

# MENTORING IN THE COOPERATIVE EDUCATION WORKPLACE: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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*This paper reviews the literature exploring the mentoring relationship between students, their cooperative education workplace and their host supervisors. The literature review will focus on mentoring relationships generally, and consider the learning benefits from structured and informal mentoring. The literature review will form the basis of further research into "students'" and "host supervisors'" perceptions of the mentoring relationship, with a view to identifying key factors of a successful mentoring relationship.*

*When students enter the cooperative education workplace, they are hungry for a mentoring environment. This hunger is the same as that experienced by any degree or high school graduate entering the workforce for the first time. As young adults new to work, there is potential to develop a mentoring environment to provide models and guides. Mentoring is an intentional, mutually demanding and meaningful relationship between two people. The benefits of a mentoring relationship are the provision of support, challenge and vision. Support enables the development of constructive relationships, and encouragement to meet new challenges. Challenge is a new opportunity or threat facing the student, for challenge to be productive as a learning experience, it needs to be just within the students reach. Vision is a key component of the mentoring environment, providing students with a view of the future and their place within it.*

*For students encountering work culture and challenge for the first time, a mentoring environment can be crucial in finding work "flow". Flow tends to happen when the student is fully engaged in overcoming a challenge that is "just about manageable". When students reach a state of flow they are completely focused, with little room for distractions and irrelevancies. As Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) explains: "When goals are clear, feedback relevant, and challenges and skills are in balance, attention becomes ordered and fully invested"(p. 31).*

## **Introduction**

*"The proper aim of education is to promote significant learning. Significant learning entails development. Development means successively asking broader and deeper questions of the relationship between oneself and the world. This is as true for first graders as graduate students, for fledgling artists as greying accountants" (Daloz, 1986).*

Successful mentoring relationships have long been recognised as central to student learning in cooperative education courses (Ricks, 1997). When students and the host supervisor (mentor) work shoulder to shoulder with colleagues in the workplace, one person stands out – the workplace mentor. This mentor has a significant influence on the activities, relationships, learning, development and often assessment of cooperative education students. These mentors have the opportunity to provide a creative and supportive environment for students to achieve

"peak performance" (Gilson, 2000). They play an important role in creating an environment for fostering significant learning experiences for students.

When students enter the cooperative education workplace, they are hungry for a mentoring environment. This hunger is the same as that experienced by any degree or high school graduate entering the workforce for the first time. As young adults first experience work, there is potential to develop a mentoring environment to provide models and guides. (Daloz Parks, 2001).

### **Benefits of mentoring in the workplace and cooperative education**

Kram and Isabella (Kram, 1985), described the benefits of mentoring in an organisation. They identified increased productivity through performance planning, increased teamwork, and cost effectiveness in training, as the mentors undertook their role in addition to their usual duties. Improved recruitment programmes, which promote development, learning and support of new employees, provide an organisation with a talent pool. Another significant benefit was the opportunity for senior employees to share their knowledge and skills, and in the process "rethink" personal philosophies and methods. However, the greatest benefit from an organisational perspective was improvement in organisational performance from developing trained and competent employees. Cooperative education students often take up permanent positions in their host organisation, because during their placement, they have demonstrated skills useful to the organisation. The student's potential is recognised and valued by the organisation.

Evers, Rush and Berdrow (Evers, 1998), considered how to equip graduates with skills for lifelong learning and employability in the new millennium. They identified crucial competencies graduates will need in the future. These include the ability to "manage self", to "communicate", to "manage people and tasks" and to "mobilise innovation and change" (p.135). Mentors can provide feedback on each of these competencies, guiding the student to reflect on their successes and shortcomings. Ideally, students are developing lifelong skills that will benefit both the organisation and their own career development.

Stump and London (Stump, 1981), explored the crucial role of the mentor in career development. While they were not concerned with cooperative education, they drew attention to the link between mentorship and career success, development of leaders, early socialisation into the workplace and career progression. Applying these research findings to cooperative education indicates early fostering of cooperative education students in the workplace may have long-term career benefits for them.

The benefits of a mentoring relationship are the provision of support, challenge and vision (Daloz, 1999). Support enables the development of constructive relationships, and encouragement to meet new challenges. Challenge is a new opportunity or threat facing the student. For challenge to be productive as a learning experience it needs to be just within the students reach. Vision is a key component of the mentoring environment providing students with a view of the future and their place within it. All three qualities are required to provide an environment for students to find "flow".

The mentoring relationship is an effective tool to assist students to cross the bridge from the classroom to the workplace. Mentors can coach students to become effective members of a

team, and provide opportunities to discover and strengthen weaknesses, learn from their mistakes and emulate a role model (Gibson, 1997).

Daloz Parks (Daloz Parks, 1993), considers mentoring an essential feature for "fostering moral courage". Young adults, often unsure of their own "meaning system", are vulnerable to influences of authority. She writes, "A mentor's function is to recognise and affirm the emerging competence of the young adult, while beckoning forth the promise of the young adult life and making accessible a viable and desirable pathway into the future" (p.50). Mentors are teachers of ethical values and decision-making; valuable skills for both the organisation and the student.

### **Types of mentoring relationships**

In the workplace and in cooperative education there are many and varied mentoring models. Levinson (Darrow, 1978), identified the mentoring relationship where the mentor is both a "teacher" and a "sponsor", a "host" and "guide" (p.98). The mentor welcomes the "initiate" into a new work and social world. In the process, he identified the mentor as "acquainting him with its values, customs, resources, and cast of characters" (p.98) As Daloz (1999), explain, the role of the mentor is to "empower their students by helping to draw out and give form to what their students already know" (p. 206).

Crosby (1999) differentiated between a role model, sponsor and a mentor. The "role model" is not a formal relationship, and many role models may not know they are acting as a mentor. The "sponsor" provides degrees of guidance, but this role tends to be informal and has no emotional investment. He identified the "mentor" as having both "emotional investment" and a "mutually trusting relationship" with the mentee. The structure of the relationship is formal and guided, and has at the heart of it the interests of the mentee.

Murray and Owen (Murray, 1991), explored the benefits of formal mentoring relationships in the workplace. These formal structures, they found sought to develop skills and leadership abilities for mentees. "Facilitated mentoring" is used by organisations who want to foster "growth and development to happen and wants to know it has". Intrinsic in the mentoring experience is the focus "on problems and situations of concern to the mentee, as well as with their general progress" (Eraut, 1998).

As noted by Van Gyn and Ricks (Ricks, 1997), in many workplace and cooperative education settings, mentoring relationships are formalised by the assignment of mentees and mentors, giving the relationship formality and structure. However, the relationship is at heart "an intentional, mutually demanding and meaningful relationship between two people" (Daloz Parks, 2001). It is interesting to note that the relationship does not appear to need to be voluntary for it to be meaningful for all three parties, the organisation, the mentor and mentee.

### **Developing the adult learner**

Galbraith (Galbraith, 1991), acknowledges adults and young adults new to work are highly pragmatic learners. "They have a strong need to apply what they have learned and to be competent in that application." Mentors and the host organisation provide that opportunity.

Stanley and Clinton (Clinton, 1992), refer to the work of Knowles (Knowles, 1980), who summarised the four principles of adult learners. He found that most adult learners have a

deep need for self-directed learning. Adults appreciate learning takes place through experience, and they need to accomplish tasks and solve problems in real life situations. Adults see the learning process as one in which they can raise their competence in order to reach their full potential. They have a real "desire" to apply tomorrow what they learnt today. Cooperative education students are anxious to demonstrate and test their new knowledge in the adult environment. Many are hampered by insecurity and fear of failure. The mentor plays an important role in building confidence and facing fear.

Coffield (Eraut, 1998), concluded that learning at work takes place where there are distinct activities undertaken by the learner. Effective mentoring enhances all of these activities. They include a phase of "induction and integration", where the mentee is socialised into the workplace. This process may be formal or informal, but establishes the boundaries of the mentee. The second phase is "exposure and osmosis", where learning takes place by peripheral participation and the supervisor is largely passive. The third phase is one of "self-directed learning", where the learner takes an active role, experiments and takes risks. This phase requires a positive and supportive mentor. The final stage, and the one that is of most interest, is the stage of active performance management. In a successful model, this process will facilitate and encourage learning. At worst, it will fail to recognise learning and discourage mentees.

### **Finding Transformational Mentoring**

Van Gyn and Ricks (Ricks, 1997), adapted a model from Miller and Seller (Miller, 1985), to establish a conceptual framework for the classification of mentoring relationships, and identify transformational learning. Generally, there are three categories. At each stage, mentees are engaged in significant learning experiences. The first developmental stage of a mentoring relationship is "transmission", a process of modelling, and concrete explanation imparting learning skills, knowledge and values to the mentee. Characteristics of this stage include hierarchical and respectful formal relationships. Some mentoring relationships will remain as transmission relationships, but others will develop further to the second stage, "transaction".

The features of the transactional stage are addressing of dilemmas, dialogue between mentor and mentee, and reconstruction of knowledge and values. In this relationship, mentees learn a process of independent problem solving within their workplace. Many of these skills are transferable to other aspects of their life including social interactions. The significant quality of this relationship is equal participation between the mentor and mentee.

The third and most developed stage of mentoring is "transformation", where the mentee, with assistance from the mentor, creates a vision for their future, internalise their learning and participate in collaborative interaction in the workplace community. A strong feature of this developmental stage is the mentee's ability to engage in personal and social change. It is this aspect of the mentoring relationship, the transformational process, which deserves further study in cooperative education.

The relationship between the mentor at work and the counsellor are not dissimilar, as Summerfield (2002) notes, both are based on a relationship of trust. However, in the mentoring role, there is a third party, the organisation, whose needs must also be met. The mentoring relationship may not be entirely confidential, as an example, a mentee's developmental plan may be shared with managers and teams. However, a key aspect of the

relationship is that, although the outcome of the mentoring relationship may be shared, the conversation that preceded it may not. Both the mentoring relationship and counselling include elements of learning of new skills and behaviours.

Summerfield (Summerfield, 2002), observes two features of mentoring. The first is "acquisitorial", where the mentee acquires new or enhanced areas of knowledge, skill or behaviours, which he/she can use in a practical way. Secondly, there is "transformational" mentoring. This occurs when the mentee is working at a level or on a task that is challenging to them. In this process, the mentee may be "stretched", feeling vulnerable and insecure and needing emotional support and encouragement. A feature of transformational mentoring is movement by the mentee from previously held attitudes, beliefs and skills to new ones.

Mentoring relationships can be "synergistic" (Lick, 1999), a caring support system in which participants "genuinely and openly cooperate with each other to provide creative sharing, assistance and encouragement to build towards (our) common goals. (p.811). Transformational mentoring is more likely to occur in synergistic organisations, where openness, sharing, encouragement and trust are the norm.

### **Role of the mentor in transformational mentoring**

Stanley and Clinton (Clinton, 1992), identified some essential characteristics of successful mentors. They "take a passionate interest in seeing young people grow", are a "good intuitive judge of potential", and "knew the importance to young people of crucial formative experiences." (p. 116)

Van Gyn and Ricks (1997) identified the characteristics of an effective or ideal mentor as "wise and experienced with regard to the needs of the protégé, accepting of alternate views, flexible in their behaviour, patient and unbiased" (p.88). Stanley and Clinton identify the mentor as an "influence networker", bridging the mentee into the organisation, and a "resource linker", matching the needs of the mentee with the workplace organisation.

The research of Van Gyn and Ricks (1997) found three characteristics of a successful mentoring relationship. The mentor promotes the mentee as a whole person, responding to their intellectual, physical, social, emotional and moral development. Secondly, the mentee is the centre of the mentoring relationship. The mentor facilitates in a manner, which allows the mentee to explore choices, and make decisions. Thirdly, the mentor acknowledges the "uniqueness" of the mentee. (p. 93) There is no one "catch all" formula to apply to the mentoring relationship. This research demonstrates all mentees need to be developed as people having unique needs and backgrounds.

Gehrkes (Gehrkes, 1998), identifies the greatest gift for the mentor to offer a mentee is "a new and whole way of seeing things. This gift of wisdom....comes from having lived and thought deeply and it permeates all the mentor does with the protégé. It is, a way of thinking and living what is given ...Through the gift of self as philosopher, the receiver, the protégé is awakened". (p. 192). Clearly, it is through the mentor's gifts and skills, that the transformational learning opportunity is opened to the mentee.

## **Transformational Mentoring and Flow**

In their article on academic and industry supervisors, Jancauskas, Atchison, Murphy, and Rose (Jancauskas, 1999) concluded that the skills required of an industry supervisor in a cooperative education programme are not the same as those of an industry supervisor, or line supervisor. However, in our workplaces and communities, there is a range of effective mentoring relationships. Some of these relationships are formal and some informal, but training and experience in mentoring does not prevent effective mentoring from occurring. Mentors have a range of life skills they bring to the mentoring relationship, and these are not dependent on training.

Although it is clear that training new graduates and cooperative education students is a worthwhile activity for the organization. However, the focus of the organization remains on training employees in skills and knowledge to fulfil the tasks of the organisation. "Self-betterment" in a spiritual or philosophical sense is not the primary purpose of mentoring in organisations. However, there is evidence to suggest in the research of Csikszentmihalyi, that well trained people have a better understanding of their own role and capabilities, and experience more satisfaction with self.

For students encountering work culture and challenge for the first time, a mentoring environment can be crucial in finding work "flow". As Csikszentmihalyi (1996), explains, flow tends to happen when the student is fully engaged in overcoming a challenge that is "just about manageable". (p. 30) When students reach a state of flow, they are completely focused, with little room for distractions and irrelevancies. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) found, "When goals are clear, feedback relevant, and challenges and skills are in balance, attention becomes ordered and fully invested." (p. 31)

Csikszentmihalyi identified nine stages of "flow".

1. *Clear goals are set every step of the way.*  
The goals are a "vision through a dark glass" (p. 115). Goals provide give vision of what can be achieved by the student in their placement. However, for students they will involve elements of unexplored territory.
2. *There is immediate feedback on one's actions.*  
The interesting aspect of feedback is that it is double sided. Although cooperative education students seek external feedback from their supervisors and colleagues, an essential aspect of their learning is for the student to feedback to themselves on their own performance. Students need to have self-critical skills to assess their own performance. Mentors can be valuable in helping students identify their own performance measures.
3. *There is a balance of challenges and skills.*  
Challenges stretch students, but not to breaking point. Wise mentors instinctively know the student's capabilities even if the student does not.
4. *Action and awareness are merged.*  
Students are unaware of distractions, as their thoughts and actions are in union.

5. *Distractions are excluded from consciousness.*  
The problem with distractions is that they stop "flow". Many creative people rely on a "buffer" to counter distractions, and the mentor may be useful in reducing distractions for the student to provide a productive environment.
6. *There is no worry about failure.*  
Students are so engaged in their activity and having success within it, that fear of failure disappears. Mentors who provide "soft landings" for mistakes and view them as learning experiences, reduce fear of failure.
7. *Self-consciousness disappears.*  
Creative students are completely absorbed by their activity, forgetting time, self and surroundings. They eagerly seek the next absorbing experience. Mentors encourage students to work as independent and self accountable adults.
8. *The sense of time becomes distorted.*  
Creative students spend large amounts of time on their activities, not through design, but because they are completely involved with them and lose track of hours and minutes. Mentors allow the "space" for students to fully engage in their activities.
9. *The activity becomes autotelic.*  
The "activity" becomes an end in itself. For cooperative education students, it means they are driven by need to solve a problem or create something new, rather than merely pass a course. Mentors empower students to become autotelic.

## **Summary**

There are many different types of valuable and supportive mentoring relationships. They occur in the workplace, cooperative education, for career development and in social situations. The relationships may be formal, structured and hierarchical, but at heart they are all mutually beneficial and mentee centred relationships. Mentors undertake their role for many different reasons, and they are not always voluntary responsibilities. However, whether trained or untrained, people in all walks of life rise to the occasion to share their skills, and experiences with young people.

In cooperative education, mentors are a valuable resource, allowing the aims of significant learning, and optimum student performance to be achieved by students. In this process, with guidance, support and appropriate challenges students experience flow and transformational learning. The mentor provides an environment for student learning, fostering learning, and developing a unique person.

The next stage of research is to explore the perceptions of students, mentors and academics to find out how mentors create the environment for their students to experience "flow". The stories of mentors and mentees will be varied in nature and experience, but there will be some common characteristics that, once identified, will be invaluable to future mentors and mentees. The next stage of this research is to identify those characteristics and apply them to training mentors to achieve even better success in cooperative education placements.

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