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## Mentoring and Leadership: A Practical Application for One's Career Path

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### Abstract

This paper explores mentoring and mentorship at the beginning and ending of one's career path and the role of mentoring in the process. It frames the mentoring and leadership discussion using the lens of a first year teacher in a LaSallian elementary school in Browning, Montana, on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Topics examined in this paper are garnered around the questions of who are your mentors and of how do they help you. Mentoring is a complex endeavor propelled mainly by love and care. In our examination of mentoring practice, we explore the behaviors, relationships, leadership styles, personality, individual gifts, and learning styles which create the cornerstone of the formation of mentoring. Mentoring begins and ends with exploring and validating each individual's gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control, whereby mentors provide presence, encouragement and accountability for the journey.

### Introduction

Anthony De Mello's (1995) book, *The Way to Love*, suggests that gaining authentic perspective of one's attachments, beliefs and value systems is a foundation for career development, personal development and spiritual development. We are always in the midst of change whether we admit it or not. We can choose to live our lives in love or fear. Opening or closing up a career path, relationship, or experience offers a new chapter in one's life. We need mentors along the way to help us with each change, each evolution. The question we ask is "who are your mentors and how do they help you?" This paper explores mentorship at the beginning and ending of one's career path and the role of mentoring in the process. It frames the mentoring and

leadership discussion using the lens of a first year teacher in a LaSallian elementary school in Browning, Montana.

### Mentoring and Formation of New Teachers in the LaSallian Tradition

Lasallian formation and instruction is built on four pillars: faith, compassion, prayer, and action. The Lasallian structure for teaching and learning, formation and mentoring is superior to many others that Laughlin has observed over his career as an educator. *The Formation of New Teachers--A Companion on the Lasallian Journey*, written by Brother Frederick C. Mueller (2008), offers substantial foundations and qualities that impact good mentoring, formation

instruction, and methodology. These concepts have application when one first steps in and when one steps out of teaching or any other profession. In-service training of education professionals based on the solid ideas in this monograph could be a component of the mentor teacher's portfolio. Gaining expertise in one or more of the Conduct of Christian Schools as a foundation in their own teaching could benefit all learners. The Lasallian axioms, qualities, and virtues are a leaven for others and all communities served. Their key is to create a scaffold of knowledge to connect the new knowledge to what has already been learned.

Transitions in life require us all to embrace the concept of "metanoia," or turning around to look at where we have been and then looking forward to where we can be. There is liminal space in between. Who we talk with, who we trust, and who we are influenced by are key during liminal periods. This is a time for growth, transformation, and an introspective look at our individual gifts in light of being and doing for the rest of our lives. In mentoring practice, behaviors, relationships, leadership, personality and learning styles are examined in light of individual gifts. Achieving balance in light of desires, delusions and reality is a good goal. By exploring using the lens of the gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control mentors give presence, encouragement and accountability for the journey.

Holly Moore is presently being mentored by her principal at De LaSalle Blackfeet School in Browning (DLSBS) and by various teachers at DLSBS in her role as a 5th grade teacher. DLSBS is the 13th of 17 San Miguel schools in the US. It is the first one in a rural area as well as the first serving primarily the Native American population. In addition, her friends, family, and her godfather play a role in her discernment process. She is teacher/mentor for fourteen students on the high plains of Montana at a private school open to all faiths and cultures. It is not tuition driven, and it serves a predominantly at-risk population. DLSBS is dedicated to creating an environment that recognizes the reality of God's living presence and nurtures the dignity of each student within a supportive community of

teachers, parents, and guardians. The aim is to develop individuals who are strong in self-esteem, cultural identity, competence and faith. Sensitive to the poor and to the sacredness of all life, students are inspired to bring their full creativity to their personal lives. Creating expertise in Lasallian, Blackfeet, and social justice education is a great outcome from this teaching experience.

Where does the discussion of mentorship fit into her teaching context? Being a first-year teacher, or taking on a new year in any profession, and succeeding with strength and happiness requires a strong foundation and relationship formation. The Ten Qualities of a Lasallian Teacher recognize that one must identify virtues and qualities which will help them to be successful at their work and personal life. The ten qualities, as outlined by Mueller (2008), are as follows: Decisiveness, Authority and Firmness, Reserve (i.e., serious, thoughtful, and modest in behavior), Vigilance, Attention to Oneself, Professionalism, Prudence (Carefulness), Winning Manners, Zeal (Enthusiasm), and Facility in speaking and expressing oneself clearly to learners (p. 28).

In addition, the Lasallian's have identified 12 virtues of the good teacher that are worth exploring as a component of formation and mentoring practice. The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher by Brother Agathon, fifth Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools from 1777 to 1795, taken from Saint John Baptist De La Salle's (1996) *The Conduct of Christian Schools*, incorporates virtues that are not isolated to teachers in Catholic or Christian schools but are universal to educators whose vocation is to instill in students entrusted to their care the love of learning that is essential to becoming a positive active member of the world we share. Virtues outlined and their definitions are:

- Gravity (seriousness)--A person who demonstrates gravity says nothing which is bitter, stinging, supercilious, crude or offensive to anyone. This person is convinced that gravity, modesty and reserve do not exclude kindness or tender affection. The goal of this person is far from seeking students to fear him or her, but

his/her main aim is to win his/her students confidence.

- Silence--This person avoids talking when he/she must not speak and speaks when he/she should not be silent.
- Humility--This characteristic is directly opposed to pride, which gives us an unjustly exalted notion of our own excellence. This person is talented but does not draw attention to him/herself or draw attention to his/her accomplishments but acts in a way that will bring honor to God and others.
- Prudence--This person understands what he/she needs to do and what he/she needs to avoid. This person is deliberately careful, judges rightly, and orders all things properly.
- Wisdom--This person guides students to distinguish what is truly good from what is such only in appearance and leads them to choose rightly and to persevere in every enlightened choice.
- Patience--This person does not have outbursts in trying occasions and accepts without complain all the ills that befall her/him.
- Reserve--This person thinks, speaks, and acts with moderation, discretion and modesty, controlling her/himself in circumstances where he/she might grow angry or upset.
- Gentleness--This person displays goodness, sensitivity, and tenderness. This person shows the perfection of charity not only through patience but is over and above meek and good-natured.
- Zeal--This person instructs her/his students by her/his good example.
- Vigilance--This person is diligent and painstaking in fulfilling his/her duties.
- Piety--This person fulfills worthily her/his duties towards God and guides students in understanding moral virtues.
- Generosity--This person sacrifices voluntarily his/her personal interests to those of his/her colleagues or neighbor.

The Lasallian formator and mentor, in dealing with new teachers today, wants to assist them to develop qualities that will make them good and effective teachers and to address habits or attitudes that reduce their effectiveness. The ideas advanced by De La Salle in the 1800s take on new value and meaning in our present learning environments. Identifying the teaching virtues and qualities that need to be uprooted and those that need to be developed must be discussed in action or shortly thereafter in meaningful dialogue between formator and teacher. This set of teaching qualities, habits, and behaviors, which are suggested in the various editions of De La Salle's *The Conduct*, can be grouped into five areas:

1. Qualities that impact motivation, meaning and purpose;
2. Qualities that impact teacher-student relationships;
3. Qualities that impact good instruction and methodology (this includes technology);
4. Qualities that impact classroom management;
5. Qualities that impact rewards and correction that addresses extraordinary student behavior.

Mentoring takes place for personal, professional, leadership, family and spiritual purposes. This paper examines just one professional framework and addresses the question of "who are your mentors, and how do they help you?"

### **Mentoring Method**

As a mentor, Kevin Laughlin often notes an absence of or lip-service towards mentoring as a component of educational and leadership models and praxis. Having just completed 30 months bridging the non-profit Idaho Returned Peace Corps Volunteer group from a 20 year leader to a 30 month team effort, mentoring was seminal. Key to this has been the mentoring of each member of the new team so that they are empowered in their roles from what has been to what will be. In the practice that he has been engaged, the mentoring provides a haven for personal and professional growth. Making successful transitions in life and career require

understanding one's leadership style; good mentoring guides that process.

There are steps that need be taken to help the mentee better understand themselves, their personalities, and their learning and leadership styles. After relationship building, the completion of the Learning Style Inventory (Multiple Intelligence or Myers Briggs) and the Enneagram (Personalities), the next step is to have mentees look at their leadership style. When one wonders in and around their leadership style and takes time to reflect on and read about the theory that supports how they think or understand leadership, great movement happens! It is a Cooperative Extension System (CES) inspired, learner-centered approach. Asking the question, "What is your leadership style and how does it affect your personal, professional, physical and spiritual life?" has become the most important next question that needs be asked when mentees are ready.

Mentors mirror the changes of life for mentees. They amplify the importance of understanding transitions in the classroom, family and community. In addition, they help us as we encounter each third of our lives and help us to understand who we are in the process of change. Separation, liminality, and reincorporation allow us to seek and find, knock so that the doors will be opened, and choose love in the face of fear. Mentoring offers insight and hope to the phases of life. Mentors, in individualized sessions, show how to use powerful discernment tools for the past, present and for future transitions.

Mentorship, as alluded to above, guides one along the pathways of life; pathways and phases of life which we all encounter as time goes along as we flux and flow with what has become present to us in our lives. Carl Jung identified five main phases of midlife which have great application to all mentoring:

1. Accommodation (meeting others' expectations--actually, this takes place in the first part of life but is the context in which midlife processes take place);
2. Separation (rejecting the accommodated self);
3. Liminality (a period of uncertainty, where life seems directionless and meanders);

4. Reintegration (working out "who I am" and becoming comfortable with that identity);
5. Individuation (facing up to and accepting the undesirable aspects of our own character).

Being a good mentor involves acknowledging the phase in which the mentee is at present; where the mentee stands in his or her life's discernment process, admitting to the impermanence of all things. The mentor guides the mentee to realize where they stand in life and career, and where they would like to, or should, be going. Mentors help in transitions that season life.

Transitions embrace the concept of liminality, the threshold space in between where we have been and where we will be. In (Anthropology) that temporary state during a rite of passage when the participant lacks social status or rank is required to follow specified forms of conduct, and the participant is expected to show obedience and humility. If obedience means to listen, then humility includes preparation time to ponder as one season of life has ended and one has not yet begun. Teachers become leaders in the presence of multiple mentors. Generations generating leaders is the trust that the mentor brings light to.

Laughlin is currently mentoring seventeen individuals (two are current extension workers) and two men's groups (one group since 1997 and the other the last 23 months). Applying individual and group mentoring principles has been key to individualized success and measurable outcomes. Using the 3S leadership model, which stands for Shepherd, Steward, and Servant ("Understanding Your Leadership Roles: Shepherd, Steward, and Servant," 2012), has been the foundation in this process. His lifelong studies in leadership began at the Chatcolab--Northwest Leadership Laboratory in 1983. The 3S Model has emerged from his studies and Certification in Ecumenical Spiritual Direction with Mt. Carmel/Haden Institute in Ontario, Canada. As a mentor, each year he takes the pre-conference or special "leadership" training offered at a different conference, workshop, retreat or program in a new arena to keep thinking about the topic of mentoring and leadership.

In Laughlin's (2001) study of 45 Extension

practitioners in Pacific Northwest Extension units, those reporting the greater numbers of mentors had higher job satisfaction and demonstrated greater teaching effectiveness during observations and in program delivery. The highest mentor numbers (12) reported were by support staff members who included informal mentors such as healing circles, tribal elders, brothers, sisters, and or children. Generally, practitioners in the first decade of their CES careers had fewer mentors than those in the second or third decades of their career.

Culture, traditions, and elders were woven into the concept of mentorship in the discussions conducted in units with Native American practitioners and communities. Native American descriptions suggest that individuals or communities--external to Extension, over or equal to those they worked with in their Extension System--mentor them to a great extent. Increasingly "new" practitioners are living and working in isolation, receiving little or no orientation, living in a "sink or swim," "do or die" culture that lacks trust. Older practitioners who had achieved tenure reported that the formal mentoring process had mostly ceased and that they were on their own until the end of their careers.

Presence, patience, persistence, and listening skills are the most important aspect of mentoring practice. In Laughlin's (2001) CES studies of practitioners in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, he found gender specific mentoring also important. Now in Spiritual Direction practice he is finding the same. Similar outcomes but different approaches or exercises merit mentor understanding. Exercises (Ruffing, 2000) by St. Ignatius vs. St Gertrude opens doors in different ways but result in the preferred outcomes identified by the individual and most times the organizations they work in, volunteer in, or serve in. Gertrude ends with amends after jubilation, and Ignatius begins in amends. In masculine consciousness, desires are shaped by the hero's journey, complete with heroic ideals, quests, and ends in intimacy. In feminine consciousness desires are first shaped by intimacy, details of the journey, and the invitation to dream about a larger reality than herself. Do these gender components have direct application to your mentoring, leadership practice, or model?

Abiding with and looking at individual gifts has been the foundation of my mentoring practice. Offering encouragement, accurate feedback in images (and words when necessary), and employing active listening provides a solid support structure. Framing each individual's gifts in the mirror for and with them, helping them to examine their leadership approaches and offering hope at every age is a major premise. We are never done with life until we die--our journeys need companions not to "fix us" but to frame our passage and help us listen to the whisperings of our life.

## **Discussion**

Leaders, administrators and managers would do well to ponder aspects and benefits of mentoring as planning, formation, and accountability take form. As you apply your leadership model for the 21st century to educational work, we encourage you to consider mentoring as a component of your model. After hiring, and before, during, and after performance review, dedicated mentoring is a proven support structure needed for individual growth. It is the leaven for the liminal spaces in our lives, families, careers and communities. Teachers, community educators, and/or county agents need to ask the question, "Is mentoring an unspoken part of our model?" Mentoring is how we demonstrate the magic and wash the feet of those that will come after us in work, play, family and service.

The peer and formal mentoring model Laughlin tested with 45 Pacific Northwest Extension practitioners and employed with Holly Moore in her teaching practice as a first year teacher helped to raise awareness of their learning styles, changed communication, and changed teaching behaviors with youth and adult learners. Mentoring was encouraged for future application for personal growth and professional development as a non-threatening tool for the educator's journey. If the mentee reflects on and owns the data generated by this observation process, then the presence of the mentor or formator is a gift that empowers and sheds light on their individual gifts.

A most important component of the mentor's "job"

description is dedication and attention. The Lasallian “Conduct” model offers tested and intriguing additional foundations to the mentoring process. The formator (mentor) must give oneself completely to the task and must give all the affections of the heart to new and old teachers further putting at their disposal all his or her experiences and gifts. She/he must hold a mirror before them and rearrange the pieces of the puzzle when the puzzle fails to fit just right or to be completed. Above all the formator is called upon to help the teacher grow in their love: their love for teaching, their love for the subject matter, their love for their students. Called to accompany them in the transitions, the formator fosters ownership of the journey to find the ultimate meaning of their teaching.

In the end what we experience as a leader is our best teacher. Mentors help us come to know our gifts, individual strengths (pluses) and weaknesses (wishes). They are essential with transitions, helping us “live with” and over the bumps that will inevitably come with elected, assigned, or assumed leadership, employment, and family and community roles that one takes on over a lifetime. We must listen for the whispering of the mentors in our life, those we identify and those we do not know yet. We must also search and find our mentors; the mentee gives much life to the mentor making the relationship a mutual one built on love and understanding. So ponder the question: “Who are your mentors and how do they help you?”

What follows are a set of questions which will help to guide one on the search for, or the recognition of, the mentors that we have or the mentors that we need and desire:

1. Who are your mentors and how do they help you?
2. In a journal describe your mentors and why they are an important part of your life.
3. What are the qualities, virtues and axioms that you seek in a mentor?
4. Identify the four pillars of mentoring in your organization, school or profession.
5. Do you have a bucket list? Liminal time between what has been and what will be is good time to

work on its items. Ponder what on this bucket list you could do now in preparation for your next season in life? Share this with your mentors.

6. Both “liminal” and “liminality” are derived from the Latin “limen,” which means “threshold,” that is, the bottom part of a doorway that must be crossed when entering a building. Is there a threshold you need to cross? What do you need to build before you enter your next threshold?
7. Student teaching is all about transition, and finally being given your new status, re-assimilating into the world and the new season. What actions will help you to make the necessary transitions?
8. Are you at a boundary or transitional point between two conditions, stages in a process, ways of life, etc.? Mentoring calls you to carefully examine both sides of this spectrum and then to move where you are called so in the next season your “new” way will be evident.
9. Mentors too face a point at which life appears to be terminating our known world and inviting us to a new world in which our true nature can be uncovered. This means that each new season is a time to prepare, experiment, and discover your personal relationships. Spend an hour or two journaling each day about where you have been and where you are being called to. Note the movements in your heart as you wonder in your past and ponder yearning towards a preferred future. What commitments and changes will this require and who can help you on “the way”?

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