as does Clawson, that mentoring can vary in terms of its scope of influence (Clawson, 1980). While their scope of influence can and does vary within mentoring relationships, the spirit of

mentoring, as we understand it, suggests that true mentors are inclined to be concerned about the comprehensive welfare of their protégés.

Lastly, in our definition of mentoring, we stipulate that mentoring must involve an ongoing, caring relationship. Levinson et al. (1978) assert that the essence of mentoring may be found more within the kind of relationship that exists between the mentor and protégé than in the various roles and functions denoted by the term, "mentoring." We believe the caring relationship is at least of equal importance. The kind of relationship we advocate in mentoring is similar to that of a good substitute parent to an adult child.

With the above definition as our base, we now expand briefly on the five functions of mentoring: teaching, sponsoring, encouraging, counseling, and befriending. First, by teaching we mean basic behaviors associated with teaching, including: modeling, informing, confirming/disconfirming, prescribing, and questioning. In the context of mentoring, these behaviors are guided by principles of adult education.

Sponsoring involves being a kind of guarantor. Sponsoring within the context of mentoring involves three essential behaviors: protecting, supporting, and promoting. Teacher mentors can protect their protégés from something in the environment (e.g., helping to get a very troublesome student removed from their class), or by helping protect protégés from themselves (e.g., encouraging them not to stay up late every night preparing lessons until their health is impaired). Teacher mentors can support their protégés when they participate in an activity assigned to them (e.g., preparing lesson plans together). As sponsors, teacher mentors can promote their protégés both within the instructional and social systems of the school program. They can, for example, not only introduce them to other teachers and help them feel included but also recommend that their protégés serve on a school committee.

Encouraging is a process that includes the behaviors of affirming, inspiring, and challenging. Teacher mentors can affirm their protégés for who

they are and what they can do; they can inspire them by their example and words; and they can offer challenge by inviting them to become involved in a variety of growth producing experiences.

Counseling is a problem-solving process that includes behaviors such as listening, probing, clarifying, and advising. To the degree that protégés are willing and able, teacher mentors can help them solve their own problems.

Lastly, mentoring demands befriending. While it is difficult to delineate all of the behaviors associated with befriending, two critical ones stand out: accepting and relating. As a friend, teacher mentors will in continuing ways convey to their protégés that they understand and support them; and that they have time for them.

Again, we have selected teaching, sponsoring, counseling, encouraging, and befriending as basic functions within our conception of mentoring for two reasons. First, they logically flow from the historical meaning of the term mentoring. Second, they have the capacity to organize a number of more specific functions of mentoring cited in the literature.

To clarify the concept of mentoring, we need to illustrate how mentoring functions are carried out within the teaching context. Examples of basic mentoring activities in the area of education include: demonstrating teaching techniques to a protégé, observing the protégé's classroom teaching and providing feedback, and holding support meetings with the protégé. The point is this: As we think about the concept of mentoring, we need to identify various activities in which mentoring functions can be expressed. To be of even further assistance, we might eventually identify times in which these activities can best take place.

To take the concept of mentoring one final step, we need to identify dispositions that mentors should have as they carry out their mentoring functions and activities. Drawing on the definition of dispositions offered by Katz and Raths (1985), we define a mentoring disposition as an attributed characteristic of a mentor, one that summarizes the trend of the mentor's actions in particular contexts. Dispositions are broader constructs than skills and denote recurring patterns of behavior.

Mentoring dispositions may arise from the concept of mentoring and also from the values held by those who develop mentor programs. We offer three dispositions that we believe are essential to the concept of mentoring. First, mentors should have the dispositions of opening themselves to their protégés by, for example, allowing their protégés opportunities to observe them in action and conveying to them reasons and purposes behind their decisions and performance. Second, mentors should have the disposition to lead their protégés incrementally over time. Third, mentors should have the disposition to express care and concern about the personal and professional welfare of their protégés.

The schematic in Figure 1 summarizes the essence of mentoring and its basic components. It indicates that basic to mentoring is a relationship in which the protégé views the mentor as a role model and the mentor nurtures and cares for the protégé. Entailed in the mentoring relationship are five mentoring functions and related behaviors that are carried out within various mentoring activities. The entire mentoring process is styled by a set of dispositions displayed by the mentor.
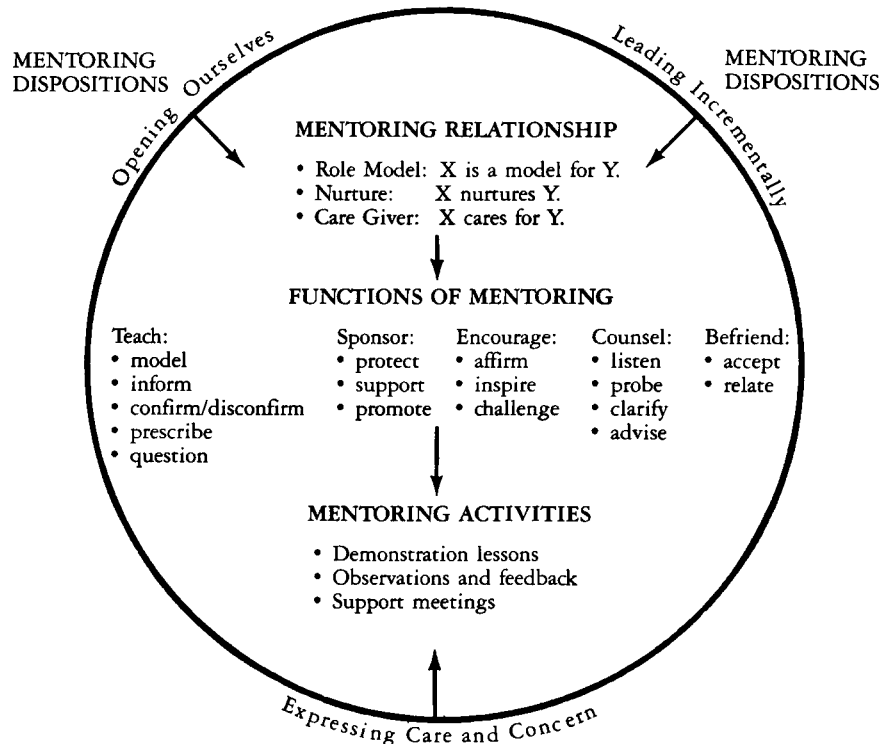
Implications

In developing teacher mentor programs it is all too easy to focus prematurely on such tasks as designing job descriptions for mentors, selecting mentors and protégés, providing some initial orientation sessions, and then getting a program underway. To do so, without first thinking carefully about the concept of mentoring, is to run the risk of developing programs that are incomplete, lack integrity, and duplicate programs that in some form have already been tried.

We believe that those who develop mentor programs for beginning teachers should embed them in a definition of mentoring that captures the essence of the mentoring relationship. Further, developers must decide what they believe are the essential functions of mentoring; they must identify possible mentoring activities in which these functions can be expressed; and they must develop the dispositions that mentors are to exhibit as they carry out the functions and activities.

Only when a strong and clear conceptual foundation of mentoring is established can effective mentor programs for beginning teachers be constructed.

Figure 1
Mentoring Model

MENTORING DISPOSITIONS

Opening Ourselves

Leading Incrementally

MENTORING DISPOSITIONS

MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

* Role Model: X is a model for Y.
* Nurture: X nurtures Y.
* Care Giver: X cares for Y.

FUNCTIONS OF MENTORING

Teach:
* model
* inform
* confirm/disconfirm
* prescribe
* question

Sponsor:
* protect
* support
* promote

Encourage:
* affirm
* inspire
* challenge

Counsel:
* listen
* probe
* clarify
* advise

Befriend:
* accept
* relate

MENTORING ACTIVITIES

* Demonstration lessons
* Observations and feedback
* Support meetings

Expressing Care and Concern

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