Peer Mentoring Among Mature Students
2010 Version

There are the demands on personal life that often accompany mature students. With this in mind, mature students seek out relationships with adult peers outside the classroom. Mentoring schemes, among other devices, that involve mature students provide an opportunity for important peer-to-peer contact to take place (Barton Pernal, 2009; Kasworm, 2010). Significantly, the purpose of peer mentors is to facilitate the mentees' personal, educational and professional growth so that they can successfully function within an academic environment (Munford, 1996). Peer mentoring removes a hierarchy that normally associates itself with instructor-student relationships in hopes that a more balanced and comfortable learning relationship can take shape. Availing mature student mentoring opportunities can develop supportive and collaborative peer interactions for years to come (Ramsay et al, 2007).

Key Points from the Literature

- Younger mentors can feel intimidated by or disconnected with older student mentees. Despite of this, these feelings could be put at ease when provided with the opportunity for these mentors to reflectively learn from the experience (Heirdsfield et al., 2008; McLean, 2004).
- There might be some apprehensiveness, on behalf of the mature student mentee, to be mentored by a younger student (McLean, 2004).
- Mentors and mentees teams that consist of mixed race and gender backgrounds provoke a degree of tension and awkwardness within the mentoring relationship. To avoid this kind of response, it would be helpful if the mentor exhibits crucial relational skills such as empathy and cultural sensitivity as well as a desire to learn of the mentee's experiences (Langer, 2010).
- Knowing that their mentor is familiar with the professional concerns of the mentee becomes an important aspect of the mentoring experience (Langer, 2010).
- Peer mentors do not need to be limited to the institution; rather, they can be anyone of importance to the mentee and of varying numbers depending on the type of support needed (Munford, 1996).
- Some of the tasks that frame an interactive mentoring experience could be: proof reading assignments, tutoring on important curricula, helping with time and workload management, tutoring on how to balance studying and family time, and providing emotional support (Brenden, 1986; Penman & White, 2006).
- Interactive experiences with peer mentors can foster values, ethics and practices that are uniquely identified with the professional group that the mature student is preparing to join (Brenden, 1986).
- Logistical issues (conflicting timetables, travelling long distance, room bookings, etc) seem to challenge mentor-mentee experiences (Saunders & Gibbon, 1998).

Recommendations

- A mentoring programme is optimal for the mentee during the first year of school (Penman & White, 2006).
- Introduce the mentee to the mentor and explain her/his role during the first week of school (Penman & White, 2006; Tardiff, 2006).
- Have an institutional commitment, through policy, to provide a sustainable and productive mentoring programme for mature students. For example, employ a supervisor who can oversee the mentoring experience and help nurture the emerging mentor and mentee relationship (Brenden, 1986; Saunders & Gibbon, 1998).

- Enable mature student mentees to shape their own mentoring experiences because as the relationship with the mentor grows, they may need to rely on mentors for personal guidance and understanding (Langer, 2010; Penman & White, 2006).

Recommended Readings

- Brenden, M. (1986). Pioneering new support systems for non-traditional baccalaureate students: Interactional advising and peer mentoring. *NACADA Journal, 6*(2), 77-82.
- Langer, A. (2010). Mentoring nontraditional undergraduate students: A case study in higher education. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 18*(1), 23-38.

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Ramsay, S., Jones, E. & Barker, M. (2007). Relationship between adjustment and support types: Young and mature-aged local and international first year university students. *Higher Education, 54*, 247-265.

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