

# Illuminating the Heart of Mentoring: Intrinsic Value in Education

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Other than the fairly consistent and inspiring depiction of the origin of the word Mentor from Greek mythology, literature on mentoring surfaces a myriad of mentoring concepts, as variable as the individuals, pairs, groups or organizations involved. Despite the diversity, there exists an emphasis on learning and its associated

dynamism. Beyond the mere utility value of mentoring, the author presents the core of powerful mentoring in illuminating the intrinsic unconditional love of mentoring in education.

**Keywords:** Mentoring, education, unconditional love

## 闡述督導的核心：教育的內在價值

督導一詞源自於希臘神話。希臘神話對於督導一詞的描述是相當一致，而且啟迪人心；但其他文獻中有關督導的概念卻是眾說紛紜，因個人、兩人、小組或組織的參與其中而有所變異。雖然概念分歧，但都強調學習以及與

學習有關的積極性。除了督導的實用價值，作者也介紹了成效極大的督導的核心，以闡述教育督導所蘊含的內在的，無償的誨人不倦的精神。

**關鍵字：**督導、教育、無償的愛

## Introduction

The word Mentor has its roots in the classic Greek mythology, in the poet Homer's "The Odyssey". The Trojan War propelled King Ulysses to entrust his child Telemachus to Mentor's care. When Telemachus engaged himself on a quest in search for his father, Athena (the Goddess of War and Patroness of the Arts and Industry) assumed the guise of Mentor and accompanied him. This classic has captured the

fascination of many and it is of significance that Mentor's impact on the life of Telemachus was paramount.

With the passing of time, the term takes on related meanings. A review of literature reveals a variety of terms that are used to denote mentoring. For instance, Johnson (1980) considered a mentor as one who develops the special abilities of a person, without being detrimental to others. It has also come to mean trusted friend, counsellor, career guide and executive nurturer (Safire, 1980). Adopting a phrase from Samuel Taylor

Coleridge (1772-1834) that a dwarf sees farther than the giant when there is a giant's shoulder to mount on, Noller (1982) suggested further terms associated with mentor: guide by the side, supporter, advisor, aide, encourager, coach, host, tutor, sponsor, monitor, facilitator, god parent, advocate, confidant, ally, strength, nurturer, teacher, influencer, counsellor, helper, leader, role-model, exemplar and guru. Coaches, senior advisors, sponsors are also used instead of mentors, and their partners can be termed mentees, trainees, interns, candidates, learners or students (Phillips-Jones', 1983). Similarly, Shea (1992) asserted that mentor is synonymous with trusted adviser, friend, teacher and wise person; the mentors could provide the special insight, understanding and information. In relation to the interest generated in mentoring, literature reveals the existence of mentoring forms, which reflects that the use of mentors has its complexities. Hennecke (1983) advocated low profile fairly formal strategy and refraining from reference of association as mentor/protégé relationship to pre-empt problems in mentoring. In contrast, there are propositions of structured, formalised mentoring (Moore, 1982; Phillips-Jones, 1983; Geiger-DuMond & Boyle, 1995). Seeking a delicate balance between informality and structure, other notions have surfaced: facilitated mentoring (Murray & Owen, 1991), mentoring multiplier (Kaye & Jacobson, 1995) and shared mentorship (Sweeny, 2002).

It is apparent from the above that literature reflects attempts to conceptualise mentor or mentoring, and reveals that the terms are loosely used in many circumstances. Regardless of the varying conceptualisations and forms, mentoring has been increasingly acknowledged as a means of enhancing individual or organizational development (Caldwell & Carter, 1993; Daresh, 2001) and its learning dimension is presented in the section that follows.

## **The Learning Dimension of Mentoring**

Depiction of structures in mentoring for teachers (for example, Burke, 2002a & 2002b; Roberts & Constable, 2003) could range from observation, designing lesson plans and learning strategies, managing the classroom and assessing students, and could emphasise skills and underlying knowledge. Nonetheless, learning can be formal or contrived, as well as informal or natural (Fox, 1994) and the fluidity of mentoring facilitates the variety of learning. As such, Pitton's (2002) template of "ground rules for mentor and mentee" (p. 32) could be excessively formal and stifling. Considering "education is the activity where the learning is focused on the future job for the learner" (Nadler & Nadler, 1992, p. 6), mentoring can be deemed as a learning programme focusing on education.

Further, although literature often differs in the specific nature of mentoring, there is some consensus on aspects of the relationship, inclusive of evolving dynamic relationship between the individuals. In order to enhance the success of the endeavour, there have been propositions (for example, Carruthers, 1988; Kram, 1988) with regard to matching in mentoring. Protégés acquire important learning in various ways under different circumstances and mentoring relationships are crucial to the developing professionals (Bova & Phillips, 1984; Gray & Gray, 1985). In addition, Kram (1988) described mentoring as the broad range of developmental relationships between juniors and seniors, and among peers. Relationships with peers often provide an important alternative to a developmental relationship with a senior. Learning relationships at work was proposed as a concept of mentoring in that participants could form such relationships during and beyond a mentoring programme (Lim, 2002). In the study, a formal programme for aspiring school leaders which was

implemented for one-and-a-half decades surfaced as the breeding ground for the initiation of informal learning relationships of school leaders with their peers. These peers may or may not be their former mentors. In learning beyond mentoring, the management practice of networking for learning relationships at work is highlighted. The former protégés of a formal mentoring program create, seize and promote opportunities to improve their on-the-job practice through learning from the unstructured learning relationships at work. Beyond formal mentoring, former protégés appear to lead their own learning in collaboration with their peers. Associated with learning relationships at work is lifelong mentoring, defined as “the process of continually seeking, finding, and reconstructing mentoring and comentoring relationships through which one can become enabled, empowered, and self-actualized” (Mullen & Kealy, 1999, p.187). This holds the assumption that learning is an integral aspect of life and mentoring serves to enhance continual learning lifelong.

Within organisations, the existence of the multitude of mentoring forms, with descriptive words that attest to its varying degree of structure or formality, serves basically as a means to an end. The end varies in accordance to the outcome of the utility value of mentoring. Nonetheless, beyond the mere utility value of mentoring, the core of powerful mentoring lies in the illumination of unconditional love of mentoring in education.

## **Voicing the Silence of Unconditional Love in Mentoring**

The notion of unconditional love in mentoring for the future cannot be ignored in the thrust towards acknowledging quintessentially the intrinsic value of mentoring in education. Such a concept transcends

beyond the confines of the structure of societal functions and generates from within the fundamental essence to define its significance. It has been lamented that research on mentoring tend to focus on implementation issues concerning the structure of mentoring programmes or programme evaluation, which involved the former participants being requested to describe their perceptions of the benefits of the formal mentoring programmes (Daresh, 1995). While there were studies indicating human relations as an aspect of what was learned or practised through mentoring (Lim, 2002; Low, 1995; Pocklington & Weindling, 1996), it appears to be that the focus was invariably on the ultimate utility value of mentoring as an unequivocal function in education. There is a dearth of literature which specifically attempts to bridge the notions of love and mentoring, not to mention the proposition of unconditional love as central to the core of mentoring. In this paper, the conceptualisation of the core of mentoring depicts unconditional loving relationships, nurtured and lead by the mentor, which features aspects of altruism, care and faith.

This concept of unconditional love in mentoring differs from love in the realm of sexual or romantic love between individuals of the same or different sexes. In examining mentoring, data gathered from protégés by Okawa (2002, p.81) surfaced “unlimited” “love” as an aspect which mentors offered their mentees, establishing a bond of trust based on mutual self-disclosure and sharing. The protégés considered the contact time with their mentor, in terms of presence-in person or on the phone or on email, as a gift given, an end in itself. A report on findings of a paper that focuses on the role of mentors on the careers of senior female international managers includes the following quote: “I love to mentor people. Most of them are women, but not all. I try to spend some time mentoring them. I believe the women have chosen me because there are not very many senior women managers” (Linehan & Walsh, 1999, p.16). Such explicit expression could be

manifestation of quintessentially the essence of mentoring, noting in particular that none of the 50 senior, female managers who were selected for inclusion in the study declined to be interviewed. It was also reported that the interviewees were “eager to participate, indicating that, because there were relatively few women expatriate managers, topics and issues which were specifically relevant to their situations had received little attention” (Linehan & Walsh, 1999, p. 3). Aspects of altruism, care and faith appear to emerge as a motivational force that could propel the mentors to serve beyond their call of duty in the process of mentoring. The feature of faith in this concept of unconditional love is analogous to the tilling of land and planting of seeds in mentoring, with the faith that there be germinating and fruiting. A faith that permeates, that the protégé possesses a potential or the potential. The termination of presence in the physical death of the mentor could spark the beginning of a continuation. In essence, the protégé survives the mentor and the mentor lives in the protégé. This is succinctly articulated by protégés who experienced the impact of such powerful mentoring, for example, Sim (2002, p. 172-173) reported that “as long as there are people thinking about him [the mentor], he will be alive... the journey that he is travelling now is the journey into our hearts. In various degrees, he is already living in each of our minds”. It could perhaps be contended that protégés who experience such altruism, care and faith in unconditional love of mentoring would reciprocate with “deep love” (Sim, 2002, p. 172) for their mentor.

## Implications

Crystallization of the heart of mentoring transcends beyond an earlier proclamation that mentoring “is not a subtle indoctrination process... not a promotional tool” (Appelbaum et al., 1994, p. 70), and that “mentoring is

an unselfish process. It is altruistic”. It serves as a calling, a reminder and an invitation to all who are involved directly or indirectly, in the present or the future, on matters pertaining to mentoring. Secondly, the issue of the selection of mentors in education is of paramount importance. The centrality of the headteacher’s role is a key finding in numerous research (for example, Bolam, McMahon, Pocklington, & Weindling, 1993). The conviction and commitment to the surfacing of unconditional love in mentoring, featuring aspects of altruism care and faith is not necessarily contrary to conventional instrumental use of mentioning. Mentoring has the potential for socializing new comers, and facilitating development programmes and leadership succession. Leadership succession cannot be left to chance. Thirdly, the permeation of unconditional love in mentoring behaviour featuring altruism, care and faith is likely to impact significantly the way trust is forged within the educational setting. If unconditional love exists as an intrinsic motivation, it is less likely that there be abuse and misuse of mentoring for the selfish interests of individuals that could be incompatible with ethical practice in education. Fourthly, teachers can learn from the role modelling of their school leaders and this has the potential to benefit students directly. Successful mentoring could surface the essence in the Latin word *educare* which denotes leading out the potential within the learner in education. The practice of mentors leading and serving protégés, with no selfish thoughts of return, has the immense potential to influence. In education, the quality of influence on the young directly impacts the future generation at multi-levels encompassing the family, school, organisation, society, nation and the world.

## Conclusion

With regard to its conceptualisation, mentoring has a history that dates back to Greek mythology. Through the ages, mentoring has surfaced in various forms and the evolving conceptualisation of mentoring augments the need to explore its position in education. The rationale for establishing mentoring that works has invariably been the tangible utility value of mentoring per se. Mentoring structures by itself could be meek if implementers and practitioners fail to truly empower mentoring via eliciting the intrinsic value of mentoring. Without centering the heart of mentoring, the power of unconditional love in mentoring to impact lives of the future in education is vastly diluted.

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