

# MENTORING: A KEY TO THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHER

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**Abstract:** *The teaching profession has a long history of providing mentorship to mentees (budding lecturers) through focused, collaborative, and one-on-one relationships. However, despite new lecturers' ongoing need for guidance and assistance, mentoring is relatively neglected as a concept in institutions of higher education. This study explores the concept of mentoring in higher education institutions to ascertain whether different mentoring strategies and approaches can be utilized to support junior researchers who are in need of guidance, coaching, and assistance. In this study, purposively sampled mentors and mentees were interviewed about their views of, and experiences with, mentoring. The study extends beyond the mentoring research and highlights that mentoring can promote unintended outcomes due to its dynamic nature. The article also addresses how both the mentor and mentee play important roles in the success of the mentoring process. The article concludes with recommendations for mentoring programs.*

**Keywords:** mentor, professional growth, development, education

Bozeman and Feeney (2007) point out that "more than 500 articles on mentoring were published in management and education literatures during the 10 years leading up to 1997" (p. 720). However, the vast majority of this mentoring research emerged in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., Burke, McKenna, & McKeen, 1991; Burke & McKeen, 1996; 1997; Dirsmith & Covaleski, 1985; Fagenson, 1989; Noe, 1988; Ragins, 1997; Thomas, 1990). Despite this abundance of studies, the literature on mentoring remains "less useful than one might hope because fundamental, conceptual, and theoretical issues have been skirted. Findings are abundant but explanations are not" (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007, p. 720). The dearth of recent theoretical and conceptual studies on mentoring suggests that mentoring has been neglected as an essential developmental activity. This neglect has implications for the promotion of research in higher education institutions

where budding academics benefit from mentoring to develop their research capacity.

Bozeman and Feeney (2007) argue that the concept of mentoring is a complex and complicated process. To illustrate this complexity, the authors ask the following questions: a) is mentoring different when the mentor is the protégé's employer or supervisor at work? b) is acknowledgement required for a mentoring relationship? c) who is the mentor? d) must the mentor and protégé like one another? e) what part of knowledge transmission is mentoring and what part is not? f) can groups mentor individuals? and g) when does mentoring begin and end? Notwithstanding Bozeman and Feeney's (2007) position, this article explores how application of different strategies and approaches can develop our theoretical and practical understanding of mentoring processes in institutions of

higher education. As we elaborate below, mentoring is a multifaceted process that can take place almost everywhere that there is a need for assistance and guidance.

The varied definitions of the concept mentor suggest that how an author uses the term may depend on individual preference. For example, the concept of mentoring can refer to acts of accompanying, respecting, collaborating, listening, and trusting in which the mentee, someone who is in need of assistance and support, is entrusted into the hands of a well-informed and intelligent person who can formally and confidently provide guidance and help. Kram and Isabella (1995) point out that “mentors provide young adults with career-enhancing functions, such as sponsorship, coaching, facilitating exposure and visibility, and offering challenging work or protection all of which help the younger person to establish a role in the organisation, learn the ropes, and prepare for advancement” (p. 111).

Wikipedia provides over 50 definitions of mentor. Mentoring can be formal or informal and mentors may be any age or at any stage of life, although they generally have expertise in the area in which they are mentoring. Jones, Harris and Miles (2009) explain that, “in academia mentoring appears to concentrate on the development of the person” or mentee (p. 273). For Callan (2006), “mentoring is a recognised activity concerned with the supported professional development of practitioners in work-based practice” (p. 16). Overall, the goal of mentoring is manifold and includes: raising and improving levels of research output; improving levels of individual or institutional research co-operation; or grooming new cadres who should take over when the older generation retires. Whatever the goal, a mentor “should not see their mentee as someone with a problem but as a young person with much

to offer in the relationship and who just needs some additional support” (Dolan & Brady, 2012, p. 109).

## **Rationale**

### **Career Development**

Several studies have noted that individuals’ opportunities for career development are enhanced when they have mentor support (Gabaro, 1987; Kram, 1985; Levison & McKee, 1978; Roche, 1979). These studies suggest that mentors can empower mentees when they use strategies such as coaching and role modeling and when they involve mentees in challenging assignments (Hansford, Tennent, & Ehrich, 2002; Hobson & Sharp, 2005). Knowledge and the art of knowing can remain isolated phenomena when not nurtured and incubated through well-designed mentorship programmes. Given that universities and colleges as well as departments within different institutions are under pressure to increase research output, mentoring can guide, assist and support scholars to increase their productivity and realise their objectives. When experienced researchers engage in mentorship practices, young and budding researchers may be motivated to venture into current and unexplored fields of research, increase their research productivity, and bolster their innovation and creativity. Not only is this increase in research productivity significant for the mentee, but a high research capacity is often a marker of a successful higher education institution and country.

### **Institutional Research Capacity**

In this article, we are motivated to consider the value of mentoring as mentoring can support the research capacity, productivity, and reputations of struggling institutions. Universities with different classifications can have disproportionate access to resources,

which in turn affects research output. For example, in South Africa, 23 universities are classified as Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs) or Historically Black Institutions, (HBIs) and Historically Advantaged Institutions (HAIs) or Historically White Institutions (HWIs). These classifications are the result of the apartheid dispensation that favoured white institutions over Black-based or founded institutions. Table 1 lists the top ten universities in Africa in 2011. The top four African universities (leaders in research output), are formerly Historically White Institutions. The other six are Historically Black Institutions. These HBIs have been resourced poorly and have not been able to function as optimally (in terms of research output) as their White counterparts. Of the universities listed in Table 1, none are former Black South African universities (HDI/HBIs). From the onset, Black institutions of education have received the fewest resources compared to Indians, Coloureds and Whites respectively. The Study Commission on U.S Policy towards South Africa (1981) identified this issue early on, highlighting that, “African education is markedly inferior to White education. To a lesser extent, the education of Coloureds and Indians is also inferior” (p. 113).

The information in Table 1 also provides a gloomy picture when one compares the research output of the top ten universities in the African continent with universities around the world. In 2011, no HBI/HDI universities were featured. Historically, Black universities were referred to as bush colleges because they were built in secluded rural areas in the Black homelands where there were no industries to sponsor them. They struggled to attract qualified staff and to raise resources to render them functional and viable. In 1994, the new democratic government, comprised of a majority of Black parliamentarians, promised to address these inequities by providing resources for

the Historically Disadvantaged Institutions. Despite these efforts, HBIs continue to face considerable resource deficits. “The funding of universities must address the plight of disadvantaged institutions while ensuring that the relatively advantaged institutions ... remain internationally recognized and competitive” (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013).

Mentoring programs enhance an institution’s research capacity. Mentoring has been found to increase professionalism, scholarship and research output because its singular aim is for experienced researchers to guide, assist and support budding researchers on their journey to becoming responsible, independent and self-sufficient academic intellectuals. As Hamilton (in Hein & Nicholson, 1986) suggests, “mentoring is an old and honourable way of assisting a neophyte in a profession” (p. 143).

**Reciprocal Benefits: Ubuntu.** Mentoring is a shared two-way opportunity for learning and growth between the mentor and the mentee. Although the mentee gains knowledge, skills, experience, support, guidance and assistance, the mentor gains experience and insight into how he or she can employ new mentoring techniques and approaches. The acquired knowledge also helps mentors to plan an effective programme that can address the needs of a mentee more effectively. The concept of Ubuntu highlights the importance of the reciprocal benefits of mentoring. In English, Ubuntu means a human being is a human being because of other human beings or I am because we are, and since we are, I am. Letseka (2000) and Shutte (1994) argue that Ubuntu implies an interactive ethic in which our humanity is shaped by our interaction with others as co-dependent beings. With a value system of Ubuntu at the foundation of the mentoring process, individuals can effectively network in institutions of

higher education and forge healthy partnerships that support the growth and development of scholars. Mentoring also helps novice scholars to obtain advice,

information, feedback, and coaching that improve their self-esteem.

Table 1  
*The Top Ten Universities in Africa, July 2011*

University	Ranking in Africa	Ranking in the world
University of Cape Town (UCT)	1	324
University of Pretoria (UP)	2	507
Stellenbosch University (SUN)	3	540
University of Witwatersrand (WITS)	4	699
University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN)	5	729
Rhodes University (Rhodes)	6	1083
University of the Western Cape (UWC)	7	1156
Cairo University (CU)	8	1219
University of South Africa (UNISA)	9	1221
Makerere University (MU)	10	1256

Note. Adapted from the Ranking Web of World Universities, July 2011 ([http://www.webometrics.info/en/Ranking\\_africa](http://www.webometrics.info/en/Ranking_africa)).

### Theoretical Framework

Despite the importance of mentoring in institutions of higher education, no applicable theory of mentoring is available. Bozeman and Feeney (2007) demonstrate “the difficulty of using existing research and theory to answer fundamental questions about mentoring” (p. 720). As Keller (2007) explains, “despite longstanding interest in mentoring as a means to influence children's lives, a solid theoretical and empirical literature addressing important issues involved in youth mentoring has only begun to

emerge” (p. 24). Similarly, Bozeman and Feeney (2007) caution, “we nominate *mentoring* as an outstanding illustration of limited progress in theory for a topic that is obviously important and amenable to convenient measurement” (p. 719). To this end, we must understand the mentoring “concept as a precursor to theory” (Bozeman & Feeny, 2007, p. 724). In the absence of a relevant theory of mentoring, this article draws on theories of motivation and on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs to understand mentoring as a concept. We also present a Johari Window model to illustrate the relationship between

individuals in a mentoring partnership.

Hamachek (1990) outlined key elements of motivation, suggesting that where extrinsic motivation pushes us from the outside, intrinsic motivation pushes us from the inside. Extrinsic motivators are most effective at starting one's motivational machinery while intrinsic motivation is usually necessary to keep that machinery going. For Hamachek (1990), praise is a more powerful motivator than criticism of work performance; praise that is specific and contingent on actual success works best. He explains that confident, high self-esteem students both want and need a high level of personal and intellectual challenge. However, the ability to motivate students is not a gift given to a chosen few but is the result of hard work and careful planning.

Motivation is key to the mentoring process. Mentors provide extrinsic motivation that can ignite the mentee's intrinsic motivation and interest. In other words, a mentor can inspire self-confidence in the mentee that in turn develops their individual empowerment. A relationship based on motivation, mutual respect, trust and understanding is key to empowering the mentee by helping them develop the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in a career. A constructive mentor-mentee relationship that builds a mentee's confidence and self-esteem seems the best strategy to achieve desired skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that a mentee requires to become a successful academic scholar. Drawing on Hamachek's (1990) understanding of motivation, we suggest that successful mentoring requires rigorous work, meticulous planning, and face-to-face encounters in a one-on-one relationship.

The hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1954) is useful for our discussion of mentoring. Maslow (1954; as cited in Hamachek, 1990) presented five levels of

human needs that are hierarchically arranged from lowest to highest. The lowest needs (and most essential for human survival) are: food, water, sleep, oxygen, and sex. The highest human needs include the acquisition of new knowledge and an understanding of issues and activities central to human survival. These central activities might include investigating, examining and exploring one's environment to make meaning of human existence. Sometimes these activities are used to discharge fairness and justice in situations where people are interdependent and interrelated. Although the high level needs are not life threatening, they are important because they lead to self-actualization, self-discovery and self-realization. The majority of people survive without knowing their significance. In between the lowest and the highest needs there also is a host of middle level needs that inform our lives. How individuals prioritize their needs along this hierarchy informs their motivation to achieve.

In academic contexts, individuals may meet the highest need and achieve self-fulfillment through the publication of articles, chapters, books, and by mentoring junior colleagues. Engaging in research activities can propel motivated academics towards achieving high levels of performance in a field of scholarship. By definition, budding researchers are individuals who are on a journey of discovering their true potential as scholars. Exceptional mentees are naturally inquisitive about their selves and are motivated inwardly/intrinsically by the need to discover their intellectual strengths and weaknesses as potential researchers.

As Lall and Sharma (2009) explain:

The aim in any group should always be to develop the 'open area' for every person, because when we work in this area with others we are at our most effective

and productive and the group is at its most productive too. The open free area, or 'the arena', can be seen as the space where good communications and cooperation occur, free from distractions, mistrust, confusion, conflict and misunderstanding. (p. 138)

To this end, Carper (1978) is of the view that “[o]ne does not know *about* the self; one strives simply to *know* the self” (p. 18). It is through knowing the self that one is able to relate to another human being as a person. This view is of significance to both the mentor and the mentee as they engage each other in matters of self-discovery, self-realization and self-actualization through acts of mutual enrichment and development. Generally, a

common desire to know and to experience life through self-discovery as an intellectual should contribute to a successful mentor-mentee relationship.

We use the Johari Window (Luft & Ingham, 1955) to illustrate four possible mentoring relationship scenarios. As illustrated in Figure 1, there are four possible mentoring relationships that can unfold depending on the willingness and ability of mentor and mentee. The variable *willingness* represents the environmental factors associated with either intrinsic or extrinsic types of motivation that may influence a mentee to achieve on a higher level. The variable *ability* represents a mentee’s inherent gifts and talents, which a mentor seeks to unfold and maximize in a mentoring relationship.

1. Willing and Able	2. Willing and Unable
4. Unwilling and Able	3. Unable and Unwilling

Figure 1. A quadrangle illustrating possible mentoring relationships.

The first quadrant, *Willing and Able*, depicts a win-win situation for both mentor and mentee. In this scenario, incentives such as assistance, support and guidance motivate the mentee to participate in a potentially empowering mentorship process. A mentor who is given incentives like a pay raise or promotion will likely be motivated to conduct a sterling job supporting the mentee. A mentor who is willing and able to assist, guide and support a willing and capable mentee is likely to enhance a mentee’s skills, knowledge and practice of conducting research. The scenario portrays a mentoring relationship with the most likelihood of success. In this scenario, the task of mentoring is made easier for both the mentor and mentee because both are

endowed with positive virtues like *willingness* and *ability*. This scenario advances the view that experienced, willing and able mentors are essential for a successful mentoring relationship.

The second quadrant, *Willing and Unable*, depicts a win-lose scenario. Here, the mentee may be willing to learn but is unfortunately not gifted or talented enough to accomplish their goals. Although hard work coupled with the use of incentives can, to some extent, produce positive results, in this situation there is less guarantee of success. This scenario depicts a situation that calls for patience and might be characterized by the saying, *where there is a will there is a way*. Although all mentees lack some form of knowledge and

therefore seek mentors to develop their capacity to conduct research, the less knowledge and skills mentees possess, the more difficult it will be for them to succeed regardless of their willingness or motivation. In this scenario, a mentor must be well equipped to deal with challenges that arise when a mentee is willing but not necessarily capable of mastering the skills and art on conducting research as required.

The third quadrant, *Unwilling and Able*, depicts a lose-win scenario. In this scenario, the mentee has the ability to achieve but is unwilling to cooperate or be helped by a mentor. Although the use of incentives might motivate the mentees to engage in and benefit from a mentoring relationship, ultimately this situation is likely to yield poor results.

The fourth and last quadrant, *Unable and Unwilling*, depicts a lose-lose scenario for the mentor and mentee. This situation holds little promise for the mentoring relationship because the mentee is unwilling to be mentored or receive support and does not have the capacity or knowledge to fulfill the exacting tasks associated with doing research work.

Our study builds on the theoretical and conceptual framework of mentoring outlined above. Our objective was to explore mentors' and mentees' views toward the concept of mentoring and ascertain which strategies, methods and approaches might benefit budding researchers who still need guidance, assistance and support as they seek to become full-fledged, self-sufficient, productive academic intellectuals in their fields of research. We suggest that, from a mentoring angle, experienced researchers are best suited to mentor young and developing researchers to grow and develop into successful scholars.

## Methodology

This paper employed a hermeneutic method to study the concept of mentoring. As Higgs (1995) explains, such a method is applicable in a variety of contexts since "...hermeneutics is no longer regarded as being confined to our study of historical text and dialogue – it can also be applied to our understanding of contemporary literary and scholarly works" (p. 12). The researchers used the hermeneutic method not to conduct interviews but to interpret the text of the literary works they had consulted. Abulad (2007) explains "hermeneutics as the art of interpretation" (pp.11-23). In other words, we used hermeneutics to decipher the meaning of the written words as used in the sources we consulted.

The authors used purposive sampling to select interview participants. Purposive sampling "is a type of sampling in which the units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researcher's judgement about which ones will be the most useful or representative" (Henning, Van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). Five mentees and three mentors were interviewed. Selected participants had the requisite experience of mentoring junior colleagues in scientific research in the field of education. Mentors not only had experience mentoring budding researchers, but as seasoned professors they had worked with Masters and Doctoral students, had published extensively in high impact journals, and had written scholarly books. Interviewees were accessible, information-rich, and willing to be interviewed. We deliberately chose these scholars because of their ability to: describe a typical profile of a mentee; discuss what possibilities should exist for collaboration; and detail what type of cooperation must take place between the mentor and the mentee in order to achieve success. The interviews took place during free periods at one university where the researchers were

employed. The university is a HWI and had merged with two other universities, including one HBJ. The study had ethics clearance to collect interviews and all interviewees provided consent to participate.

All interviewees were asked the following questions:

1. Did you enjoy mentoring or being mentored?
2. Did your association lead to the publication of an article?
3. If you published a paper, who contributed more?
4. Are you still collaborating?
5. Is there anything that you learned from working together?

Data were classified and grouped into two categories: *fruitful/beneficial* mentorship experience or *inconsequential/waste of time* mentorship experience. These two groupings formed themes that were used to determine findings, draw conclusions and make recommendations.

### **Findings and Discussion**

We are interested in how Higher Education institutions make use of mentorship strategies to develop junior researchers professionally and academically so they can actualize and realize their potential as scholars. We referenced literature that suggests individuals can and do benefit from having supportive working relationships (Gabaro, 1987). With regard to the first interview question (Did you enjoy mentoring or being mentored?) participants suggested that mentors and mentees were unhappy with their working relationship, a finding that seems to contradict claims in the literature. Mentors described mentees as lazy, lacking initiative and creativity, and wanting things to be done for them. Mentees pointed out that mentors used them to publish papers without acknowledging their contributions. The

mentees saw the mentoring relationship as exploitative, and ultimately left them feeling discouraged, demotivated and reluctant to continue with the relationship.

According to Thomas (1990), the term developmental relationship is one that provides needed support for the enhancement of an individual's career development and organizational experience. It is also a relationship in which the parties have knowledge of one another and can both potentially benefit. With respect to the second question (Did your association lead to the publication of an article?), there was little evidence of a developmental relationship. Most mentors and mentees explained that their association did not yield good results but only ended with each accusing the other of dishonesty. The mentees reiterated their concerns that the mentors exploited them, while the mentors upheld their view that mentees were lazy and wanted to be spoon-fed.

Jones et al. (2009) explain that when developing a formal mentoring process, the following must be considered:

who will be mentored, on a matching method, the voluntary participation of the mentors needs to be ensured, the rules need to be minimized, while the mentor's personal freedom within the relationship should be maximized. Although these are given points, what should be avoided is the temptation to mechanise this process, thus removing the human element from it. (p. 275)

When responding to the third question (If you published a paper, who contributed more?), interviewees revealed that their mentoring relationship was not founded on any key principles or guidelines, including those that might address collaboration, division of labour, research output or publication credit. Rather, the relationship



between the mentor and mentee appeared to have been left to chance. The misunderstandings resulted in accusations of inequity as both mentor and mentee claimed to have done more work than the other.

The mentoring process is concerned with contributing to professional, academic and personal growth. Such growth is not possible unless there is an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust based on team spirit and that leads to cooperation and a fruitful association (Jones et al., 2009). However, in response to the fourth question (Are you still collaborating?), most participants said they decided to terminate their mentoring relationship and no longer collaborated. This finding highlights the importance of reciprocity and mutuality in any productive mentoring relationship, something that participants articulated was for the most part absent.

Although all mentoring situations are unique, participants' experiences offer useful lessons for developing mentoring partnerships. With regard to the fifth and last interview question (Is there anything that you learned from working together?), both the mentors and the mentees said their experience provided them with knowledge and lessons that they will apply in the future. For example, mentors noted the importance of familiarity, saying they would like to choose their mentee and not to be assigned people they do not know. Similarly, mentees said their experience may have been more positive if they had been assigned mentors with whom they were already acquainted.

Rhodes (2002), a renowned scholar in the area of mentoring, is of the view that "mentoring is a relationship between an older, more experienced adult and an unrelated, younger protégé -- a relationship in which the adult provides ongoing guidance, instruction, and encouragement aimed at developing the

competence and character of the protégé" (p. 3). However, the most common complaints of modern academics are: loneliness, isolation, detachment and depersonalisation, which can lead to faculty "burn out" and ultimately ineffective mentoring (Hamilton, as cited in Nicholson, 1986, p. 149). These challenges often occur in institutions and contexts that lack the networks and partnerships necessary to build strong communities in which such valuable mentoring practices can flourish. Our review of the mentoring literature, including our interviews with mentors and mentees, indicates that a community of practice that fosters collaboration and cooperation and carries goals of mutual benefit and progress is essential to scholars' success. We suggest, as do Anderson and Shannon (1988) that, "mentoring is a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and/or personal development" (p. 40).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

We offer the following preliminary conclusions and recommendations:

- **Familiarity.** Mentoring relationships are strengthened when mentors and mentees are acquainted before they are assigned to work together. When mentors and mentees are not strangers, but have some familiarity with each other, they are more likely to begin their mentoring relationship from a position of communication and cooperation. These are necessary qualities for successful mentoring experiences.

- Clear expectations. Mentors and mentees benefit when they have clear expectations of the mentoring relationship. To outline these expectations, a memorandum or mentoring agreement is recommended. This agreement should not be imposed but should evolve in the process of dialogue and communication and from a position of mutual understanding.
- Outline of role. Mentors and mentees should begin their relationship with a clear understanding of their roles in the mentoring process. These roles would include clearly laid out understandings

of relevant responsibilities, boundaries and timelines. Understanding these roles early in the process can reduce confusion and resentment and foster cooperation.

In conclusion, a mentoring program with clearly identified, defined and achievable targets is essential to any mentoring venture. Mentoring in higher education institutions would benefit from clear principles and an understanding of the concept of mentoring, rather than approach the relationship from uninformed positions.

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