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Mentor and Mother Hen: Just What I Needed as a First Year Professor

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Abstract

Support is needed for new faculty members to achieve success in the early stages of the higher education career. Women, in particular, are often left to fend for themselves when entering the academy. This sonata-form case study glimpse into a mentoring relationship will focus on the experience of a new female faculty member as she was mentored and “mother-henned” by a senior member in her department. The mentor provided the framework for open sharing about tenure and promotion expectations, the inside politics of the department, research protocols at the university, and many other supports that led to her early success in academia. A point of interest is the fact that this was a cross-race mentoring relationship.

Keywords: Women, education, gender, mentor, professor, tenure

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Introduction

As a newly hired professor of Educational Leadership at a Research I University, I needed a mentor. I had just made the transition from being a veteran elementary principal, with only a few semesters of adjunct college teaching on my resume. I had little concern about being able to fulfill the teaching role of the professoriate, but the reality of the research and publishing demands filled me with fear and trepidation. Fortunately for me, Loucrecia, the only other female professor in the Educational Leadership program, knew that I would need a mentor, and she took me under her wing. Although we were from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, we shared the experience of coming into higher education from elementary principal positions.

This article will provide a glimpse into the mentoring relationship initiated by my senior colleague as she became my “mother hen,” determined that I would have support in making the transition from practitioner to professor. My mentor provided the framework for open sharing of information about tenure and promotion expectations, the inside politics of the department and school, research protocols at the university, and many other details that led to my early success in higher education. I, in turn, consulted with her regularly to ask questions, clarify expectations, and get advice for moving forward with my research and publishing. The mentoring relationship we established provided strong scaffolding for my emerging confidence and competence. In addition, we enjoyed mutual respect as mentor and protégé, and developed a friendship in the process.

Conceptual Framework for Mentoring in Higher Education

Upon my arrival in higher education, I was unaware of the literature that supported my need for a mentor, yet it did exist. Since then, I have discovered a number of scholarly works that verify the need for new professors to receive mentoring. First of all, newcomers to higher education are often frustrated by the differences in their own expectations and the university’s expectations for them (Aguirre, 2000; Johnson & DeSpain, 2004). It was daunting to learn that there was an expectation for new faculty to produce at least two published articles per year in peer reviewed journals, contribute service in the field and to the university, and present at national conferences.

Secondly, studies showed that the presence or absence of collegiality in the higher education setting is a factor in retention of new faculty (Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005; Ericson & Rodriguez, 1999; Zhou & Volkwein, 2004). Thirdly, Boice (2000) stated that “the first few years in the careers of professors, beginning at the time they interview for their initial positions in academe, are an enormously critical period” (p. 2). However, usual advice for new faculty is sporadic, anecdotal, and unproven (Boice, 2000). Finally, it is noted that women, in particular, are often left to fend for themselves when entering the academy.

Wylie (1995) stated that the “tendency to explain away women’s successes, treating them as an exception or attributing them to circumstances, luck, or the support of a male associate, while failure is accepted as the norm” (p. 39) devalues female faculty members. Although changes in hiring policies and attitudes towards women in higher education have improved over time, biases against women still exist in higher education today (Gerdes, 2006).

Mentoring for new faculty in higher education is not a new concept. Mentoring is usually cited in faculty development literature as a vital component in helping newcomers in the induction process (Sorcinelli & Jung, 2007). Mentoring in the traditional sense involves a process in which one person, usually of superior rank, guides the development of an entry-level individual (Savage, Karp, & Logue, 2004). This traditional mentoring has been called *grooming-mentoring*, whereby special assistance is provided by an older, more experienced professional who grooms his/her protégé during a transitional period (e.g. entry into a profession), in order to enhance a quicker movement up the career ladder (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978).

Mentoring for both males and females in higher education has received more attention from researchers in recent years, due to the discovery of the psychological, social, and career-related benefits that mentoring provides for protégés (Bouquillon, Sosik & Lee, 2005). Mentoring, however, may not be happening for every new higher education faculty member. In a study on faculty mentoring, 86% of new faculty members wanted a mentor, but only one-third of them actually had one. Two possible reasons for this were cited. First, only a small number of faculty members find a mentor on their own. Second, few campuses provide mentoring in a systematic and effective way (Boice, 1992). Bode (1999) proposed a possible reason why mentoring might not be taking place, “perhaps newcomers wish to hide their ignorance and uncertainties from members of their own department” (p. 124). This may indicate that new faculty feel vulnerable and have fears that their incompetence might be revealed.

Intellectual companionship is also something that new faculty desire but may find lacking. Fink (1984) found that only one-third of new faculty in his study had someone with whom to discuss ideas and professional concerns. Those who did not said that it had a negative effect on their professional satisfaction. Two-thirds of them said that this situation had affected their performance as professors. Participants who had found intellectual companionship received high course evaluations from students and higher assessments from chairpersons and colleagues. Clearly, becoming connected to a mentor when one enters the academy could result in a more positive transition to the culture of higher education.

Method

This glimpse of the mentoring relationship between my mentor and me is written as a sonata-form case study (Sconiers & Rosiek, 2000). A case study is written “to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were undertaken, how they were implemented, and with what result” (Schramm, as cited in Yin, 1994, p. 12). Case studies are useful when researchers must “cover both a particular phenomenon and its context because....the boundaries between [these] are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994, p. 31). The sonata-form is a particular style of case study, drawing its name from the field of music, as depicted in the following definition:

Sonata form: a type of musical structure distinctive of the first movement of the sonata, usually based on two themes or subjects presented in different keys often with transitional episodes and consisting of an exposition giving the principal subject in the tonic key, and the secondary subject in the dominant

key...[including] a development giving full thematic working out of one or both subjects, and a recapitulation repeating both subjects in the original key and ending with a coda. (Gove, 1963, p. 2172)

In the sonata-form case study, my mentor and I are in dialogue, as in the tonic and dominant keys of a sonata. Thus, we write in first person, present tense voice to convey the emotions that we were feeling during this first year of our mentoring relationship. You will hear my voice as the protégé in excerpts from the journal I kept during my first year as an assistant professor in Educational Leadership as I endeavored to make meaning of my experiences. Arranged chronologically and assigned themes, each of my journal excerpts is followed by thoughts from my mentor. The dialogue with my mentor was crafted at the end of my first year, as we conducted the collaborative writing phase of the case study. Here she reveals her “reflection on action” perspective, giving the reader insights into the rationale for her intentional mentoring behaviors (Schon, 1991).

We acknowledge that this case study, like others, does not contain generalizable principles or specific revelations. In addition, we recognize that this case study is not illustrating a phenomenon that would always be observed in other contexts (Sconiers & Rosiek, 2000). However, we chose to highlight dialogue that illustrates issues most cited in professional literature as important to the mentoring of newcomers to higher education. After each themed ‘split-screen dialogue’ section of this article, relevant literature is reviewed which offers support and validation of the experience we shared.

The First Year Professor Receives Socialization, Information, and Guidance

Linda, New Professor, Protégé: I have a job offer for a tenure track position in Educational Leadership at the University of (Alabama at Birmingham)! I just received a phone call from Dr. Loucrecia, the program coordinator for Educational Leadership. She greeted me with “Good Morning, Colleague!” and that made me feel so good! She conveyed excitement about me joining their faculty, and told me that they had been looking for someone like me for two years. Talk about feeling wanted and empowered! It was a huge ego builder for me, and eased my mind about the upcoming transition into teaching at a Research I university.

Loucrecia: Mentor, Mother Hen, Newly-Tenured Professor: Finally! A new colleague and a woman, too. Our department has been looking for almost two years. We have placed ads in national journals, contacted colleagues, used word of mouth, and the internet. Linda seems nice. I want to be sure I support her as I was supported. It is important to support new people. When you start over, you become the low person on the rung. It is almost like being a rookie. All previous accomplishments go out the window.

Linda: I have decided to keep a diary of my first year as a college professor. I know there are a few books out there about the experiences of first year professors. Perhaps I can get a journal article out of this if I keep some good notes! After all, someone has advised me to “write what you know about.”

Loucrecia: The world of higher education can be a daunting place for women and minorities. A social gathering in a non-threatening environment will set the stage for all the work that awaits my new colleague. I will invite our full time professors and adjunct faculty to join us. The Henley Room in the library will provide an intimate setting for sharing and bringing down barriers. Life can be challenging at a Research I University.

Linda: My new colleagues made me feel welcome from the beginning. Loucrecia, the only other full time female faculty member in the Educational Leadership program, arranged for a welcome luncheon to introduce me to the full time and adjunct faculty in the program. It was held in a beautiful walnut-paneled conference room of the library, where we pulled the comfortable upholstered arm chairs in a circle, and everyone introduced themselves and shared their professional journeys. Afterwards, we enjoyed a catered light lunch. Everyone was so friendly! It seemed like the epitome of Southern hospitality to me.

Linda: It is still the summer before my first semester of teaching. Loucrecia called me to arrange a lunch date. She made me feel welcome all over again by saying, “I want you to know how happy I am that you are here. For five years, I have been the only woman in the program with all these men. I am so thrilled that the other university told us about you. I finally will have another woman to talk to!”

We made a lunch date for later that week and she told me to bring my list of questions I might have about my work here. When we met, I had my list of questions, ranging from the “nuts and bolts” of how we conduct business in our program area to what this tenure thing was all about. I know I am a novice and my questions will reflect that, but here are some things I want to know:

- Who decides what courses we teach?
- Do you get to see the student evaluations at the end of each semester? Does anyone talk to you about them?
- How do you go about starting to do research?
- How do you decide when to ask someone to co-author with you?
- Is there someone who checks your writing for correct APA style?
- How do you get copies made for class handouts?
- If I want to use technology in my teaching, how do I go about accessing it?
- What have you found that works for you to get your writing done?
- How much do you work in your office and how much do you work at home?

Loucrecia is ready to mentor me! She brought me a folder of information on the tenure and promotion requirements. She explained them to me, and told me she stood ready to help me get started on my portfolio. She told me she would help me get oriented to professional involvement in national organizations, tell me where to send proposals for making presentations, how to start the work of publishing, and she answered every question I had. I am so humbled by her kindness. I have heard from other professors in other places how competitive their departments are and how they have to fight for their own survival without any guidance. I feel strongly that this will not be my experience here. I have a “mother hen” who is going to take me under her wing.

Loucrecia: Food is a natural way to socialize. I invited Linda to the local Subway Restaurant to have a conversation about tenure and promotion issues. Nurturing is how I live my life – hence, I compiled a ‘how to’ file folder for my new colleague. It is exciting to have a female colleague. There are just certain conversations that women want to have. . . A natural flow to how we communicate. After just moving through tenure, I believe I can provide relevant information. I want Linda to be successful. My goal as her mentor is to help her move from fear to flight.

A common need expressed by most new faculty in higher education is the need to feel connected to others. Common first year concerns of new faculty include feelings of loneliness, isolation, and lack of social and intellectual connection to others (Sorcinelli, 1994). Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith (1990) observed that “there is a deep hunger among faculty members for more meaningful, collegial relationships and more conversational structures in our institutions” (p. 86). Yet, there has been relatively little attention paid in the literature to faculty development strategies that assist new faculty members in building skills in collegial networking (Akerlind & Quinlan, 2001). My mentor, Loucrecia, took the initiative to ensure that I became connected to others immediately. She created the climate and setting for networking for me the very first week I was on campus. Unfortunately, the research on new faculty in higher education does not show my experience to be very common (Boice, 2000; Fink, 1984). If no one steps up to guide and mentor a new faculty member, that person is left to navigate the academy alone.

There are often barriers that inhibit new faculty from successfully networking with one another. Akerlind and Quinlan (2001) found two common barriers to be (a) new faculty simply are not aware how important collegiality is to faculty life, and (b) new faculty do not know that they must be proactive in building collegial ties and establishing themselves in scholarly communities. It is suggested that new faculty may not feel confident of their abilities to network and actually need to learn how to develop collegiality. According to the authors, “It takes courage to introduce oneself to senior (or indeed, junior) colleagues or to share one’s work with them” (Akerlind & Quinlan, 2001, p. 307). I was fortunate to have a mentor who paved the way for me to begin building important collegial relationships.

Searching for Competence and Confidence in a New Culture

Loucrecia: The expectations are high at a Research I University. Our department chair has been so generous with his financial and emotional support. In some departments, you get only one trip per year to attend a conference. This has not been a challenge here. I want to be sure I help Linda connect with people at the national level. She will need strong letters of support from external reviewers at tenure time. Every behavior must now be purposeful towards the concept of earning tenure. Findings from the research reveal that women and minorities have the most difficult time earning tenure. Some females move as many as six times in their academic careers.

Linda: From the beginning, this university has seemed to be a good fit for me. I have received encouraging comments from my colleagues in the program, such as “we will give you lots of help and support” and “we are just thrilled to have you.” My department chair informed me that I could order new office furniture and that I would be furnished with a computer for the office and a laptop for working at home. I was told I could order books for my professional library and

that travel to conferences to make presentations would be highly supported. “We want you to have the tools to be successful,” was the message that was conveyed in multiple ways. When I shared with Loucrecia how pleased I was with the support for travel and the generosity of the department chair in providing me with a pleasant office environment and professional resources, she said....“You’re in the big leagues now, girl!” Loucrecia started mentoring me immediately. She wanted me to get connected to the wider field of Educational Leadership and began citing opportunities I should pursue. Loucrecia told me about the University Council of Educational Administration Conference we should attend together, and a colleague from Illinois encouraged me to attend the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration conference. I submitted requests to attend the two conferences right away which were both approved. The department secretary offered to make my plane reservations, and told me how to get reimbursed for other expenses incurred at the conferences. Coming from K-12 education, where I was lucky to go to one in-state conference a year, I sensed that my world was going to suddenly expand exponentially!

Linda: All this new excitement fills me with hope and anticipation for what my new life as a college professor might be like. However, I have to admit that I have some fears. I have entered an unfamiliar culture in more ways than one. Not only am I new to higher education, I am also a Caucasian “Yankee” new to the South. At (Alabama at Birmingham), a large percentage of the graduate students in our program are African American. Will they accept me? As a school administrator, I was never expected to do any professional writing or research. My dissertation experience was a few years ago. Will I be able to write and publish anything of importance? Where do I begin? What will the work-rhythm of my life be like? How will I know if I am being successful? These are questions swirling in my head.

Loucrecia: Any time one makes a major life change, fear creeps in. It can paralyze and hamper one from self-realization. Life in the academy is filled with the unknown. I hope to assist my new colleague in wading the murky muddy waters of higher education. We are fortunate to have a specific set of guidelines to provide structure to an amorphous process of earning tenure. It is always a challenge to enter a new organization, but when one relocates to another region the challenge increases. Cultural norms vary from region to region. The South is very formal . . . this city is even more formal. Should I warn Linda about the use of titles? Many African Americans want to be addressed by their official title. After years of being called “Auntie,” “Tom,” “Girl,” and “Boy,” titles are important to this group. Remnants of the struggles of the Civil Rights movement remain entrenched in the society. I wonder, will my new colleague understand these dynamics?

Bailey and Cervero (2004) noted that cross-cultural mentoring relationships may be a struggle due to issues of race and class. One of the unique constructs of this mentoring relationship is that my mentor is an African-American female and I am a Caucasian female. Power and privilege are often thought to reside only within the dominant culture (McIntosh, 1988). However, race and class yielded to nurturing and support, with me as the benefactor. Kram (1985) found that women mentoring other women often resulted in the senior’s maternal behavior and attitudes providing a supportive climate for professional growth. While there exists a plethora of literature on cross-racial mentoring when the mentor is White (Bailey & Cerevo, 2004; Gregory, 1995; Moody, 2004; & Peterson, 1990), there is a paucity of research to offer

insight into the kind of relationships that exist. Coker et al. (2007) and Patterson et al. (2002) identify the determination and collaborative efforts of White and African American women who seek mentoring as a means of surviving and thriving in the academy. Our experience confirms that same determination to thrive together.

Teaching, Research, and Service – Paying Attention to What Counts

Linda: The first week of teaching is over. I've taught each of my classes once now and both went well. I am re-affirmed that teaching is one of my passions because after each class, I felt totally buzzed and energized. I have a one-course reduction in teaching load this first semester, to help me get started on research and publishing. I am teaching Politics of Education (which I felt totally unqualified to teach) and the introductory course of Leadership and Administration. In the latter, I have 35 students in a really small room! Despite the cramped conditions and poor air conditioning, the students were good sports.

Lourecia: Fall semester – Our classes are huge this year - 35 in one class. Linda is cramped in a small classroom. I went by to check on her and her spirits were high. She is always positive and open to new ideas.

Linda: I am taking the advice of so many who say “set aside a writing time and protect it.” This semester, I am going to make Friday my writing day at home. I got started on my first article this week. I actually found it fun to write again. It's not a chore for me, but comes fairly easily. I do worry a little about the next step, though – sending it out for review. I guess it is the fear of rejection and knowing you have to wait a long time to hear back from a journal. Anyway, it felt good to get started!

Lourecia: “Publish or Perish” is the law of the land for non-tenured professors, and always a challenge. I have given Linda my materials on getting published. I shared with her my first manuscript submission experience. I shared the importance of finding the “right person” to serve as your editor. You want constructive comments to spur you on versus a crushing comment to stifle you. Finding a good balance is the chore. Finding the right place to submit an article is crucial. I must warn my new colleague to protect her time. Avoid over-committing. It may appear you have a lot of time, but days will quickly dissipate. Semesters turn into years and oh, the time goes quickly.

New faculty members need to feel capable and competent early on in their careers in higher education. However, in Fink's (1984) seminal research on the needs of new higher education faculty, it was found that an incongruence of expectations for new faculty members often exists which hinders the development of competence. One is hired as a faculty member because members of a search committee, a department chair, a dean, and ultimately, a provost, judge that the individual possesses the ability to teach and conduct research commensurate with the expectations of the institution. Expectations and job descriptions are usually covered in the job interview. However, the reality is that there is often a radical ambiguity in the professoriate, where one is hired for one purpose (chiefly, teaching), expected to carry out another (research), and prized for achieving a third (scholarly publishing) (Fink, 1984). When this incongruence is realized, the new faculty member may begin to feel less than competent and capable.

New faculty members often do not receive enough feedback to judge their own competency. Sorcinelli (1994) conducted a longitudinal study of new faculty and found that unrealistic expectations and inadequate feedback, recognition, and rewards were factors that contributed to stress for new faculty members. New faculty members want to know if they are viewed as competent. Menges (1999) noted that faculty members want three types of feedback. They want affirming feedback, telling them what they are doing right, corrective feedback to help them improve, and clarifying feedback to clarify expectations.

Learning to write for scholarly journals can also be daunting for new professors, especially those coming from roles as K-12 school leadership (Sanacore, 2006). In 20 years of studying new faculty, Boice (2000) found that almost all failures of new hires had little to do with lack of expertise in a faculty member's field of study. Instead, failures came from not knowing how to manage enough writing for publication in modest amounts of time, as well as not learning how to elicit effective collegial support. In a study by Sorcinelli (1994), many new faculty found that their senior colleagues were generally encouraging, but newcomers did not receive any concrete help with scholarship, such as offers to collaborate on a research program or to review a manuscript or grant proposal, or with teaching (sharing syllabi, visiting a classroom).

There may be an assumption in higher education that new faculty will arrive knowing how to produce scholarly articles, therefore, help in this area is not provided. Boice (2000) argued, "Tradition assumes that professors already know how to work as writers; new faculty, after all, have almost always written a thesis or dissertation. So, custom limits most advice for new faculty to teaching because teaching seems less sufficiently mastered" (p. 103). In Boice's (2000) study of hundreds of novice professors at a variety of campuses, he found this assumption to be disastrous. The majority of new faculty struggled as beginning scholarly writers. During years 1 and 2, over two-thirds of them produced nothing that "counted," despite their plans for substantial output in scholarly writing. For many newcomers, this lack of productivity continued into years 3 and 4, and often well beyond.

Loucrecia recognized the importance of encouraging me to get started on scholarly writing projects the very first semester I was employed. Even though I felt inadequate in this area, "just doing it" helped me overcome my initial fears. Following the advice I had received to "write about what you already know" enabled me to build on prior research from my dissertation and public presentations I had delivered. Extrinsic and intrinsic rewards accompanied my first 2 publications. No one could have adequately described to me the powerful emotion I would feel the first time I saw my name in print as the author of a peer-reviewed publication!

Receiving Support in the Feminist Tradition

Linda: Things are winding down before Christmas. Loucrecia suggested that four of us in our Educational Leadership program go out to lunch together as a holiday treat. It was a fun and relaxed time together. My sweet mentor gave me a gift certificate for getting my nails done for Christmas at the salon where she goes! She said she remembers how tight money was for her when she first came to teach here, and there was not money for extras like manicures. What a special, thoughtful gift!

Loucrecia: It is important to nurture all aspects of my new colleague's life. We were lamenting the reduction of salary from our principal's jobs and discussing getting our nails done. I sure could not discuss that with the males! A nail certificate for the holidays is what I knew would be the perfect gift.

In her study of feminist leadership in higher education, Barton (2006) pointed out that the feminist leadership philosophy places value on collaboration and creating a supportive and pleasant work environment. The feminist leader possesses a more holistic perspective, often looking at situations differently than males. According to Barton (2006):

You rely on your intuition; you value those things that go with being a woman but that have been marginalized traditionally. The ideology of feminism certainly has an effect on your disposition and then your leadership action or behavior. You're doing it because it's the right thing and the good thing to do. (p. 4)

Further, Barton pointed out that fostering academic communities in which members can be happy, healthy, and productive was a consistent theme that emerged from the data on feminist leadership. My mentor, Loucrecia, certainly led from the feminist perspective, understanding the importance of the small gestures that could make a big difference in both the collective culture of our program and with me, personally.

Making it Through the First Year Without a 'Formal' Mentoring Program

Linda: It's midway through the spring semester of my first year. I continue to be energized by my teaching. It's been a challenge to have three preps this semester, two of them being new, and I have to spend a lot of time getting ready for classes. But I really love the students here and I feel that I have bonded with them. They are very diverse in their backgrounds, in race, interests, teaching specialties and levels. When I am teaching, I feel my passion coming forth, and I hope that the students catch that. I feel a heavy responsibility for preparing them to be great leaders in our schools. I always hope that something I say or prepare for them or facilitate in one of the classes will stick with them and make a difference.

Loucrecia: As former classroom teachers, I believe we place extra emphasis on how we teach. We prepare with great expectations as we want to pass on the knowledge. I have shared articles, books, videos and strategies to assist Linda. I hope I am not being too pushy. New preps for classes are a part of this world. But once you get it completed, you are on your way. Building relationships is the essence of this work. We want to plant seeds so that harvests of candidates are bountiful.

Loucrecia: Linda is in good shape as she ends her first year. Oh, the time goes so quickly and one must be quite strategic as far as tracking progress. While we are told there are three legs on the tenure-earning stool, one does carry more weight: scholarship. You must have at least six articles to be safe. Linda enjoys writing, which is a big plus for her.

Linda: It's April and I have to turn in my first Faculty Information Form which documents my productivity for the year. Loucrecia said I was in good shape for my first year. I had a book chapter contribution, an NCPEA Yearbook article, two other articles under review, several national conference presentations, and some consulting.

Linda: I met with my department chair to de-brief my first year of employment. He said I did fine but would need to step up my production year by year. He said that I should develop an area of expertise and broaden my focus for publishing. I should also work my way onto committees of national organizations and eventually become an officer of one. My service is acceptable, and he praised my work on dissertation committees. My teaching evaluations were good. Something he told me was a revelation to me. He said I have to "toot my own horn" to him about my work. He said I could give him copies of things that I get published, let him know what I am working on, and in my Faculty Information Form, "brag" about what I have done in the classroom, such as revising syllabi, trying new teaching strategies, etc. I didn't know that kind of information played into our merit system of raises, but I will know for the future! I am nearing that milestone of completing my first year and it feels great.

Loucrecia: Linda is ending her first year and we have not run her off. The guidelines for tenure provide clear structure on how to be successful. Our Chair is very good to work with. He encourages us and is generous with financial support. Linda will be nurtured and nudged forward simultaneously. It is true that the first year sets the stage for your career at a university.

When I was hired at the university, there was no formal mentoring program in place for new faculty. This is the case in many institutions. However, research indicates that support for new faculty can be provided even if a mentoring program is not in place. In his seminal study of new faculty, Fink (1984) presented a list of eight types of support that new faculty could receive: (a) being invited to a colleague's classes; (b) colleagues offering to visit their classes; (c) colleagues discussing general teaching problems; (d) colleagues explaining local resources; (e) colleagues carefully explaining criteria for performance evaluations; (f) colleagues discussing particular courses and teaching; (g) colleagues inviting one to professional events, and (h) colleagues inviting one to social events.

New faculty participants in Fink's (1984) study were asked how often these supportive activities took place and they reported low support in all areas. However, in the same study, when senior faculty were asked for their perceptions on how often these supports were offered to new faculty, they perceived that they were provided quite often. One possible explanation for the difference might be that faculty who had been in the organization for some time may have believed that such supports were not very important, or that, if they were, newcomers could get them on their own. This indicates the incongruence that could exist between the perceptions of senior faculty and new faculty seeking encouragement. According to Fink, "New teachers may feel a much stronger need for assistance, and they may not be at all sure how to get it" (p. 51). Loucrecia, my mentor and "mother hen," did not wait for me to struggle and ask for help. She was proactive in offering the exact kinds of needed support delineated in the research literature.

Reflections on Surviving and Thriving

Linda: My first full twelve months of being a new professor of Educational Leadership is history! One of my colleagues asked me yesterday if I was glad I made the switch from being a school administrator to being a college professor, and I emphatically said, “Yes!” It has been a satisfying year. I like the pace of the work. I feel I am contributing to something worthwhile and investing my life in students who will make a difference in schools and for kids.

Loucrecia: It has been rewarding having a female colleague. We have bonded as women and as professionals. We discuss our differences and similarities. We seek common ground as professors of Educational Leadership trying to make a difference in the lives of our students.

Linda: I know I could not have arrived at the end of this first year feeling successful if it had not been for the intentional mentoring and attention given to me by my colleague, Loucrecia. She provided a road map, traveling directions, and encouragement to move forward every month. She facilitated my entry into the profession through her “mother hen” behaviors – gently prodding me and pushing me along in my process of finding my voice and place in the department. While she was mentoring me, a fringe benefit unfolded – we became friends. That fact, as well, has sustained me through this first year. She helped me to feel competent and capable. She showed compassion when I shared frustrations. She made sure I got connected. I finished my first year feeling very fulfilled.

Conclusion

Mentoring provides guidance for new professors on the road to tenure and promotion. For female faculty, it provides a crucial support system needed to navigate the demands of entering the world of higher education. Brennan (2000) posited that mentoring is an intervention which can enhance socialization, orientation, and influence the career progress of faculty. According to Aisenberg and Harrington (1988), the level of support provided either enhances or deters female faculty progression. Their study highlighted the importance of positive mentoring relationships for a woman’s professional development. Findings by Gardiner, Tiggemann, Kearns, and Marshall (2007) further supported the benefits of mentoring for female university faculty. For those who were mentored, retention rates and grant productivity increased. It is also interesting to note that female faculty who had been mentored rated their self perceptions as academics higher than those in the control group who had not been mentored.

It has been purported that because women’s learning and development is more conducive to relationships, mentoring may be more beneficial as a capacity building tool for women than men (Gilligan, 1982). Five essential themes of the mentoring experience of female faculty were identified by Gibson (2004). The themes noted were: (a) having someone who truly cares and acts in one’s best interest; (b) a feeling of connection; (c) being affirmed of one’s worth; (d) not being alone, and (e) politics.

The mentoring experience I have described in this article confirms and reinforces the research on mentoring of new faculty in higher education. The support of my mentor enhanced my orientation and socialization into the higher education culture. Loucrecia “mother-henned”

me in a gentle, yet firm way. She demonstrated to me that she truly cared about my success at the university. She affirmed my worth and initiated meetings that insured that I got connected immediately to others, thus reducing that often-experienced isolation that is found in the higher education culture. As was noted in the dialogue, Loucrecia even helped me, a Caucasian Yankee, navigate the politics of the Southern culture.

My mother hen, Loucrecia, took her self-appointed role as mentor seriously, offering me ongoing, consistent support throughout that critical first year. The result of our mentoring relationship was growth in my confidence and competence, and the development of my engagement in the culture of higher education. My mentor and mother hen was just what I needed as a first year professor.

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Biography

Linda Searby joined the faculty in Educational Leadership at the University of Alabama at Birmingham in August, 2005, where she teaches graduate courses in Leadership and Administration, Curriculum and Supervision, and Mentoring. Dr. Searby received her Ph.D. from Illinois State University. She has presented nationally on Preparing Protégés for Mentoring, Characteristics of Stuck and Moving Schools, Engaging Women in Mentoring Relationships, and Effective Leadership. Dr. Searby's research interests include mentoring from the protégé's perspective and mentoring new school leaders.

Dr. Loucrecia Collins is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. A veteran educator, she has been recognized as an outstanding teacher, principal, and professor. During her tenure at UAB, she has conducted research in the areas of bullying and conflict resolution to reduce school violence. Dr. Collins also researches current trends in urban education. She is a member of the Center for Urban Education and provides seminar to support teachers and principals in urban settings.

In an effort to expand student learning experiences, Dr. Collins is leading the Travel Abroad Program for the School of Education. She has lead a delegation of students to Rome, Florence, and Arezzo Italy to compare and contrast the educational experiences of students. Dr. Collins has also presented research internationally in Pescara Italy, Cambridge England, and Johannesburg South Africa .Her philosophy is "There are no barriers to learning, only opportunities for growth".