

## Full Length Research

# While Odysseus Was Away Mentoring Pre-service Teachers Across Generations: Examining Roles, Guidelines and Models.

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**Mentoring is frequently identified as a significant event in the training of pre-service teachers. The importance of the university faculty mentee and pre-service mentor relationship is agreed upon as critical, however guidance and structure for the practice remains ill defined. Roles and characteristics of mentors and mentees must be examined and refined respective of all generations engaged in mentoring. Studying collected descriptions of mentor and mentee roles, the multigenerational workforce involved and effective mentoring models contributes to a heightened understanding of the mentoring process.**

**Keywords:** Odysseus, mentoring, mentee, pre-service teachers

## INTRODUCTION

Greek mythology's King Odysseus lends the name of a most trusted friend, Mentor, to a practice gaining attention in many professional arenas (Jonson, 2002). Odysseus conscientiously appointed Mentor to guide and advise his son while he was away at sea (Jonson, 2002). The word mentor traveled through languages to finally be recorded in 1750 as a Greek word meaning "wise counselor" (Pennsylvania State, n.d.). The relationship depicted in *The Odyssey* was one of the earliest examples of a developmental process of nurturing, guiding and supporting currently referred to as mentoring (Jonson, 2002). The kind of relationship modeled in mythology exists today in various settings (Young, Bullough, Draper, Smith, and Erickson, 2005). As professionals in training move along the developmental continuum toward a goal of independence, the journey can be enriched by a fulfilling mentoring relationship. Mentoring can be the intervention to bring solace to the feeling expressed by a beginning professional when a new job is likened to a "journey for which there is no map to guide you" (Walker,

2001). The mythological Mentor would surely be pleased with the guidance given today to young men and women embarking on journeys of unknowns.

An area of emerging research in light of mentoring is the field of education (Hamel and Jaasko-Fisher, 2011). Within the teacher education context, mentoring relationships often exist between university faculty and students studying to become teachers in a teacher preparation program. Students preparing to become teachers are known as pre-service teachers. By definition, according to The North American Council for Online Learning (2008), mentoring is a relationship between a mentor who has experience in a particular role being learned by the mentee. Zachary (2000) describes a mentor as one who facilitates, listens, empowers, encourages and assists. The mentee is the companion in the relationship who is developing to become like or fill a role similar to the one of the mentor by way of receiving guidance (Oxford, n.d.). Beginning teachers continue to report the importance of the mentor and the influence of the relationship as key aspects in

professional training (Kagan, 1992). While the impact of mentoring is generally noted as positive for both participants, there are concerns surrounding issues such as the absence of clear guidelines, the need for program orientation and training and clear definitions of mentor and mentee responsibilities. (Clinard and Ariav, 1998). In addition, teacher education is facing an ever growing multigenerational workforce with stark differences as well as slight nuances to further complicate the relationship of pre-service mentee and faculty mentor at the university level (McCraedy, 2011). To better understand the changing dynamic of teacher education mentoring, the purpose of this paper is to examine the roles and responsibilities of mentor and mentee, the generational differences that can impact the process and successful models for mentoring is imperative.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Mentor and Mentee: Research Summary and Critique**

To begin, considering the roles of both the mentor and mentee is necessary. Literature suggests behaviors and functions of each player in the mentoring relationship, but also well documented is the lack clarity concerning the desired behaviors of the participants (Ambrosetti and Dekkers, 2010). Hudson and Millwater (2008) suggest the role of the mentor being one to nurture the mentee during development by building a relationship, while Walker (2001) asserts the need for the mentor to be dedicated to the teaching profession. Nonetheless, the mentoring role is viewed as complex and multifaceted (Ambrosetti and Dekkers, 2010). In an effort to consolidate the wide ranging collection of descriptors, of character and role, recorded in research, Table 1 provides a concise view of the range of information.

While there are a number of mentor characterizations available when reviewing literature, the information presented in Table 1 tends to confirm the theory maintained by Lai (2010) in that many charged with mentorship view the responsibility as one where a relationship or a rapport of trust with the mentee is developed. Conversely, a number of mentors see the job as one for honing the more technical aspects of teaching in the mentee (Lai, 2010). The absence of a definite consensus of the mentor role likely exists because there remains a focus on differing dimensions of the mentor's function (Lai, 2010).

Although the mentor's role is discussed at length in a number of publications, the mentee characteristics, responsibilities, and roles remain more obscure, particularly in the context of teacher education.

Characteristics and behaviors of mentees, some of which are taken from successful business and medical models, are delineated in Table 2.

Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010) characterize the interconnectedness of the functions of mentor and mentee as one of reciprocity and complementary. The process of mentoring can and should become a give and take relationship where both members learn from and teach each other (Paris, 2010). The present movement away from a hierarchical model of mentoring allows mentors to interact with mentees in a way that is non-supervisory precipitating an ethos where trust can be developed and free sharing can take place (Jasper and Foster, 2010; Richards, 2010).

### **Generational Differences of Mentors and Mentees:**

#### **Research Summary and Critique**

As roles and responsibilities are established for the mentor and mentee, a broader study of mentoring is incumbent upon the education community to examine the generational differences and the impact likely to become apparent with the variety of ages represented in the current workforce (University of Hawaii, 2003). Educators can benefit by understanding others and the personal beliefs and values held based on the generation in which others have lived (University of Hawaii, 2003). Whether or not there is agreement with behaviors or habits, appreciation can help to make for a more productive learning environment for all involved (University of Hawaii, 2003). Pre-service mentors will conceivably be in one of the three generations represented in Table 3 based on current ages of college students (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005).

Acknowledgement of the generational disparities among university faculty is crucial in creating ideal mentoring situations (McCraedy, 2011). Moreover, critically analyzing the general descriptors of the Millennial generation of which college mentees belong is paramount warns McCraedy (2011). Descriptive characteristics of Millennials as well as behaviors and habits related to learning and relevant to mentoring are shown in Table 4.

Investigation of Millennial characteristics reveals dissimilarities between university mentor generations and the student mentees (McCraedy, 2011). Preparing to mentor Millennial pre-service teachers warrants appraisal of potential caveats (Baker College, 2004). Recognizing possible discord between Generation X and Millennials will prove beneficial to a mentoring relationship (Baker College, 2004).

**Table 1:** *Teacher Education Mentor Roles and Characteristics Noted in Literature*

<b>Mentor roles/characteristics</b>	<b>Literature reference</b>
Dedicated to the profession	(Walker, 2001)
Open minded	
Flexible	
Listens attentively	
Uses time effectively	
Critiques in a positive way	
Patient	
Approachable	
Able to build relationships with individuals and groups	(Moir, 2003)
Able to build relationships with individuals and groups	
Offers hints, feedback and reminders	
Helps with personal and professional issues	
Advises and encourages reflective thought	
Advocates	
Provides resources	(Brady and Broadbent, 2005)
Provide inspiration	
Develop ethics	
Share passion for teaching	(Jasper and Foster, 2010)
Model reflective thinking	
Respond in a timely manner	
Have a caring attitude	
Provide wise council	
Display a cordial attitude tempered with humor and empathy	
Able to teach new teachers how to think about their own teaching	(Jonson, 2002)
Facilitator to encourage, challenge, empower and assist	
Understand needs of the beginning teacher	

**Table 2:** *Teacher Education Pre-service Mentee Roles and Characteristics Noted in Literature*

Active participant	(Ambrosetti and Dekkers, 2010)
Set personal goals	
Open to communication with mentor	
Utilize feedback	
Make use of opportunities facilitated by mentor	
Listens	
Takes advice	
Performs critical reflection	
Open to feedback and recommendations	
Trustworthy	
Maintains appropriate boundaries	
Follows through on commitments	(Erwin, 2010)
Eager	(Emory University School of Medicine, 2009)
Prompt	
Flexible	
Respectful	
Willing to take initiative for own development	(Medical College of Wisconsin, 2010)

**Table 3:** *Generalized Characteristics and Behaviors of Mentor Generations on the University Campus*

Generation	Years of Birth/ Age Ranges	Labels	Characteristics	Behaviors Relevant to Educational Mentoring Settings
Traditionalists	Before 1955- Over 55	Silent Generation War Babies	Living during Great Depression & World War II	“Their word is their bond”  Prefer face to face & written communication  Do not share easily or openly
Baby Boomers	1956-1973  38-55		Largest percentage of population  Strong work ethic	Speak to them directly  Taught pedagogy with teaching focus
Generation X	1974-1985/  (1961-1981)  26-37/30-50	Slackers  Latch-key kids	Both parents worked  Accepting of diversity  Practical  Reject rules  Technologically literate  Informal	Lifelong learners  Need the “why”  Need immediate answers  Prefer email Independent, hands-off style  Taught a pedagogy with teaching focus

Adapted from: “Understanding the Net Generation”, by D. Oblinger and J. Oblinger, 2009, EDUCAUSE, 2.0-2.23.

Relationship building will be an area requiring focus from both the Millennial mentee and the Generation X mentor as the generations are polar opposites in relational preferences based on Tables 3 and 4. The informality exhibited by Generation X is another area of

inconsistency when compared to the Millennial structure seekers also shown in Tables 3 and 4. With the same sense of importance lies the awareness of the likelihood of too much leeway being granted by Baby Boomers to the Millennials due to the younger generation being

**Table 4:** Generalized Characteristics, Behaviors and Habits of Mentee Generation Represented on the University Campus

Generation	Years of Birth/ Age Ranges	Labels	Characteristics	Behaviors Pertinent to Educational Mentoring Settings
Millenials	1986-2003  8-25	Generation Y	Technology is “6 <sup>th</sup> sense”	Prefer structure and support
		Nexters	Assume technology as action v.tool	Desire personalized, interactive relationships
	Net Generation	Child centered Multitaskers	Seek feedback Team/group oriented	
	Short attention spans	Weak interpersonal skills		
	Celebrate diversity	Want relevant work		
	Realistic,Organized	Prefer networked communication		
	Socially conscious			
	Stressed, Pressured to succeed	Expect rapid responses Want what is needed to achieve goal		
	Self-demanding			
	Involved in extracurricular activities	Refuse to read large amounts of text, desire online access to syllabi, reading,etc- also want face to face time		
“Hypertext” minds				
Always connected	Taught learning focused pedagogy			

Adapted from: “Understanding the Net Generation”, by D. Oblinger and J. Oblinger, 2009, EDUCAUSE, 2.0-2.23.

viewed as children by the older one. (Baker College, 2004). Divergence in teaching practice and the focus shift from a teaching pedagogy to one where the objective is student learning can cause generationally separated mentors and mentees to struggle philosophically (Ingleby, 2011). According to Tables 3 and 4, communication issues are obvious as varying generations prefer distinct styles and formats. Based on the indicated considerations, the need for all generations involved in mentoring relationships to relinquish the assumptions of other participants sharing the same values and beliefs is crucial as misunderstandings and miscommunication can result (McCraedy, 2011).

On the contrary, as stated by Richards (2010), many beneficial outcomes of cross- generational mentoring are also evidenced. As mentors share knowledge about teaching and learning, opportunities to reflect on personal beliefs and perceptions arise (Gitterman and Shulman, 2005). Plato (380 B.C.) sums up the responsibility for veteran faculty to share knowledge with younger mentees as posited in *The Republic*, “For those having torches will pass them on to others” (Jonson, 2002). Sharing said teaching expertise and knowledge with the next generation of teachers frequently leaves mentors feeling renewed and energized (Moir, 2003; Silva, Correia and Pardo-Ballester, 2010). Likewise, Walker (2001) explains,

supportive mentoring relationships are forged; Baby Boomer and Generation X mentors have the opportunity to learn from mentees. Millennial students are naturally savvy in the technological arena and can open digital doorways for mentors of older generations (Baker College, 2004). The perceptions and beliefs espoused by the Millennial generation pertaining to cultural diversity is one of celebration (Thielfold and Scheef, 2004). Prior generation mentors can learn from and emulate the behaviors and habits of mind practiced by Millennials when advancing individual learning and responsiveness to various cultures (Thielfold and Scheef, 2004; Walker, 2001). When mutually beneficial mentoring relationships exist, the needs of both mentor and mentee can be well satisfied (Young et al., 2005).

### **Mentoring Patterns and Models: Research Summary and Critique**

The scarcity of and need for structure and guidance concerning the process and procedures for effective mentoring in an educational context has been well documented (Feiman- Nemser, 1996; Ingleby, 2011; Lai, 2005; Richards, 2010). Of initial importance is the pattern of mentoring models following a logical, developmentally appropriate pattern (Ambrosetti and Dekkers, 2010). General program outlines should include clear purpose and expectations, concisely stated roles for mentor and mentee and a specific duration timeframe (Ambrosetti and Dekkers, 2010). Education based research calls for programs which make efforts to combine new alongside time-tested strategies (Jones as cited in Walker, 2001). Walker (2001) suggests ongoing training for both mentors and mentees as a desirable program component. Overwhelmingly, effective models are urged to move away from very generalized and predictable patterns to ones of increased spontaneity coupled with a focus on individualized needs in response to research revealing the vast amount of learning taking place in informal and social settings (Hamel and Jaasko-Fisher, 2011; Jonson, 2002; Reeves and Oh, 2007; Walker, 2001).

When considering effective patterns and models for mentoring between pre-service teachers and university faculty, knowledge may be gained by examining existing research. A study conducted by Brigham Young University in Utah involving over 300 students in the teacher education program reveals patterns of mentoring to consider when developing a working model of mentoring for teacher candidates (Young et al., 2005). The study paired two teacher interns with one inservice teacher mentor during the student teaching semester.

Interns received one-half the usual salary for teachers in the Utah district and full benefits. The mentor teacher was released from regular teaching duties for the duration of the interns' placement in order to devote time to the mentoring process fully (Young et al., 2005). Following the interns' placement, surveys were completed to inform the researchers with data collected from mentors and mentees leading to the formation of the Personal Mentoring Model (PMM) (Young et al., 2005). The PMM is based on the sharing of professional values about teaching and learning, teaching obligations and beliefs about how people should be treated (Young et al., 2005). The PMM also reveals patterns of mentor behavior to further inform development of mentoring guidelines and training. Shown in Table 5 are highlighted findings from the PMM surveys.

According to Young et al. (2005), from the same Brigham Young University study, are dimensions of mentoring aiding to further define and clarify foundational tenets of effective mentoring programs. Leveled descriptions on the survey ranged from "Emotionally Available" to "Invested" (Young et al., 2005). Data demonstrate all mentors as "Invested", but in varying degrees, as 15 of 18 mentors were labeled as "Emotionally Available" and only 2 classified as "Disengaged" (Young et al., 2005). As an added finding of interest, the survey indicates, with little exception, mentors being seen as having difficulty or showing hesitancy when giving mentees critical, negative feedback (Young et al., 2005). The Personal Mentoring Model survey and resulting data collected brings to the forefront varying styles of mentoring and adds to the complex nature of understanding and developing an effective program.

A second body of research exists because of a mentoring study involving mentors and university students in Australia. In a 2006 study at Australian Catholic University in Canberra, mentoring issues were addressed within the context of teacher education including university mentors and secondary education students (Brady and Broadbent, 2005). The study was designed to mentor secondary students while learning pedagogical practices to complement the content areas. Mentors were assigned small groups and a unique program was designed by the mentor (Brady and Broadbent, 2005). The mentoring sessions took place in a K-12 school setting to further the mentee's induction into a school culture (Brady and Broadbent, 2005). Post-study questionnaires reveal not only the importance of the "environment of support" (school setting) but also the opportunity to have an "environment of enquiry" [inquiry] (Brady and Broadbent, 2005). Mentees share the value of being able to openly discuss and reflect on

**Table 5:** Emergent Patterns of Mentoring from PMM Survey, Utah

Mentoring Pattern	Number of participants practicing pattern type	Description of pattern	Mentor viewed as:
Responsive	13/18	Mentor looks to mentee for guidance and direction of relationship	Resource, Guide, Cheerleader
Interactive	4/18	Mentor holds open conversations on issues of concern; jointly form agendas	Friend, Colleague, Advisor
Directive	1/18	Mentor takes charge and encourages corrective behavior	Master teacher, Guide, Coach

Adapted from: "Novice teacher growth and personal models of mentoring: Choosing compassion over inquiry," by J.Young, R.Bullough, R.Draper, L.Smith & L.Erickson, 2005, *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 13(2), 169-188.

teaching practices with others as important. Walkington (as cited in Brady and Broadbent, 2005) confirms reflective activity as the foundation of all mentoring. Engaging in reflection is frequently cited in educational literature as a practice supporting teachers to accept new responsibilities and become a more efficient problem solver (Stewart, 2004). Additionally, Carter and Francis (as cited in Stewart, 2004) assert the presence of reflection in mentoring relationships as necessary to move beginning teachers forward in development.

A final study to be examined seeking data to design and implement effective mentoring models and programs is noted by Stewart (2004). The research involved more than 200 mentors and 200 novice teachers in a university setting. Reported by an overwhelming majority of study participants is the need of mentees to be consistently supported emotionally. (Carter and Francis as cited in Stewart, 2004). Gold (as cited in Stewart, 2004) confirms the inherent need of psychological support by mentees.

### Strengths and Limitations of Research

As the topic of mentoring continues to be frontrunner in educational publications and discourse, the reaching of a consensus on surrounding issues

remains unresolved. The study of mentoring reveals more questions than definitive answers. Roles and responsibilities of mentors and mentees are vague and varied according to program and setting. The need and desire for clarification of guidelines for mentors emerges throughout literature. Research continues to mention the necessity of mentor training, but nothing specific or uniform is available. While mentoring relationships are continuously validated as needed for the development of effective teachers, considering the impact of generational differences on mentors and mentees as they are paired is imperative. With as many as four generations in the current teacher education community, interested parties would be remiss in dismissing the possible advantages and challenges presented when mentor and mentee are working to navigate a mentoring relationship. An awareness of generational differences of mentors and mentees will add strength and solidity to developing teacher mentor programs. General characteristics of various generations are well defined, and incorporating the knowledge into the practice and process of mentoring is pertinent.

### Areas of Future Research

To create scenarios where mentor and mentee approach the relationship in a positive way is desirable in the university teacher education setting. Evidence of the lasting positive impact of mentoring relationships on teacher quality provides teacher education programs the impetus to create models and set them up for success. The success of mentoring would likely be perpetuated by the positive perceptions of the participants. A question for further research is as follows:

- Will expectations and initial attitudes of mentors and mentees be affected by the introduction of training in mentoring roles and generational understandings and use of specific guidelines surrounding the mentoring relationship?

Evidenced in literature is an overwhelming need for clear, concise guidance in the mentoring process. Another area of consideration for further work is the development of mentor-mentee training based on identified generational characteristics and preferences.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Mentoring is defined in multiple ways and for various settings. The teacher education community has adopted the idea of mentoring as one of great value for pre-service teachers. Research confirms the acceleration of a novice teacher's learning curve by way of a positive mentor (Stewart, 2004). Walker (2001) expresses the act of mentoring teachers as a "mechanism to articulate the genius of teaching." While Walker's statement is one of philosophical beauty, mentoring is not without pitfalls. Currently, mentoring deficiencies have tremendous bearing on the process and on the practice (Lai, 2010). Ultimately the responsibility of nurturing the next generation of teachers falls on teacher education faculty. Diligent faculty will look to successful models and surrounding research to create mentoring programs for the candidates served. Undoubtedly, mentoring programs have to be created with clear guidelines and procedures appropriate to the setting of implementation. Roles of mentors and mentees must be defined and training for the participants is imperative. Within each setting, generations of mentors and mentees should be recognized and considered as relationships are established. Awareness of generational characteristics potentially affecting mentoring partnerships is unfamiliar and feasibly requires attention.

The mentoring responsibility first accepted by Odysseus' trusted friend to guide his young son

Telemachus is still very much alive today. Mentoring is a privilege and an obligation requiring continuous dedication and fortitude by university mentors to continue leading pre-service mentees on a personal odyssey of becoming the teachers of the future and, quite possibly, the next generation of mentors.

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