

Review of Mentoring in Developing Countries

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As with other developmental indices, mentoring is as much a challenge in developed countries as it is for the developing countries. Personal circumstances, institutional challenges and differences in beliefs and orientation between the mentor and the mentored or mentee could pressurize the later to opt for other supplementary disciplines for the purpose of earning a living and not necessarily to fulfil a lifelong aspiration in self fulfilment. Mentoring junior scholars in developing countries could be very challenging on either side of the divide, however this process of grooming the future leaders in academia, industry and commerce requires a boost of motivation, support from learned societies, and indeed government and non governmental bodies. The review focuses on ecology as a discipline and draws examples from there.

Introduction

Mentoring is a dynamic process whereby leaders in different spheres of human endeavour nurture and bring up others in their respective fields in order to boost the manpower needs of the society. It is a selfless service to mankind that cannot be quantified nor adequately compensated, hence to others it is an act of charity or a delegated responsibility in some institutional settings. Mentoring is a vital tool for transferring leadership and excellence from the senior colleagues to upcoming junior scientists or scholars. It is the process of serving as a mentor or someone who facilitates and assists another's development. The process includes modeling because the mentor must be able to model the messages and suggestions being taught to the

beginning teacher or student (Gay, 1995). The mentor must be able to serve as a model of the teacher's role in education. The mentoring process includes teaching as an instructional technique used in endeavors such as sports or apprenticeship at the work place. In addition, it includes cognitive teaching which is gaining wider familiarity in ecology education. In order to be effective, the mentor must be able to demonstrate a range of cognitive teaching competencies, such as posing carefully constructed questions to stimulate reflection, paraphrasing, probing, using wait-time, and collecting and using data to improve teaching and learning. Mentoring, like teaching could be a collaborative process (Gay, 1995). However, as a function that is a special duty required of a person, mentoring has considerably more dimensions than teaching or role modeling. Therefore, it is more complex and demanding task (Head *et al*, 1992). The mentoring process has often been used to integrate the educationally disadvantaged in the society into the mainstream of affairs of institutions in order to appreciate the resourcefulness of diversity. For instance, there are mentoring programs for women, the disabled members of the society and aborigine or indigent populations in diverse fields of human endeavour. Challenges abound in the discharge of this process of mentoring and may differ from place to place.

The Mentoring Process and its Challenges

Mentoring could be internal or external depending on location or distance of separation between the mentor and the mentee. The challenges

of internal mentoring within the same system might include the following. The level of job satisfaction will determine to a large extent the effectiveness of being a role model mentor to others. It might perhaps be related to the feeling that comes with the pay check or when salaries are paid, as such a contented fellow may generate more enthusiasm in bringing others up to follow the path, while on the other hand it may be a lack lustre relationship with multiple side effects on both the mentored, the system, the mentor and the general society both in the short-term and in the long-term.

Internal interactions of the system may put the mentor-mentee relationship in a difficult position especially if the competition is the harmful type hinged on other sentiments other than the institutional goals. Competition for scarce resources or opportunities without the assurance of partitioning for equal accessibility in time and space could sever the dreams of many a mentor and mentee to meet each other's aspirations and satisfy individual quests for achievements and excellence. Perhaps diversification of opportunities, accessibility and respect for each other could buffer the side effects of internal interactions on the mentoring process.

Change is another factor that challenges the mentoring process. How positively one is disposed toward new change in circumstances of job status, technology, methods and methodology, other people's opinion, opportunities and even religious affiliations could affect a good relationship in mentoring. For instance, how a mentor does reacts when a mentee comes up with an opportunity that would probably better his / her lot and requires the mentor to recommend. This would be tantamount

to signing off your student or at worst an admittance of failure or a slight on the mentor's reputation for being unable to conclusively carry out the mentoring process. Even in the developed world, Albert Einstein was once denied a letter of recommendation from Professor Heinrich Weber after he graduated in 1900. Einstein thereafter faced one of the greatest crises in his life, because he studied advanced subjects on his own, often staying away from classes for a job to sustain his career which earned him the animosity of some professors. Einstein was subsequently turned down for every academic position that he applied to, which he later wrote: "I would have found a job long ago if Weber had not played a dishonest game with me". At some point, one teacher even told him that he would never amount to anything (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010). This is just a glimpse of what the mentored could face before some mentors. Changes in technological innovations and methods of research could also stalemate relationships if both parties do not come to terms with a common ground and accept new innovative ways. Other things that could have an element of change to do with it include a potentially eligible emeritus professor who may not have been appointed yet, but would rather not transfer supervision down the ladder to others to complete the process, but tenaciously hold on to it at the detriment of the mentored. Again this might have to do with the fear of criticisms from peers and the insistence of rubbing it off on the mentored as slowing down the entire process. Perhaps an institutional policy could rescue such hapless fellows from the paws of insistence.

Other forms of stereotypes may abound, but it is the onerous responsibility of the home institute to constantly review such relationships with honour in order to sustain the integrity of both mentor and the mentored. It is thus better to reassign new mentors from a pool of at least 3-5 as early as possible once misunderstandings start emerging from such relationships so that future collaborative research partnering both

within the university and without are not jeopardized in the future. Going by Olayinka and Taiwo (2005) "the prime responsibility of a postgraduate teacher is to nurture the next generation of university teachers", an onerous task that is both challenging, a personal sacrifice and staking one's reputation in the presence of colleagues that cannot be allowed to suffer based on primordial sentiments. The postgraduate teacher is therefore expected to see the students as best friends, securing their confidence at all times, forging relationships that, in many cases, become lifelong.

One of the first considerations when establishing mentor pairs is proximity. Proximity greatly facilitates the mentor-

Mentee relationship that is at the heart of this supportive process (Freedman, 1993). Requesting for volunteer mentors is an effective and efficient way of recruiting mentors. Studies suggest, however, that a successful mentor-mentee relationship requires a desire by both parties for the interactions that will follow (Gehrke, 1988). In addition to personal and professional attributes, there are other pertinent ways of establishing good matches between mentor and mentee. These include factors like gender, diversity, culture, class, discipline and religious persuasion (Freedman 1993).

Mentoring from without presents even more trials. However with technological innovations the world is now a global village whereby would-be mentors can be contacted within the twinkle of an eye and a reply gotten almost immediately. Mentoring from overseas as with home-based has a lot to do with trust often assessed based on the ranking of the home country on certain developmental and social indices. For instance, many foreign scholars would be most reluctant to have anything to do with junior scholars from climes that have been ranked within the single digits on the corruption scale, terrorist watch list, mail scammers, drugs and other social vices. But the benefit of the doubt granted many have often paid off well in hammering the point that if a finger brings out oil, it quickly soils the

other's reputation. The snag here is that fellows who often benefit from such compassionate grounds turn round quickly to paint the rest of the populace in their home country as been all the same, possibly to please their hosts or in self-aggrandisement or preservation for the competitive space of opportunities. The onus rests on the objective and discerning minds of these scholars from developed countries.

Technology has made it possible for letters of recommendation to be requested and submitted electronically in relation to many an overseas opportunity. Brain drain along with the aforementioned challenges could restrict the optimism of mentors from either side of the divide to commit themselves in such letters of trust, even though not every one that enters a lottery emerges as a winner. Thus faced with such challenges of lack of exposure from some developing country scholars, their curriculum vitae become limited in competitiveness for upcoming opportunities in the future, and at best remain obscure and reclusive in the content of their research and collaborative effort. It is worthy of mention that some grant opportunities from overseas nowadays require an optional component for a mentor based in the country where the granting body has a headquarter or branch. Obviously, this is for purposes of transparency or checks and balances, continuity and a cultivation of academic culture through long term collaboration. Although optional, this mentorship component in my opinion is very critical to the review process and therefore counts. Now the question is: how does one secure the confidence of a would-be mentor from overseas without having met the fellow or advisor? Trust and Technology have made it easier. Even though they might share similar research interests, the task remains daunting if the international mentor places emphasis on other factors that the grant candidate has no control over. Perhaps the option of allowing the grant applicants to spend time at some institutes to cultivate the desired relationship with the mentor by using the time to develop an agreeable or joint proposal. The interest of the

overseas mentors in the candidates' research and curiosity about the home country are critical and therefore would require the beneficiary to live to the best of his local culture while keeping his mind open to integrate into the new environment.

Differences in funding and infrastructural capacities could pose a threat to collaborative support across the divide because many are quick to enthuse that one or the other has nothing to offer in return. This often happens on either side whether from developing or developed country scholars. Individual experiences of scholars from overseas that have mentored those from developing countries are also an important reservoir of helping to shape the developmental process. Such experiences have been captured in diverse literature and memoirs, one of which is elaborated by Ronni Edmonds-Brown in Tyokumbur, *et al* (2008).

In addition, the mentoring process seems not to be always clearly understood in ecology education. Hence, researchers are becoming increasingly cognizant of its complexity. Head *et al* (1992) asserts that the heart and soul of mentoring grows out of belief in the value and worth of people and an attitude toward education that focuses upon passing the torch to the next generation of teachers. Ecology mentoring process extends far beyond supporting the induction of new teachers into the school system through professional guidance and encouragement. Shadio (1996) suggests that the heart of mentorship comes from a commitment to education, a hope for its future, and a respect for those who enter into its thought process. Again, Head *et al*, (1992) adds that major aspects that contribute to the complexity of mentoring include the multiple needs of beginning teachers as well as their mentors, their developmental issues or concerns, their repertoire of teaching skills, the school culture that may impact positively or negatively on the mentoring process, and numerous other challenges. Various findings indicate that mentoring is a more demanding process than

classroom teaching, and that even experienced teachers cannot always objectively assess the quality of teaching performance of beginning teachers in ecology.

Conclusion

My review has shown that in order for the mentoring process to succeed, the mentor and mentee must be sufficiently motivated, open to new changes such as ability to accept advances in science and technology that will ease the knowledge acquisition, assimilation, transfer and its transformation to better the lot of society at large. Mentoring remains a viable deliberate policy in ecology education. For purposeful mentoring to occur, a requirement is the acceptance of its complexity in carrying out the mentoring commitment. Careful planning is therefore required. Teachers as valuable human resources in ecology education and high quality performance in teaching are an essential ingredient of ecology educational improvement and change. To assist junior ecology scholars, it is necessary to support their performance in the classroom from the very beginning of their studentship and teaching careers. Support in the form of well-designed mentoring programs can be a requisite in inducting new teachers into the profession and keeping them in ecology education. High quality teaching is essential if the mission of ecology education is to be fulfilled. Mentoring plays a critical role in continually improving the professional knowledge and skills that teachers need to instruct and prepare students as the next generation of scholars. However, in order to be effective, mentoring programs must be developed that take into account the complexity, process and function of the process. Mentoring programs are now perceived as an effective staff development approach for beginning teachers. By establishing teacher mentoring programs, novice teachers are given a strong start at the beginning of their careers, and experienced classroom teachers serving as mentors receive recognition and incentives. Researchers believe that mentoring can be a valuable process in

educational reform for beginning teachers as well as veteran teachers. Supporting beginning teachers in ecology at the outset contributes to retention of new teachers in the school system. Formalizing the mentor role for experienced teachers creates another niche in the career ladder for teachers and contributes to the professionalism of an educational career ladder for teachers and contributes to the professionalism in ecology. The relevance of mentoring in advancing knowledge cannot be overemphasized. ■



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