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Mentoring: A Role to Facilitate Academic Change

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ABSTRACT

The concept of mentoring is presented, including a historical overview and definitions of both mentor and protégé as well as corresponding typical roles and responsibilities. Theoretical models of mentoring are presented and contemporary views on using mentors to create meaningful curricular change are discussed. In particular, the overall results of the American Occupational Therapy Foundation's Curriculum-Mentoring Project are presented. The conclusion appears to be that both the process and outcomes of curriculum change seem to be highly dependent on the communication style and make-up of the faculty and their relationship with the mentor.

INTRODUCTION

Many occupational therapy academic programs are making changes in curriculum format, structure and content in order to respond to the new entry-level requirements of post-baccalaureate education. This presents both challenges and opportunities to occupational therapy educators. While the academic environment can be collegial, work is often done in isolation. Faculty in occupational therapy programs have varying levels of expertise related to curriculum design / program development. There is a shortage of doctorally prepared faculty, therefore mentoring is one opportunity for more experienced educators to assist faculty groups in making changes that will benefit the profession by strengthening occupational therapy education programs.

Occupational therapy education has seen rapid growth and dramatic change in the past decade. The number of occupational therapy education programs has significantly grown with an increase from 68 programs in 1989 to 146 professional occupational therapy programs in 2001.^{1,2} By the end of 2004, the number of occupational therapy education programs had slightly increased to 152.³ In 1989, the majority of programs (80%) offered occupational therapy education at the bachelor's level. By 2001, 53 programs were offering occupational therapy education at the bachelor's level (36%) and 28 programs were in transition of their bachelor's program to a professional entry-level master's degree (19%). The remaining 45% of the programs were offering master's or doctorate level education. By 2004, 130 of the 152 (85%) programs were offering some type of master's or doctoral degree program. This major shift in occupational therapy education is due to the passage of Resolution J, which mandates that all occupational therapy programs offer masters level entry by 2007.⁴ It was evident that the number of occupational therapy academic programs was steadily increasing and the master's degree was becoming more prevalent in the past decade.

This rapid growth in educational programs resulted in a shortage of qualified faculty members with doctoral level education.⁵

Since occupational therapy faculty traditionally have been recruited from clinical practice, faculty often focused their teaching on clinical skill development and training for clinical practice rather than teaching broader theory development or research skills, which is necessary for graduate education. The occupational therapy education community was aware that a mechanism was necessary to assist faculty in their professional development for the future of advancing education.

Many programs presently are or will still need to revise their curricula to meet the revised Standards for an Accredited Educational Program.⁶ Additionally, many other programs will need to enhance their academic rigor by adding substantially to the research content and theory to meet the master's level entry and accreditation standards. Mentoring is an option, beyond doctoral level education of faculty, to assist the profession in the design of quality graduate education programs,

which will prepare graduates to carry out both the clinical and scholarship skills needed for the next generation of therapists. The occupational therapy profession is beginning to use mentoring as a formal means to support and provide resources as well as leadership to assist academic programs, more specifically the occupational therapy faculty, to meet these challenges.

Although the effects of mentoring within healthcare professions have been studied in clinical practice settings, there is little research concerning the effects of mentoring in higher education, particularly on occupational therapy educators.

Mentoring

Historically, the term mentor has been used within literature to define one who was responsible for educating and nurturing another. Often the mentor was older and had already established him or herself in the profession in which the mentee or protégé was attempting to learn. While there have been mentors from as far back as Greek mythology it has only been since the late 1970's that the concept has been studied and received attention in the professional literature. Over the years, the concept of mentoring has broadened considerably.

During the late 1970's and well into the 1980's, mentoring was seen as a means to provide career advancement. Levinson, and Roche were among the first researchers to study mentoring and created serious interest in the subject by giving it academic legitimacy when they each published findings that demonstrated the relationship between having a mentor and subsequent success in the business world.^{7,8} The impact of their ideas led others to study the concept and document its importance to both learning and psychosocial development.^{9,10,11,12} Although studied, the mentoring construct remains unclear as there is a lack of agreement within the literature on a single definition of term "mentoring."¹³

Definitions of Mentoring

The definitions of "mentoring" have various and diverse foci, that range from tasks of the mentor and protégé to processes occurring within the relationship. Murray defined mentoring as a process whereby a more experienced person helps a less experienced person develop in some specified capacity.¹⁴ For example, a newly hired teacher could be paired with a veteran teacher and weekly meetings between them could elicit discussion and practice that would support the new teacher's instructional skills.

Torres-Guzman and Goodwin defined mentoring as an intense, dyadic relationship in which the mentor furthers the professional and personal development of the protégé by providing information, assistance, support and guidance.¹⁵ More recently, Kochran and Trimble defined mentoring as a relationship that provides opportunities to develop dispositions and abilities that are invaluable in strengthening capacities to grow personally and professionally.¹⁶

Most recently, the concept of collaborative mentoring has emerged within academia. This form of mentoring replaces the hierarchical model with one that focuses on mutual empowerment and learning.¹⁷ Collaborative mentoring is described as a practice that creates a creative, democratic relationship which promotes the development of insights and understandings between peers.^{18,19} Collaborative mentoring is developed through professional support networks and is practitioner centered, reflective, and empowering. It has been shown to provide a catalyst for change by promoting new relationships and organizational structures. Mullen stated that collaborative mentoring is an opportunity for professionals to become directly involved in each other's learning and to provide feedback while developing along a mutually agreed upon set of goals.¹⁷ Collaborative mentoring has also been referred to as a "Critical Friend."¹⁹ A critical friend is defined as a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward.

Roles, Responsibilities and Styles of the Mentor

Roles

Just as there are a variety of definitions of mentoring, there are many points of view concerning the roles of the mentor in the mentor-protégé relationship. According to Kram, mentors perform both career and psychosocial functions.²⁰ The career functions include sponsorship, exposure and preparation for advancement. These functions of the mentor are shown to directly correlate with career advancement of the protégé. The psychosocial functions provided by the mentor enrich the protégés' sense of competence and effectiveness. Kram concluded that the career-related functions emerged first in the relationship, followed by the psychosocial functions, which became important in the later phases of the relationship.²⁰

The National Education Association identifies 13 key roles of a mentor in an academic setting: a counselor, teacher, challenger, coach, observer, facilitator, trainer, master, tour guide, advocate, role model, reporter, and equal.²¹ Each of these roles has a slightly different function in the education context. First, the role of a counselor whose primary responsibility is to provide a confidential, candid, and supportive environment that gives the psychological support necessary to help the new teachers stay committed to teaching. The role of a teacher is to help new teachers refine their teaching

practices and understand the learning needs of all students, especially those students at risk, with special needs, and from diverse backgrounds. Next, the role of a challenger is identified as stimulating new teachers to do their best, by assisting them in new content areas through thought provoking questions and helping them obtain professional development training. The fourth role is that of coach, where the mentor helps new teachers improve their classroom teaching by offering assistance with classroom management and discipline strategies. Observer is yet another role where the responsibility is to observe new teachers in action and provide timely and ongoing support and coaching. The role of facilitator is primarily for helping new teachers access a broad variety of professional experiences by arranging meetings with other teachers and observations of master teachers in action. The role of trainer is designated to have the mentor conduct workshops and other professional development training for new teachers, other mentor teachers and administrators. The master role is one where the mentor uses current education techniques and demonstrates proficiency with education technology. The role of tour guide is one where the mentor helps orient new teachers to both the workplace and the culture of the community by supporting and facilitating meaningful involvement in and with the school. The advocate role carries the responsibility to advocate for new teachers by offering their thoughts and ideas in ongoing and annual assessments of the mentoring program. Being a role model is demonstrated to new teachers by the importance of "classroom connection" whereby the mentor returns to the protégé's classrooms several times within the first three years. The role of reporter is one where the success of the mentoring program is shared with all who will listen and reported frequently to the administration. Finally, the role of equal should not be underestimated. The mentor should not supervise but rather serve as a peer and colleague to new teachers.

Various aspects of each of the above mentioned role descriptions may be needed in a variety of combinations to guide any protégé toward his or her desired goal. It is important to note that no single role description above can be used as an interchangeable term with mentoring. Rather, mentoring is the ability of the mentor to carry out a variety of roles dependant upon the needs of the protégé.

Responsibilities

According to Schwiebert, Deck and Bradshaw, the primary responsibilities of the mentor are: 1) to make an investment of quality time in the relationship, 2) to make a commitment to take the time necessary to allow for in-depth discussion of the needs and goals of the protégé and the progress towards those goals and 3) to maintain a supportive interaction.²² Additionally, sharing resources, providing feedback in non-judgmental language, challenging the protégé to work toward his or her goals, assisting with the development of a vision, assurance of learning, and facilitating reflective practice are major responsibilities of the mentor.

Styles

The way in which the mentor carries out their responsibilities is referred to as the style of the mentor. McNally and Martin conducted a study to see how mentors carried out their responsibilities.²³ Three styles emerged from this study; each reflecting a difference in the way the responsibilities are carried out by the mentor.

1. 'Laissez-faire' mentors are nurturing and supportive. They have a strong belief in the importance of providing emotional support and reducing the stress of the protégé.
2. Collaborative mentors combine support and challenge to empower their protégé to engage in critical reflection.
3. Lastly, imperial mentors use challenge as the foremost responsibility and often create tension for the protégé.

Roles and Responsibilities of Protégés

Roles

The term protégé is derived from the French verb protégé, which means to protect. Fagenson described protégés as "... individuals who are provided with support, direction and feedback regarding their interpersonal development and career plans by individuals called "mentors" (p.48).²⁴ Healy and Welchert characterized the objective of the mentoring relationship for the protégé as "...the achievement of identity transformation, a movement from the status of understudy to that of self-directing colleague" (p.17).²⁵ Although the protégé is an equal partner in the relationship, their role is different in that the protégé must identify his or her weaknesses and articulate a vision so that the work with the mentor is focused on the protégé's goals.

Responsibilities

In order for the mentoring relationship to be effective, protégés need to carry out certain responsibilities. First, the protégé must demonstrate the desire to learn. He or she must have an interest in people and be able to communicate effectively. Understanding how to formulate questions and listen attentively are important responsibilities of the protégé. The protégé must want to develop his or her set of skills and work to achieve an established goal that fits into his/her overall vision for their career. Finally, the protégé must demonstrate initiative and follow through, which are essential for achieving goals. Since it is the protégé who ultimately decides what can be achieved, the degree to which these responsibilities are carried out will significantly impact the nature and productivity of the relationship.

Mentoring Model

Daloz's Model

One of the first models to appear within the adult education literature was Daloz's work which describes a mentor/protégé interaction model.²⁷ This model has been effective in aiding adults through transitions and proposes that effective mentor/protégé relationships balance three key elements: support, challenge and the protégé's vision. Daloz proposes that by balancing support, challenge, and vision, the mentor creates the tension necessary for change and growth within the protégé.

Support

Support refers to activities that affirm the value of the individual such as demonstrating respect or trust. Additionally, support reduces anxiety or uncertainty on the part of the protégé and is accomplished through setting clear expectations, providing resource materials or discussing potential responses to difficult situations. McNally and Martin conducted a study, which sought to examine the tools mentors used to promote novice teachers' development using Daloz's model.²³ Although all mentors recognized that providing support was an important part of their role they cited a range of ways they provided support. These differences seemed to lie on a continuum from nurturing to professional actions to ensure the development of professional competencies. Mentors also acknowledged that the amount of support changed over time as the protégé developed in skill and ability.

Challenge

Challenge forces the protégé to reflect on his or her values, competencies and visions. Within Daloz's model, challenges are provided by the mentor and may be illustrated by the example of the mentor who identifies inconsistencies between what the protégé says and what is actually done. For example, the protégé may state that he or she has a skill, yet when asked to perform, the protégé cannot perform to the same ability as stated. The mentor can then challenge the protégé to practice or learn the skill at a greater depth through role modeling or other means. McNally and Martin noted that challenge was provided in a variety of ways.²³ Mentors used challenge as a way to create opportunities for their protégés to reflect on their teaching effectiveness. Others provided challenge by simply using questions directed toward their protégés to promote growth in higher level thinking. Challenge was seen as getting the protégé to think about their effectiveness in a particular situation and to take increasing responsibility for their actions. A few mentors in this study noted that they attempted to move the challenge from coming from them (the mentors) to creating the ability to challenge oneself.

Vision

Vision is defined as looking to the future and establishing realistic goals in order to achieve this vision with the protégé. Mentors can foster vision by acting as a role model, or as a guide by stimulating discussion about the protégé's future. By having vision, the mentor and protégé continually have a "focus" for their collaborative efforts. Daloz proposes that support, challenge and vision are the key elements of an effective mentor-protégé relationship. His mentoring model is not discipline specific and is one of the first to appear in the literature. Many of the other models have stemmed from his seminal work.

Formal Mentoring Programs

Self-Selected vs. Assigned Mentors

Controversy exists within the literature as to whether a mentor should be assigned to a protégé, based upon personality characteristics, experience levels of the mentors, and volunteers within institutions or whether mentors should be chosen by the protégé. In a formal mentoring program, individuals are assigned to a mentor. Kram warned that assigned mentoring relationships may not be as beneficial as mentoring relationships that develop informally due to personality conflicts, and lack of true personal commitment because it was not formed on their own initiative.²⁰ In either case, assigned or chosen, in order for the relationship to work it should be based upon mutual respect, trust, and an understanding of the other's responsibilities in the relationship.

Mentoring Programs in Higher Education

The major emphasis of mentoring programs in health care higher education is on the development of junior faculty. Mentoring is considered one way to improve both collegiality and junior faculty research.²⁸ It is a complicated venture in academia when a faculty member mentors another faculty member.²⁹ Those who are mentored by colleagues in a university setting put themselves in an unequal and vulnerable position in relation to persons who may some time in the future be making decisions about their promotion and tenure.²⁹ Therefore, more effective mentoring programs may be ones where mentors are sought from other university or college settings.

Mentoring in Occupational Therapy

Within the field of occupational therapy, the importance of mentoring has been consistently emphasized within the literature.^{12,30,31} Vasantachart & Rice suggested the development of mentoring programs as a potential tool for faculty development.³¹

Although there are no models in the literature related to using a mentor to guide or assist with curriculum reform in allied health-care higher education, the American Occupational Therapy Foundation recognized a need to support faculty members who were redesigning their curricula to meet the new Standards and who were committed to enhancing scholarship in their programs.⁶ Following a 3-year project of curricular renaissance undertaken by the faculty in the occupational therapy department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill this faculty group expressed interest in sharing their expertise.³² A dialogue ensued and led to the idea of using mentors to assist other occupational therapy programs in their efforts.

This idea was formalized in the AOTF Curriculum-Mentoring Project. The purpose of this project was to assist faculty in their curriculum development and reform efforts. It was hypothesized that the ongoing involvement of an assigned mentor would provide faculty with the necessary skill and expertise to achieve their specific goals. The AOTF Curriculum-Mentoring Project occurred between October 2000 and June 2002 and the process of mentoring was studied in two participant/mentor pairs (cases) as it related to curriculum reform.³³ A qualitative study was designed where the mentors and participants were asked reflective questions, throughout the one year course of the project based upon Daloz's model of mentoring. The mentors and participants were also interviewed via telephone in a focus group format and sent mid point questionnaires requesting information related to how the mentoring process was going, what were the outcomes compared with the original goals or vision of the participants.

From the study of the Curriculum-Mentoring Project, it could be concluded that a mentor can have a significant impact on curriculum reform efforts. In both of the studied cases, the faculty stated that they were able to achieve ways of viewing their curriculum that they otherwise would not have been able to do if a mentor was not involved in the process. Additionally, in both cases, there was a refocusing of the faculty's perception of what they had the collective strength to offer within their curriculum. The mentors, in both of these cases, helped to shift the focus of the faculty groups to a more substantive curriculum that highlighted the vision of the faculty and integrated the context of the institution. The mentors were also able to guide the faculty to see options of how to merge undergraduate and graduate curriculums to make a more cohesive tie to their educational programs. In both cases, the mentors facilitated discussions among the faculty as to what constitutes graduate level education in occupational therapy. These discussions led to higher levels of thinking on the part of the faculty and generated ownership of the work being produced by the faculty groups.

Through the structure of the AOTF Curriculum-Mentoring Project, the mentors in both of these cases, provided support, ongoing guidance and challenge to the faculty in each of the university settings. According to Daloz's mentoring model, support, which affirms the value of the protégé, and challenge, which forces the protégé to reflect on his or her vision, are necessary for an effective mentoring relationship.²⁷ Although the amount of support and challenge given by the mentors in the two cases differed, the researcher's overall impression was that both were inherent to the process. Support was a key element of the mentoring relationship for both faculty groups. Support, in the form of feedback and reinforcement, was given continuously by the mentors in Case One, while the mentor in Case Two offered support by attempting to contact the participants to see if they were in need of assistance for curriculum change. The challenges presented by the mentors, facilitated changes in the way the faculty thought about their curriculum, however to significantly differing degrees. Again, the amount of challenge differed in the two cases, however the combination of support and challenge provided the impetus which led to the curriculum changes made in each of the occupational therapy programs.

Overall, the faculty in each of the two teams seemed to benefit from mentoring in differing degrees as a result of their participation in the AOTF Curriculum-Mentoring project. Overall, it appeared as if a more junior faculty group benefits from mentoring from a team of mentors, who are able to initially direct through well thought-out questions and then allow growth and challenge to come from among the faculty. From this study it also appears that faculty who are more senior in their makeup and had patterns of independent productivity may have been better served by mentoring focused on team or community relationship building rather than on curricular issues. It also seemed important that a well focused plan needed to be established at the onset of the formal mentoring project and presented in writing with clear expectations as to how and when to communicate so to allow a long distance mentoring relationship to sustain the momentum over a year time period.

Conclusion

Overall, the literature review has traced the history of mentoring and overviewed how the concept has changed over time from a hierarchical model to one that encourages equal partnership in the process. The complexity of the mentoring role was highlighted through the various definitions presented. Various mentoring models were described and mentoring as it relates to the field of occupational therapy was overviewed. The outcomes of the AOTF Curriculum-Mentoring Project were highlighted and the significance of mentoring was reported in relation to curriculum reform. Overall, it appears that both the process and outcomes of curriculum change seem to be highly dependent on the communication style and make-up of the faculty and their relationship with the mentor. The greater the amount of communication and planning for future communication, the greater the amount of curriculum change attributed to a mentor's participation.

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