Growing into a mentor


Background

I was drawn to this manuscript because it deals with an issue that is of particular interest to me – the move from being a mentee to being a mentor. I’ve found that transition difficult to personally achieve. Somehow, for me, being mentored by someone or being a collaborator with someone is something I do with ease. But being a mentor to others has been a challenging shift to make. Now this study was focused on the lessons learned about mentoring during a specific professional development program – namely, the Academic Pediatric Associations Educational Scholars program. This program, the authors explain, aims to promote educational scholarship in pediatrics. In the program, scholars are expected to complete an explicit curriculum and a longitudinal mentored scholarly project.

The focus of this paper is not the explicit curriculum this program. Instead, this manuscript the focus is on the implicit curriculum, exploring the knowledge that participants constructed through their experiences, what they learn through unplanned teaching events, the organizational structures of the program, the cultural values that were enacted in the program, watching mentors and learning about mentoring through their practices.

Purpose

The authors were interested in exploring the long term impact of the program’s implicit curriculum on the participants’ identity as a mentor.

Key Points on the Methods

The study’s research methods are steeped in a constructivist orientation, specifically using a constructivist grounded theory approach, with iterative data collection and analysis. The authors acknowledged that their personal experiences and knowledge of the literature informed their research – which is exactly aligned with the constructivist paradigm.

This research team has done previous research on the program, so they already had established connections with 36 individuals who were part of the previous study. They reached out to those individuals about this study, and ended up doing 19 individual interviews for the data set that is the foundation of this study.

Now – here’s a clever design feature these authors crafted. Within this group of 36 individuals, they identified a sub-set of people who had sustained involvement in the faculty development program, or who were in leadership positions within the program. They called this handful of people key informants because they felt this group of people would have rich insights into the program. So, what the authors did was interview other participants first – not the key informants. Then, as the researchers developed insights based on data analysis, they modified the interview protocol to confirm their insights and to ask about particularly important data elements – and they then interviewed their key informants to confirm their findings and get more insights into those important data elements.
Key Outcomes

So, first the authors report on what the participants learned about mentoring through the program’s implicit curriculum. The participants reported 3 important lessons:

- First the importance of multiple mentors – having a panel or a network of mentors they could rely on
- Second was the value of peer mentoring – when other members of the program helped to mentor each other along
- Finally was the incremental process of becoming a mentor – this is about how the shift from mentee to mentor isn’t a digital one, but an incremental one. As participants gained experience as a mentor, they gained confidence, and began to realize that they were in fact mentors

The other data that the authors report on was about how the implicit curriculum taught lessons about mentoring and facilitated mentor identity transformation. Here is where the authors found Ibarra’s theory to be particularly useful because they were able to describe how the three lessons about mentoring just described, describe how they were taught via the implicit curriculum

- In alignment with Ibarra’s theory, the study participants watched other mentors, each of which had unique mentoring styles and roles
- Next, still in line with Ibarra’s theory, participants experimented with mentoring styles
- Finally, participants evaluated their mentoring self, asking questions like: Am I comfortable as a primary mentor or mas a one member of a coalition of mentors? Am I ready to mentor other faculty, not just leaners? Am I mentoring for the right reasons

Key Conclusions

Based on these findings, the authors make 4 recommendations:

- First, those who are working as educators in faculty development programs need to remember that they are modeling mentorship; and those who are attending needs to think about the different mentoring styles and roles they see? What works for them? What doesn’t?
- Second, peer mentorship not only provides support, but also gives participants the chance to experiment with mentoring styles and get some feedback.
- Third, leaders should engage participants in reflective dialogue about what they learned about mentoring in the implicit curriculum – so make the implicit, explicit
- Finally, there should be post-program opportunities for participants to be mentors. If the participants can feed back into the program as mentors, they can transform their mentor identity, and gain experience that will prepare them for mentoring in their local contexts

Type of paper

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Tags

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