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Book Review: Mentoring with Meaning: How Educators Can Be More Professional and Effective

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Book Review

Mentoring with Meaning: How Educators Can Be More Professional and Effective (2015)

Carlos R. McCray & Bruce S. Cooper, Editors
Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield
179 pages; \$55.00 USD (Hardback); \$27.00 USD (Paperback)
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Reviewed by Tracey Lamont, Ph.D.

Anyone working in Catholic education, from faculty to administrators and board members, would be remiss to underestimate the importance of providing quality mentoring opportunities for faculty and administrators in education. This edited volume explores the importance of providing quality mentoring in a variety of educational contexts and offers helpful strategies and examples to create or enhance mentoring programs in schools.

As an educator with experience working in primary, secondary and post-secondary schools, I appreciate the diverse approaches to mentoring the nine essays in this volume provide and for its contribution to the field of education. The editors expand our understanding of mentoring to include how mentoring can change not only the mentees but the mentors themselves, as teaching and learning opportunities that move in both directions and in a variety of educational contexts.

Bruce Cooper and Jan Hammond, in the preface, begin the volume by describing the process and characteristics of good mentoring followed by Heather Wynne, Kenneth Cuthbert, and Carlos R. McCray's essay which provides a comprehensive overview of mentoring, from the historical informal understanding of the term as senior professionals guiding younger professionals in their career path, to a more in-depth definition which include the developmental or psychological and social dimensions of formal mentoring (p. 3). The authors encourage anyone in education from administrators, board members, to teachers/faculty, to take seriously the responsibility that comes with mentoring, to understand the developmental processes and

interpersonal relationships that emerge from mentor/mentee or protégé partnerships as well as the various stages that develop in a mentoring relationship (pp. 9-10).

Each chapter that follows explores mentoring from a different context and perspective, from post-secondary to secondary and primary schools. There are three chapters devoted to mentoring in higher education. In chapter two, authors King, Leos, Norstrand discuss enhancing mentoring in institutions with international students in graduate and doctoral programs. In the fifth chapter, Floyd Beachum proposes a way of mentoring that supports tenure-track faculty through informal mentoring opportunities but also establishes formal programs with new faculty in higher education attentive to “three pillars of mentoring: communication, relationships and caring” (p. 69). Chapter seven, by Richard Savior, explores how transformational leadership theory can lead to more effective mentoring in higher education.

Three of the nine chapters discuss mentoring in the PK-12 school setting and one chapter by Sister Mary Ann Jacobs, explores mentoring programs with faculty and principals in PK-8 Catholic schools as a way to strengthen the vision and mission and Catholic identity and culture of the school. The chapters on mentoring in secondary schools include an essay by Michael Mascellino (chapter three) on training leaders to be mentors by bringing in research from leadership and organizational development to explore how mentoring can enhance educational systems. One way to do this, according to Mascellino, is to ensure school leaders have “new-leader mentorship programs for learning” (p. 38) that offer mentor training programs that provide practical quality “problem based learning experiences” that support leaders and teach them how to mentor future leaders (p. 44).

Karen Androcino’s essay, “Peer mentoring, coaching, and collaboration: New strategies for school reform,” discusses “three models of teacher collaboration and peer mentoring” shows how mentoring programs can help reform primary and secondary schools. Such collaboration and mentoring be accomplished through (1) effective “professional learning communities (PLC); 2) lesson study; and (3) Critical Friends Group (CFGs)” whereby a group of 8-13 members meet to discuss how to increase the school culture of collaboration through peer observations and offering clear, supportive and challenging feedback (p. 87). Deirdre Callahan, in her essay “Preparing Women to Lead” brings forward the research on women in education, noting there are far fewer women in senior-level positions and that approximately “75 percent of

all superintendents are men” (p. 149), however, I am curious to know what the statistics are for women in the Catholic school context.

Callahan’s research on the underrepresentation of women in school leadership and Rhonda Bondie’s essay “Instant mentoring: The promises and perils of e-mentoring as new technologies” can be applied to all levels of education—primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools. Bondie’s chapter on e-mentoring is particularly noteworthy. The author describes how to enhance the practice of mentoring for the digital age through new media and technology. E-mentoring can effectively “transport and build on what we know about mentoring from traditional face-to-face settings into an online environment” (p. 130). She argues that “new technologies offer endless possibilities for e-mentoring, creating both opportunities and challenges for program design” especially in underfunded schools and communities (p. 130). This chapter helps Catholic educators think more broadly the mission of their school to consider how they can become expert mentors beyond their proximity to enhance the preparation of new teachers and improve teaching and learning in other school communities. The essay encourages those teachers and administrators who might be experts in a particular discipline and/or grade level to consider reaching out beyond their own school or diocese to offer their services to mentor to new teachers and principals in schools with fewer resources. In this way, e-mentoring helps Catholic educators build up the common good by working in service and support of those in need.

Mentoring with Meaning provides educators with the research and strategies necessary to create or enhancing mentoring programs and opportunities in their respective educational contexts. The volume would, however, benefit from deeper engagement with the literature on transformative learning and mentoring traditional college age students. For example, Richard Savior, in his essay on leadership and mentoring, could strengthen his argument by differentiating what level of academia he is referring to. It would seem his discussion centers on mentoring undergraduate students, but that is not explicitly stated. Faculty, as noted in Daloz’s research, should envision mentoring differently with adults returning to school than with traditional undergraduates or young adult graduate students.

Finally, it would be helpful to include in the volume a discussion on role of advising undergraduate students as a form of mentoring. Several authors reference advising as an important characteristic of mentoring, however, faculty often advise students they have not had in class, and as such they may not see those relationships as opportunities to mentor undergraduate

students. It would be helpful to show how educators can view advising with students whom they may not have a teaching relationship with as a meaningful way of mentoring traditional undergraduate students.

These critiques aside, I recommend this book for anyone involved in teacher training programs for Catholic schools. Academics and practitioners working in religious education and ministry programs will gain valuable insights from this volume on how to create quality mentoring opportunities. Anyone working in an arch/diocesan office of Catholic schools and are responsible for professional development and training new faculty and principals will benefit from this book, especially the chapter on mentoring teachers and principals in Catholic schools. Mentoring programs enhance the culture of a school, but, as Mascellino notes in his essay, they are only as effective as the quality and practicality of the programs themselves. It is a practical book that shows the importance of mentoring in all levels of education, from faculty in higher education, members of the school board, to the faculty and principals in primary and secondary Catholic schools.