

Chapter 13

A Study of Novice Faculty Members' Experiences During the Mentoring Process

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ABSTRACT

This chapter suggests a new framework for thinking about the role of informal mentoring in higher education based on the persistently changing role of education. The chapter provides the findings from a qualitative research study that examined how the lived experiences of three novice professors guided their engagement in informal mentoring opportunities. The study offers evidence to capture how engagement in mentoring opportunities improved the quality of teaching. With each mentoring opportunity, these three professors gained knowledge and skills that they integrated into their classrooms to be more effective teachers. The conclusions address the following areas: the importance of previous lived experiences as a catalyst for in engaging in mentoring opportunities; the importance of mentoring having an informal structure, one where they controlled the learning direction; the nature and ramifications of the informal versus formal aspects of this process; and the findings in this study align with Kolb's learning theory.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education continues to function in an increasingly complex and competitive environment (Daniel, 2014). Changing technology, shifting student demographics, family income, the trend of producing unemployed or underemployed graduates and a steady decline of state funding has led to several changes in higher education, including the role of faculty (Armstrong, n. d.; Becker & Toutkoushian, 2013; Tandberg & Griffith, 2013; Yun, Baldi, & Sorcinelli, 2016) support for faculty in the development of their teaching skills has been a core component of higher education since the institutions' birth (Becker & Toutkoushian, 2013). The "oversight and control of educational quality by faculty is essen-

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tially a sine qua non of most sectors of higher education” (Armstrong, n. d., p. 4). Supporting faculty in enhancing their instructional skills to meet the educational demands of the 21st century necessitates an understanding of the role of mentoring in scaffolding faculty professional development. Further, Zellers et al. (2008) assert a challenge “to identify ways in which to apply this classical [mentoring] construct more systematically and equitably across the ranks of the academy” (p. 583).

The shifting role of faculty in higher education has been researched for decades. In 1995, Barr and Tagg described a paradigm shift in faculty roles, one where faculty were viewed as lecturing experts in the classroom to a role where faculty are designers of student learning environments. More recently, Becker et al. (2017) described the role of educators as curators and facilitators of learning experiences. Faculty are expected to adjust to contemporary learning environments, which are designed to empower students to use their competencies and talents (Barr & Tagg, 1995).

Mentoring is one strategy through which higher education institutes have supported faculty in developing learning experiences, which deliver quality education. Over the decades, mentoring has been held in high esteem and viewed as “the method of choice” in schools of education, where the focus is to produce teachers skilled at delivering quality education (Bryant-Shanklin & Brumage, 2011). Zellers et al. (2008) argue as follows: “Protégés, mentors, and organizations benefit from these learning relationships” (p. 557). Despite mentoring as positive strategy to support faculty in developing their teaching skills, Hargreaves and Fullan (2002) argue that mentoring must address the changing role of faculty: “No potentially powerful intervention, and mentoring is certainly one of them, can be treated independently of the evolving nature of society and the teaching profession within it” (p. 52). In other words, mentoring must address the shifting role of faculty in the 21st century.

This chapter describes the results of an in-depth qualitative research study that creates a new framework for thinking about role of mentoring in higher education given the persistently changing role of education and the faculty that deliver quality education in higher education institutes. More specifically, the chapter proposes a theoretical framework that applies Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory to explore how faculty’s participation in mentoring programs enhanced their professional development. The chapter places a special emphasis on how novice faculty’s lived experiences influence the success of the mentoring opportunity. Exploring how novice professors rely on their lived experiences to influence their mentoring opportunities is critical as novice professors typically enter the profession with little or no pedagogical training (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Kugel, 1993; Mundy, Kupczynski, Ellis, & Salgado, 2011). Finally, the chapter provides evidence that captures how these professors engaged in mentoring programs that, in turn, influenced their ability to provide quality education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mentoring theory depicts a relationship where two or more individuals enter a relationship with the hope of “career advancement, personal development, and professional identification” (Angelique, Kyle, & Taylor, 2002, p. 197). The mentoring relationship involves two or more individuals working together to develop the abilities of one individual (Bryant-Shanklin & Brumage, 2011). Typically, a mentor is a “more experienced (usually older) faculty member or professional [that] acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and sponsor of a less experienced (usually younger) graduate student or junior professional” (Johnson, 2002, p. 88). In the current chapter, the terms “mentee” and “protégé” are used synonymously to capture the less experienced participant in a mentoring relationship.

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