Running Head: NURTURING OUR YOUNG

Nurturing Our Young: One Therapist's Process of Mentoring

Geri Miller, Ph.D.

Diana Quealy-Berge, Ph.D.

Lisa Shuskey, B.A.

Felicia Brown-Anderson, M.A.

Sarah Linder, M.A.

Evan Sexton, M.A.

Appalachian State University

Abstract

This article discusses one counselor educator's approach to mentoring her graduate

students. The themes of three of the counselor educator's mentors are presented and

emergence of these same themes in the professional development of three of her students.

"The helping professions eat their young."

This powerful statement was made to the first author by a therapist who had experienced very difficult graduate school training. Unfortunately, such experiences may not be uncommon in the mental health professions which is why this article explores and encourages those of us involved in counselor training to focus on how we can nurture students and mentor them into our profession.

Johnson and Huwe (2002) report that graduate school mentoring can be dysfunctional due to a variety of factors: the personalities of the individuals, the context of the mentoring, and the mismatching of individuals. They define dysfunction as when one or both do not have their needs met, experience distress, or find the relationship too "costly." They report the most common mismatching to be a result of personality, communication style, relationship preference, career stage, or career interest differences.

In order to nurture rather than "eat" our young, we need to look at who mentored us into the profession of counseling and how their mentoring emphases influence us in our mentoring of students. The first author's developmental markers as a teacher are presented and followed by three student stories. Recommendations for mentoring are made.

Developmental Teacher Markers

Miller's five main developmental moments as a teacher are as follows. First, she views herself as "born" to teaching: as a little girl, before she could read or write, she would hold school for the neighborhood children. She would round them up, even if they were older than her or busy with other activities, and tell them it was time for school. She would then use a small chalkboard and chalk and lecture to them about topics she

thought were pertinent. Her second developmental moment as a teacher was when she was a student in an undergraduate social work program. She was very nervous in making her presentation, but found that her highly critical and demanding teacher took notes on her lecture and gave her very positive feedback about her presentation style. Her third developmental moment was when she was working as a technician in an alcohol detoxification unit and was told, after giving a lecture to the patients, "You should teach." by a chronic male alcoholic. Her next developmental moment as a teacher was during her masters' degree training as a counselor when she co-taught classes with a professor who encouraged her to obtain a doctorate so she could teach. The fifth developmental moment was in her doctoral training when, after one semester, her supervisor told her that he had heard amazingly positive feedback on her teaching.

These five incidents evolved into her becoming a teacher, although for a number of years she had worked as a counselor and never had serious career aspirations to teach until her masters' program. Therefore, when she became a teacher in 1990, she had no formal training other than her supervision as a teacher in her doctoral program. Due to this gap in her knowledge base, she elicited feedback on her teaching style. She contacted the university center for an evaluation of her teaching, she participated in a peer review project on teaching over three semesters at her university, and she obtained feedback from a local agency who hired her to do counselor training.

Her teaching philosophy evolved from her experiences as a teacher and trainer as well as one who has been a student and a trainee. A significant contribution to her philosophy also came from three professional mentors.

Mentors

The first mentor was a psychiatrist who mentored her as both a therapist and teacher, and encouraged her to go to graduate school. This individual had the philosophy that a student had a right to be comfortable and to feel safe not knowing. She also believed that the teacher had the responsibility to model humility, to support the fumbling efforts of the student to do right, and to confront dishonesty in students in spite of organizational politics. She assisted Miller in her development professionally by supervising her clinical work and providing honest, direct feedback. This mentor's focus was on creating a safe environment for the student where the mentor was both humble and honest.

The second mentor was one of her masters' level professors for whom she had worked as a graduate assistant and from whom she had taken numerous classes. His philosophy of teaching was that: a) knowledge is to be constructed, b) politics is embedded in everything, c) the student's world needs to be understood in terms of how it impacts his or her point of view and provides a context for his or her learning, and d) the works of Bell Hooks (1994) and Paulo Friere (1989) are core to teaching. He believed that students could apply information if they were engaged in questions and challenged through face-to-face interaction, and that he needed to provide a blank slate while encouraging dialogue, story-telling, and social occasions for such discussions to occur in an educational setting. This mentor's themes were interactive teaching where knowledge was created collaboratively stemming from a student's view with awareness that teaching is value driven.

The third mentor was a doctoral program professor of Miller's who guided her emphasis in research methodology, served on her dissertation committee, and taught a number of her doctoral classes. Her philosophy of teaching was that a teacher also needs to be a scholar, that there are no absolute truths, and that the teacher needs to be a guide to the student. She applied this philosophy to her teaching through a combination of lecture and structured activities, high expectations of students, and use of a lecture outline as a guide. This mentor emphasized interactive classroom learning with high standards where the teacher is a student as well as a scholar and a guide.

The three mentors had the following in common:

1. creation of a personal, caring, mentoring relationship

2. provision of dialogue within the mentoring relationship

3. shared love of school and teachers

4. desire to assist others

5. belief that the teacher needs to be both supportive and challenging

These common factors are also discussed by Johnson and Huwe (2002). They report that graduate students commonly report a sense of being neglected by mentors when they are dissatisfied with them. They also state that common struggles with mentors include conflict, boundary violations, and exploitation. Therefore, it is recommended that mentors be warm, flexible, genuine, empathic, and ethical.

They were different, however, in terms of the context of the application of their common factors (counseling, classroom) and specific ways in which they applied these common factors. Miller then integrated these approaches into her classroom teaching style.

Classroom Impact of Mentors

Their influence is evident in Miller's teaching philosophy. Her philosophy is a combination of the "head" (being thoughtful) and the "heart" (being compassionate). She teaches graduate students in counseling and believes that both of these components are necessary in their development as therapists. They need to be thoughtful, which she encourages by helping them develop treatment planning skills and complete scientific based readings and papers. She encourages their compassion by having them write reaction papers to readings and by helping them have avenues for telling their stories (in the classroom, in presentations) or hearing the stories of others (interviews). In the classroom, then, she encourages a dialogue between herself and the students, and between the students themselves in order to assist them in bridging the gap between their heads and their hearts. Three of her students, Brown-Anderson, Linder, and Sexton describe their experience of being taught by Miller and how that influenced them to "teach" in their job positions as teacher and counselor.

Student Reactions

Brown-Anderson believes six themes were present in her becoming a teacher in the classroom. The first was an important and strong connection between herself and her teachers whose information she shared with her two younger siblings. The second was in high school when she realized she wanted to help others and became involved in a service organization. The third was as an undergraduate when she realized she needed to develop counseling skills in order to help others and became involved in a peer helper program. The fourth was in graduate school where she taught two courses and through that process began to view herself as a teacher, develop skills, and receive encouragement

to pursue a teaching career. During this time she also began presenting as a part of her job at a career center and at professional conferences. The fifth theme was when she had a counseling internship in her masters' program that enhanced her ability to help others. The final theme was her first job that involved presentations at student orientation and supervising graduate students. She found the key common elements in these themes to be: believing in her self, having mentoring relationships and realistic goals, being encouraged as well as determined, and receiving support.

The second student, Ms. Linder, conveyed the importance of communication in the mentoring relationship. She viewed a good mentoring relationship as one where communication is a process of breaking down superficiality so the interactions are real. She experienced this communication with Dr. Miller as focusing on honesty, trust, and respect. The honesty is important because it makes the experience of education more beneficial and worthwhile. Trust is critical because information or help may need to be offered by the mentor whether it is wanted or not. Finally, respect is necessary. Respect means that a student is treated as an adult and then develops confidence in her own decision-making process. This needs to be the same respect shown by a professor to his or her colleagues and peers.

The third student, Mr. Sexton, stated it quite simply. He said about Dr. Miller: "She believes so strongly in you that you catch that belief in yourself from her."

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

Johnson and Huwe (2002) outline six strategies to strengthen one's mentoring:

1. Slow down the process.
2. Honestly evaluate personal contributions to a dysfunctional mentorship.

3. Consider ethical/professional obligations as a mentor.

4. Be proactive, cordial, and clear when communicating concerns to protégés.

5. Seek consultation.

6. Document.

In addition, Dittman reports Dr. Helen Pratt as recommending that the mentor only provide what is requested, be respectful by being on time, returning contacts, providing uninterrupted meetings, allowing cancellation of meetings if projects are not complete, and asking mentees to document discussions held. She also describes good mentors as individuals who are "flexible, attentive, non-defensive, good communicators, supportive, resourceful, open to new ideas, able to assist in goal setting and willing to follow up with the student" (p. 51). This description is echoed in Gay's book (2000) where effective teachers care for students as people.

Mentoring students requires a selection process on both sides that is carefully done. Hopes and expectations need to be openly explored early in the relationship. Ongoing dialogue with a commitment to honesty is crucial. Finally, it may be helpful for both individuals to look at the relationship as a marriage.

These three generations of teachers/counselors show a chain reaction of the creation of counselors. The common characteristics of Miller's mentors (creation of a personal, caring, mentoring relationship, provision of dialogue within the mentoring relationship, shared love of school and teachers, desire to assist others, and belief that the teacher/mentor needs to be both supportive and challenging) appear in the stories of her students. The relationship is critical (Kramer, 2002), as well as confidentiality as a part of the relationship (Stanulis, Fallona, & Pearson, 2002), and the high standards for work

(Aronson, 2003). Kleinfeld (1973, 1974, 1975) describes them as "warm demanders."

The discussion of this one counselor educator's experiences supports the notion that there

is a chain reaction in the creation of helping professionals and that values are transmitted

through the teaching/mentoring relationship.

References

Aronson, H. (2003). Ask Aunt Academe: Who is a good teacher? *The Feminist*

    Psychologist, 30, 20, 23.

Dittmann, M. (2002). Open your mind to mentoring. *Monitor on Psychology, 33,* 50-51.

Freie, P. (1989). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Continuum.

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, & practice.* New

    York: Teachers College Press.

Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress.* New York: Boynton/Cook.

Johnson, W. B. & Huwe, J. M. (2002). Toward a typology of mentorship dysfunction in

    graduate school. *Psychotherapy: Theory/Research/Practice/Training, 39,* 44-55.

Kleinfeld, J. (1973). Effects of nonverbally communicated personal warmth on the

    intelligence test performance of Indian and Eskimo adolescents. *Journal of Social*

    Psychology, 91, 149-150.

Kleinfeld, J. (1974). Effects of nonverbal warmth on the learning of Eskimo and White

    students. *Journal of Social Psychology, 92,* 3-9.

Kleinfeld, J. (1975). Effective teachers of Eskimo and Indian students. *School Review,*

    83, 301-344.

Kramer, L. (2002, March/April). A grand profession for great and simple

accomplishments. *Leadership, 31* 4, 15.

Stanulis, R. N., Fallona, C. A., & Pearson, C. A. (2002). 'Am I doing what I am

supposed to be doing?': Mentoring novice teachers through the uncertainties and

challenges of their first year of teaching. *Mentoring & Tutoring, 10,* 71-81.