

Full Circle: Mentoring Graduate Students through Writing a Literature Review on Mentorship

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Are you considering your graduate student's needs for mentorship through your research and scholarship collaborations? Could you imagine developing mentoring relationships through a fully web-based collaboration?

For this research team, mentorship is both the theme of our research and scholarship and the foundational approach of our organizational development. Specifically, we are looking at mentorship of students of color in higher education settings. We, as a team meet only remotely, live in different parts of Oregon, and have effectively developed a community of support that mirrors the model of mentorship. We represent a diverse range of identities and cross-cultural relationships as individuals including: woman, lesbian, Mexican-Irish, Iranian-American, Black, multiracial, heterosexual, first generation college students, man, gay, white, cisgender.

Participants who attend this session will gain insight into the experience of virtual internship supervisors and graduate students engaging in research on mentorship, while developing mentorship relationships within a virtual team environment. Furthermore, participants will learn methods of how to incorporate intentional mentor relationship building into your research team leadership.

Full Circle: Mentoring Graduate Students through Writing A Literature Review on Mentorship

Mentorship is both the theme of our research, scholarship and the foundational approach of our organizational development. The Liberatory Mentorship for Women of Color Model (McAloney & Long, 2018) describes three aspects of mentorship – who, how, and why. The experiences of women of color attending, working at, and resisting from the margins at historically white institutions as well as our pedagogical notions of education have deeply connected and shaped experiences (Squire, Kelly, Jourian, Byrd, Manzano, & Bumbry, 2016).

This model is has multiple connected and interconnecting circles. This emulate the cyclical nature of our relationships that are ever changing and growing. This model is offered as a way to analyze the complexity of mentorship relationships and encourage others to consider how they engage, why they engage, and who they are engaged with in terms of mentoring.” (McAloney & Long, 2018).

Through approaching mentorship with critical pedagogies, these relationships have developed into spaces of transformative learning, liberation, and as sites of resistance to the systemic power and inequities at a historically white institution.

The four authors represent a diverse range of student affairs professionals, para-professionals, and graduate students within the frameworks of higher education and are all connected to a graduate education program called College Student Services Administration (CSSA). The two internship supervisors and mentors Kim McAloney and Jenesis Long are student affairs professionals and educators. Kim is a full time doctoral candidate who is an alumni from the Oregon State University (OSU) CSSA graduate education program. The two graduate student interns and menteés Gunnar Whisler and Trina Ramirez are enrolled in OSU's virtual-based, master's in education program specializing in CSSA. Trina is also working as a student affairs professional.

The scope of our team's work originated from the professional and personal relationship between Kim and Jenesis related their identification of women of color in higher education. In the spring of 2019, Kim and Jenesis recruited the two graduate students, Gunnar and Trina, to join them on a scholarly team to conduct research in literature connected to mentoring women of color. We, as a team meet exclusively remotely, live in different parts of Oregon, and have effectively developed a community of support that mirrors the model of mentorship. We represent a diverse collection of social identities and cross-cultural relationships between the four of us. The following is a discussion of our experiences developing this team and conducting the work.

Literature Review

Critical Pedagogy

Liberatory relationships can take the form of mentorship through intentional use of critical teaching pedagogy; supporting development of self-authorship mentorship that acknowledge power, situates the individual in the system to learn and

develop, so that persistence in higher education can be achieved with the least amount of marginalization (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; hooks, 1998; Rendón, 2008; Snipes & LePeau, 2017). Teaching pedagogies that have been developed that center the student, positions the educator as a co-learner, and that hold community and reflection are key components (hooks, 1994; Rendón, 2008). Sentipensante pedagogy (Rendón, 2008) and engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) center educators and students of color, first generation, and other communities historically denied access to higher ed. As we re-imagine work with students, we as educators can use tools of liberation to rupture status quo and create transformative experiences for students.

Supervision

Higher education literature has little empirical research around the supervision of student affairs graduate students (ACPA/NASPA, 2017; White & Nunnemaker, 2011). Another possible consideration around supervision could be critical supervision; however, critical supervision has been mentioned only in human services work (Noble, Gray, & Johnston, 2016). Supervision can allow for learning communities, when engaging with teaching pedagogy for the supervisory experiences of graduate students seems appropriate. Student-centered, holistic, teaching pedagogies like sentipensante pedagogy and engaged pedagogy focused on liberation and social justice have been developed and extensively talked about throughout the literature regarding teaching and classroom experiences (Baize-Ward & Royer, 2018; Beer, 2010; Benmayor, 2002; Bettez, 2012; Davis, Coffey, Murphy, & Woods, 2014; Flores Carmona, 2018; Hayward & Li, 2014; Jehangir, 2010; Jehangir, Williams, & Jeske, 2012; Joseph, 2018; Kingsley, 2009; Moon, 2017; O'Steen & Perry, 2012; Park & Millora, 2012; Prieto & Villenas, 2012; Rendón, 2011; Russell, 2010; Sanchez & Ek, 2013; Shajahan, 2010; Sosa-Provencio, Sheahan, Desai, & Secatero, 2018; Walker & Gleaves, 2016; Watt, Butcher, & Ramirez, 2013).

Graduate Student Mentorship

Strayhorn & Terrell (2007) post that mentoring can have positive benefits for the mentor as well as the protege. The mentor gains satisfaction from helping others, gains respect for his/her own competence as a professional, and evaluates the past by participating in the student's early career (p. 71).

Strayhorn & Terrell (2007) showed that establishing a research-focused relationship with a faculty mentor has a positive effect on Black students' satisfaction with college while establishing a personal mentoring relationship (p. 77). Strayhorn & Terrell (2007) found that students who established a research-focused mentoring relationship with faculty were more satisfied with college than those who did not have such a relationship (p. 78).

According to Patton, L (2009), providing mentors to students of color plays a major role in diversifying university faculty. However, there often times is little or no opportunity to search for and establish relationships with women of color mentors or mentees due to the lack of accessibility of women of color in the academy. Alvarez et al. (2009) expand on this idea with the notion that as with any relationship, the quality of the relationship is shaped by both the mentor and the student and by their respective understanding and sense of identification with race, ethnicity, and culture (p. 185).

Web Based Programs and Mentorship

Web based or online academic programs and mentoring relationships open up new opportunities for a newly diverse set of curriculum structures, pedagogies, and populations of students (Berg, 2016; Moon, 2017). Highlighting the issues of the dynamics of power and privilege that exist in higher education classrooms on virtually every college campus, Moon (2017) talks about the importance of caution instructors should have around replicating marginalizing factors on campus into the online environment. In a study about mentoring students of color in an online doctoral program, Berg (2016) emphasized that the most necessary aspects of a successful online doctoral program for Latinx and African American students included a solid mentor match, continuity of encouragement and support, and defined expectations among others (p. 231). With the rise of online classrooms and internships, instructors and mentors are tasked with decentering historically privileged classroom structures into spaces that do not enforce the idea of banking or filling the knowledge of the student (Freire, 1972). An instructor and/or mentor must provide light and guidance for students to collaborate in the creation of knowledge using their own experiences (Moon, 2017).

Scholarly Personal Narrative

Creating this light for students can take many forms. One example of this is through Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) (Nash, 2004). SPN has the ability to take a variety of forms with the premise that SPN writers incorporate their own personal experiences and histories into their writings (Nash, 2004). SPN simultaneously empowers writers to show themselves and others that their respective narrative matters and also educate audiences in the embracing of personal truths (Nash, 2004). Nash's (2004) work with SPN is particularly influential in the opportunity for us as scholars to have the capabilities of

utilizing our lived experiences as mentors/mentees in our work. SPN provides flexibility in that truths and experiences shape the perspectives in which we as individuals acquire, maintain, and transform over time, which in turn, affect how we encounter our work spaces with others (Nash, 2004).

Foundational Theory

The Liberatory Mentorship for Women of Color Model (McAloney & Long, 2018) describes three aspects of mentorship – who, what, and why. The experiences as women of color attending, working at, and resisting from the margins a historically white institution as well as our pedagogical notions of education have deeply connected and shaped experiences (Squire et al., 2016).

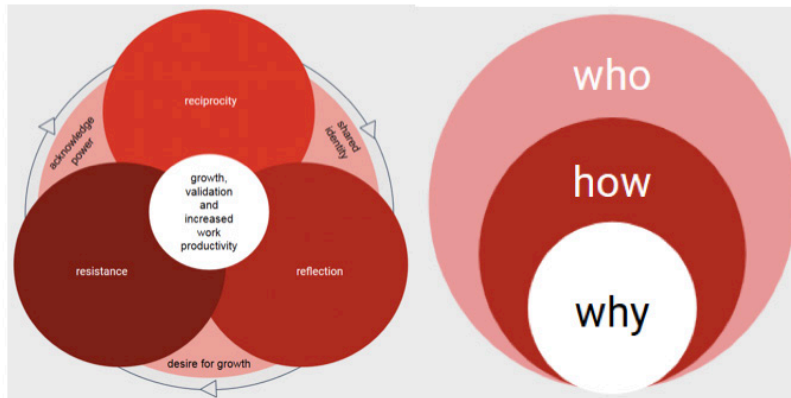


Figure 1. The liberatory mentorship for women of color model (McAloney & Long, 2018)

Who. The first layer of the model is identified as who and has three shared attributes: acknowledge power, shared identity, and desire for growth. Acknowledging the power is the willingness and ability to engage around how social identities play out in relationships as we have made a space in which we can evaluate ourselves and reflect with one another in ways that situate the experiences within the everyday experiences we have. Secondly, there is a shared understanding we have because of our overlapping shared identities as women of color, educators, and each coming from a low-income background. Because of these shared identities, similar questions and concerns have arose as we navigate our work as well as shifts in our personal and professional roles. An example of this is as we had shifts in our socioeconomic class as we moved from student to career professional and again as we advanced through our career. We were able to connect with one another about the ways we viewed ourselves through this shift and how we relate during and through these shifts with those closest to us. Third, we all share the specific value of a desire for being our best selves and continually growing. This desire for growth is evident by our interest in working as educators, our pursuit of knowledge, and this research project. This desire for growth has kept us engaged, humble, and honest with ourselves about the areas of our lives, professionally and personally, that we need support and in which we want to develop. These three foundational attributes of acknowledging (individual and systemic) power, having a shared identity, and a shared desire for growth have been foundational to our relationship allowing for both depth and complexity.

How. The second layer is identified as how and describes how we connect within our relationships: reciprocity, reflection, and resistance. The first approach, reciprocity, is shown through investment, authenticity, and trust. Each of us show up as our whole selves and we are each invested in the relationship with one another. This authenticity and investment build trust and are the foundation for reciprocity and allow for the relationships to be beneficial for all those involved in the relationship. The second foundational approach is reflection. It is through reflection that we connect with one another's experiences through our shared identity and caucusing as well as our shared desire for growth. Reflection is both a function of the relationship as well as a tool used within it. The third and final approach is resistance to systems of oppression. This requires us to have an awareness and acknowledgement of our social identities as well as how our identities are positioned within the academy and our desire to do our work thoughtfully and with intentionality. The academe was not designed for us. What does it mean to be women of color from low income backgrounds working within a system built and maintained for elite, white men? This resistance space is a way for us to not only support one another, but to encourage us to make changes and shifts within the academy that will benefit those coming after us. While the need for mentorship of women of color is clear for survival, being within these margins of the institutions, women of color can build communities of resistance. Thomas and Hollenshead (2002) quote hooks talking about the margins as a place one stays in "clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds" (p. 167) "a location of radical openness and possibility" (p. 166). Reciprocity, reflection, and resistance allow our relationships to get stronger and allow us to connect with our purposeful work within the academy.

Why. The third and final layer of the model is why we continue to cultivate our relationships. From these relationships, we each grow, are validated, and have increased work productivity. Throughout this research, there was an acknowledgement of growth that each participant experienced because of the mentorship relationships she was engaged with the others. This growth was in both personal and professional areas of our lives and as the relationship evolved and deepened, this new growth showed up through new ways of thinking and behaving. Second, validation of ourselves, our experiences, and how we understood the world was another outcome of the mentorship relationships. Specifically, this validation supported us through toxic relationships and navigating the imposter syndrome and bureaucracy within our historically white institution. Each of us, the participants, share similar values and desires about why we work in higher education specifically. This increases our work productivity through engaging together on meaningful work projects. An example of this is this research examining the nature of our relationships and the development of this model. Through our relationships and the nature of our relationships, we are consistently challenging and supporting one another to further the work we are passionate about both personally and professionally.

Finally, this model has multiple connected and interconnecting circles. This emulates the cyclical nature of our relationships that are ever changing and growing. This model is offered as a way to analyze the complexity of mentorship relationships and encourage others to consider how they engage, why they engage, and who they are engaged with in terms of mentoring.

We offer this work to document and explore our relationships as a counternarrative to notions of mentorship. This duoethnography research on three multigenerational relationships spanning 19 years of relationship of three women of color to give more language to the unique, transformational, and liberatory aspects of these relationships. Through approaching mentorship with critical pedagogies, these relationships have developed into spaces of transformative learning, liberation, and as sites as resistance to the systemic power and inequities at a historically white institution.

From this original research, we outline core themes and valuable attributes necessary for the success of the women of color mentoring relationships that emerged. We present the theoretical model of Liberatory Mentorship Women of Color (McAloney & Long, 2018) that can be used to describe such relationships.

Discussion

Supervisor Voice

In the winter of 2019, we recognized a need to gather more information than we could on our own about mentorship and research through a literature review. Thus, we decided to offer an internship opportunity to our college's student affairs master's degree program students. We put out an invitation for one or two students to work with us as we reviewed the literature on women of color mentorship in higher education and Gunnar and Trina, both e-campus students from CSSA, responded. During the forming stage of our group work, we as supervisors sought to be intentional about how this group collaboration could not only benefit our research and scholarship efforts but also the personal and professional goals of the graduate students involved. We took a collaborative approach to norming our group dynamics by asking open-ended questions about the students' individual needs and desires, what leadership goals they had, and co-created professional development opportunities that would be required alongside their literature review work. This looked like participating in an informational interview with a professional they could see themselves wanting to do work similar to in the future, and developing their personal advising/mentoring philosophy statement. This space for personal reflection and network expansion supported their goals and added additional room for mentorship in our conversations

As we continued developing the team, we, as supervisors, kept a transparent approach by teaching about our process as educators and facilitators of the research process through both verbal and written channels. Google Docs, Google Sheets, Email and Skype provided us with the technology we needed to connect with one another as we as a team are located across the state of Oregon. Although we did face some technology hiccups, we found ways around those by problem solving in the moment together as a team. This approach not only helped us to get our work done, but also gave us space to model effective leadership strategies when navigating challenging circumstances outside your control.

To do this teamwork effectively, we as supervisors were intentional to bring conversations about our whole selves into the discussions. Being that our team is comprised of many identities, and we believe in the value of critical mentorship, we encouraged self-reflection by not only asking explorative questions but also being flexible when it came to getting work done. One week, a shared theme of our reflections was a sense of overwhelm, so we chose our commitment to supportive mentorship over our commitment to completing work on a fixed timeline and removed the agenda from our discussion.

This approach allowed for deeper connection as a team, authentic sharing, and space for mentorship through what could have been a formal meeting agenda. This and other conversations similar to its nature is what made this work unique and transformative. When we as educators can slow down and be present in the moment with our students, we can learn more

about who they are, what they need, and ultimately do more effective work as a team because we are approaching our tasks from a well-informed space. This approach also helps to stave off instances of misguidance or assumptions because we are able to ask for and give space for honest sharing.

Student Voice

Using SPN (Nash, 2004), we as graduate students are able to reflect on how we encountered, navigated, and were transformed by our experiences throughout this ongoing mentoring relationship with our supervisors and the Transformational Mentorship for Women of Color Model. Staying true to SPN (Nash, 2004), our narratives simultaneously differentiate and also align our respective perspectives. Experiences in this mentoring circle that exemplify the Transformational Mentorship for Women of Color Model were plentiful. One specific example is in the weekly journaling assignments we completed in which we reflected on our experiences and were given opportunities to share out things we wanted to bring up to the group.

We were also given opportunities to create our own philosophy statements with support from our mentors. Kim and Jenesis shared their own philosophy statements and give feedback about our statements with the idea that we will be able to utilize these philosophy statements in future professional pursuits and that they will serve as another reflection tool. Through self-engineered informational interviews we were able to converse with scholars that are publishing articles in the areas of our respective interests while also being supported by our mentors. As graduate students in an e-campus learning environment, it is expected of us that we navigate our professional development and career aspirations with little 1:1 guidance from program faculty. The relationships we have developed within our mentorship circle have served as a bolster to our needs for assistance with professional development. Our supervisors are demonstrative of their support with our professional development & growth by designating time during weekly team calls to focus on coaching. By offering this supportive guidance, they illustrated to us the meaning of mentorship with graduate students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, mentorship is both the theme of our work and the foundational approach. Using the Transformational Mentorship for Women of Color Model (McAloney & Long, 2018) the internship supervisors orchestrated a cross-cultural mentorship experience that developed into spaces of transformative learning, liberation, and as sites of resistance to the systemic power and inequities at a historically white institution. Using SPN, we have detailed our personal experiences and highlighted strategies for future implementations of this approach for other research teams (Nash, 2004). As the higher education population continues to diversify, approaching supervision and mentorship through a critical lens becomes more crucial to the success of graduate student education.

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