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Awareness of Mentors in the Peer-Mentoring Conferences

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This study examines the awareness of mentors before and after supervisory experience of mentees' teaching portfolios in the peer-mentoring conferences. Data arising from discussions with and reports from 11 mentors during six peer-mentoring conferences were recorded and analyzed using a qualitative data analysis method known as the Steps for Coding and Theorization method. Successive trials of this method revealed the following five points: (1) mentors used effective communication techniques in a timely fashion to help their mentees solve their own problems; (2) novice mentors were anxious and hesitated to ask questions or give advice to older mentees due to the imbalance in the relationship between the mentee and mentor; (3) mentors directly experienced various teaching methods, alternative modalities of learning, and styles of teaching and learning that affected students' achievements; (4) mentors shared experiences with their mentees and felt empathy with them as a result of their experience mentoring; and (5) novice mentors benefited from other mentors' actual expertise and management style in peer-mentoring conferences, which offer on-the-job-training for new mentors.

Keywords: Community of Practices, Mentoring, Faculty Learning Community, Peer Conference, Professional Development, Teacher Learning

Introduction

Professional Development in Higher Education

As interest in educational reform movements increases, faculty members are gaining more control over their professional lives, although mandated accountability has proved a challenge for some (Castle 2006). The literature suggests that the professional development for faculty can be enhanced though fostering scholarly teaching, that is, systematic and critical examinations of how learning can be improved in each discipline (Burbank & Kauchak 2003, Rathgen 2006, Taylor 2010). The most effective method to optimize faculty development practices is peer mentoring founded in real-world practices, which may enable faculty to examine their own practices, reflect on their methods, and socialize with mentors.

This working-together approach enables faculty to take on a truly collaborative role instead of a passive one. To encourage professional collaboration of this type, participants can use alternative forms of inquiry, such as conducting peer observation, reporting on their own practices, and collaboratively reflecting in the development of teaching portfolios. Peer mentoring has been implemented as a way to broaden faculty's ability to take control of their professional lives and create opportunities to publicize their views of educational expectations (Clarke & Hollingsworth 2002, Zwart et al.2008).

Empirical evidence on peer mentoring shows that the professional development for faculty can be improved through experimentation, observation, reflection, exchange of professional ideas, and shared problem

solving (Zwart et al. 2008). Nevertheless, the actual learning achieved by individual faculty that occurs as a result of peer mentoring has yet been described in detail (Castle 2006, Clarke & Hollingsworth 2002, Zwart et al.2008).

Mentor Training in Peer-Mentoring Conferences

Mentoring is viewed as an essential step to achieve career success. In the educational sphere, it is commonly accepted that mentors lead, guide, and advise another colleagues who are less experienced in a work situation that is characterized by mutual trust and belief. The emotional and social aspects of the mentoring process must be respected in the establishment of a mentor program. Mentors working with mentees must achieve competence in consulting, mediation, negotiation, intervention, and clinical supervision among others (Koki 1997, Ramani et al. 2006).

Researchers have concluded that mentoring is a valuable aspect of educational reform for novice teachers as well as experienced professionals. The formalization of the mentor role for experienced professionals creates another niche in the career ladder for faculty members, contributing to the professionalization of education (Koki 1997). However, not all mentors recognize the value of the mentoring relationship. Mentors and educators in specialized areas rarely receive training on mentoring, so they are often ill equipped to face the challenges that ensue when a major mentoring responsibility is taken on (Ramani et al. 2006). Such mentors require opportunities to practice their skills and develop effective mentoring and strategies to recognize problems in a relationship (Ramani et al. 2006).

Actual outcomes, it should be noted, must be identified, including assessment of mentee satisfaction, the supervision of a supervisor, and self-reflection based on real mentoring experiences, followed by in-depth discussion and feedback in peer conferences (Burbank & Kaucheck 2003, Koki 1997).

Research Questions

This study defined how mentors perceived mentorship as professional development and how they evaluated a peer mentoring conference as a peer-support system. Under the heading of this main aim, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What did you do in your role as a mentor?
2. What problems and difficulties did you experience during mentoring?
3. How do you feel about your own development as a professional or a mentor?
4. What is your opinion of the peer-mentoring conference?

Project Focus

Teaching Portfolio as Tool for Professional Development

In current higher education, colleges and universities are increasingly seeking for portfolios, which can be a powerful tool to address the growing tendency to take teaching more seriously. Seldin et al. (2010) describe teaching portfolios as including documents and materials that collectively suggest the scope and quality of a professor's teaching performance, forming a factual description of the teaching strengths and accomplishments of that professor. They also emphasized that a solid portfolio contributes to both sounder tenure and promotion decisions and to the professional development of individual faculty members. There have been various definitions of a portfolio, one contemporary view is that it is "a powerful, collaborative, self-reflective collection of student work over time that shows evidence of self-reflection and learning in education" (Takone & Wilburn 2004). Providing a rational and equitable basis for promotion decisions is a central reason for requiring a teaching portfolio. Moreover, portfolio development must focus on personalization of one's preparation for the profession.

Workshop at Osaka Prefecture University College of Technology

Beginning in 2009, Osaka Prefecture University College of Technology has held an intensive three-day seminar, led by mentor teachers, focusing on the creation of teaching portfolios for higher education. This event is designed to engage mid-career faculty members and bring the theory, practice, and scholarship of teaching and learning home to them while establishing and supporting a faculty community of practice to provide mentorship and leadership.

The faculty participants enrolled in this seminar reflect on their own teaching practice as they create their own teaching portfolios. They collaborate with teaching mentors and hold one-on-one meetings with them at least twice a day to critically examine and discuss scholarly topics regarding teaching and learning within their disciplines. The mentors also have the opportunity to consult with a supervisor, who is experienced in teaching and mentoring

different levels of trainees, at peer-support mentor meetings. According to Ramani et al. (2006), the problems of some mentees may overstep the boundaries of the usual mentor–mentee relationship. In such cases, mentors should not be forced to take on roles that they do not have expertise for but should be supported by a network of specialists and other mentors. The faculty-member mentees draw learning from three sources: (a) the processes involved in portfolio creation, (b) the mentoring and collaboration that is often associated with the process of portfolio creation, and (c) the feedback given on the completed portfolio (Zeichner & Wray 2001, Wolf 1994). In our seminar at Osaka Prefecture University College of Technology, we focus on the second area mentioned above: the mentorship relationship between mentors and mentees and the supportive collaboration among mentors.

Research Design & Methods

Participants

Nine mentors and two supervisors participated in this project and were divided into two groups: A and B. Table 1 presents the participants' according to their mentoring experience, academic background, and affiliation. Among the 11 mentors, three were 3 novice mentors (D, E, and K) who had never worked with mentees before.

Table 1

Mentors' and Mentees' profiles in workshop

Group	Mentor (Age)	Mentoring experience	Mentors' Academic background	Mentors' Affiliation	Mentees' (Age)	Mentees' Academic background	Mentees' Affiliation
Group A	A* (Fifties)	More than five times	Chemistry	Technical College	L	Dentistry	Community College
	B** (Forties)	More than five times	Chemistry	Technical College	-	-	-
	C (Forties)	Four times	Mechatronics	Technical College	M	Nursing	University
	D (Forties)	First time	Mechanical Engineering	Technical College	N	Nursing	University
	E (Thirties)	First time	Education	University	O (Thirties)	Mathematics	Technical College
Group B	F* (Fifties)	More than five times	Educational Technology	University	P (Forties)	Japanese Literature	Technical College
	G (Fifties)	More than five times	Mechatronics	Technical College	Q (Forties)	Early Childhood Education	Community College
					R (Forties)	Nursing	University
	H (Fifties)	More than five times	Mathematics	Technical College	S (Forties)	English	Technical College
					T (Twenties)	Chemistry	Technical College
	I (Forties)	More than five times	Information Science	Technical College	U (Fifties)	Nursing	University
	J (Forties)	Three times	Chemistry	Technical College	V (Forties)	Nursing	University
	K (Thirties)	First time	Chemistry	Technical College	W (Fifties)	Nursing	University

(* supervisor, ** coordinator)

Procedure

Each mentor group separately held six mentor meetings to discuss how to support mentees and promote collaborative mentorship for the creation of teaching portfolios. With the participants' permission, two group discussions were conducted and recorded. As shown in Table 2, group A recorded discussions and reports at all six peer-mentor conferences, but group B only recorded their discussion only during the final meeting, which was held

on August 10, 2016. In the group discussions, a supervisor acted as a facilitator and encouraged the participants to reflect on the mentoring process and what changes were seen before and after the mentoring experience. In interviewers, the researchers primarily addressed the mentors' perceptions of their learning from the mentoring process and asked mentors to describe the process.

Table 2

Recorded data of the peer-mentoring conferences

	Group	Participant	Date	Recording Time (mins.)	Main Topic of Discussion
1	A	One supervisor, four mentors	Aug.8	19:51	Self-introduction; Reflection on the first day of mentoring
2	A	One supervisor, four mentors	Aug.8	81:12	Reflection on the first day of mentoring
3	A	One supervisor, four mentors	Aug.9	46:26	Second draft of the teaching portfolio
4	A	One supervisor, four mentors	Aug.9	50:45	Reflection on the second day of mentoring
5	A	One supervisor, four mentors	Aug.10	30:53	Progress report of each mentee
6	A	One supervisor, four mentors	Aug.10	40:58	Reflection on mentoring; the role of the mentor meeting
7	B	One supervisor, five mentors	Aug.10	63:25	Reflection on mentoring; the role of the mentor meeting

Data Analysis

The authors transcribed the audio recordings. The transcripts were analyzed using the Steps for Coding and Theorization (SCAT) method, a sequential, thematic qualitative data-analysis technique (Otani 2008, 2011). It includes coding steps from open to selective, storyline creation using final selective codes, and creating theories from the storyline. Accordingly, each utterance of each mentor was considered to be a single recording unit. These recording units were classified into categories and subcategories on the basis of their similarity of semantic content, with further themes extracted thereafter (Aomatsu et al. 2017, Masunaga et al. 2017, Kato 2014). This approach was selected for its explicit analysis process, in that the process integrates qualitative data analysis with theoretical coding, and for its efficiency and validity of theorization from relatively small-scale data (Aomatsu et al. 2017, Otani 2008).

In total, 495 units were extracted from the transcripts of the two final meetings held on August 10, 2016. In all, 129 units were extracted from the data recorded (40:58 min) at the sixth meeting of group A, and 366 units were extracted from the data (63:25 min) of group B.

Results

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis identified nine main categories and 26 subcategories, shown in Table 3. Examples of each aspect of the nine main themes are provided below, with subcategories and main categories denoted by angle brackets (<…>) and square brackets ([…]), respectively. In the paragraphs that follow, double quotation marks ("…") denote representative descriptions, and the numbers inside brackets denote unit numbers for each participant in Table 1. The aim was to define how mentors perceive mentorship as professional development and how they evaluated the peer-mentoring conference as a peer-support system.

Table 3

Main categories and Subcategories based on SCAT

Main categories /subcategories	Representative descriptions
1) [Values of Teaching Portfolio]	
<Bridge between theory and practice>	"Using manuals for educational improvement, educators cannot explain educational philosophy and ideas on which their classroom practice is based. On the other hand, TP (Teaching portfolio) is the effective tool for connecting theories and practices to improve educational skills" (*Mentor K, 292).*
<Collaborative problem solving>	"I think my role as mentor is to help mentees see new value in their practices. After the three-day workshop, I hope that my mentees will find a new image of themselves" (*Mentor H, 278).*
<Individual problem finding>	"Because mentees have different problems, they need to find individual solutions by mentoring with their mentors. Manuals cannot provide solutions appropriate for all mentees" (*Mentor J, 326).*
2) [Human- relationship management skills]	
<Acceptance of mentee>	"Even if my mentee's opinion was different from mine, I respected their idea. They believed that this was important" (*Mentor H, 125).*
<Questions to promote mutual understanding>	"I truly want to get to know my mentee, so I asked them questions. By asking questions, I was able to understand them better. By answering my questions, my mentee (faculty member W) also recognized their own educational philosophy and principles" (*Mentor D, 12).*
<Understanding the mentee's concerns>	"Through mentoring with young faculty members, I came to understand some of the worries and anxieties in young people. I realized that the hardships I experienced in my young days were limited and not serious" (*Mentor J, 332).*
3) [Attending to the mentee's awareness]	
<Questions/conversations to promote mentee's self-awareness>	"Mentors should understand mentee's viewpoints and help their mentees self-reflection though conversation. This conversation is more important than merely guiding their mentees" (*Mentor G, 89).*
<Waiting for the mentee's response>	"My mentee responded to my questions the following day. He said that he understood what I meant by my question" (*Mentor J, 289).*
<Respect for mentee>	"I became easer after advising my mentees that their teaching portfolios depended on their choices" (*Mentor I, 151).*
4) [Reflection on immature mentor]	
<Difficulties of human relations >	"One-on-one meetings were really hard for me. It was really hard" (*Mentor I, 179).*
<Inductive approach>	"I had to wait a full minute for my mentee's response, and I became afraid that they could not say anything" (*Mentor H, 16).*
<Self-awareness of immaturity>	"I wonder how much I am really able to support my mentees. I think that my mentees might be able to create better teaching portfolios themselves than with my support" (*Mentor C, 24).*
<Lack of a sense of achievement >	"I only listened to my mentee talk and could not help them reflect on their practices and expertise by asking questions" (*Mentor K, 257).*
5) [Satisfaction with mentee's growth]	
<Mentee's change>	"I was satisfied with the change and progress I saw in my mentee. They said that they could notice the different in the role he could play that he had not identified before the mentoring" (*Mentor H, 278).*
<Feeing empathy with mentee>	"I was able to share things with my mentee" (*Mentor I, 111).*
<Escort runner for TP creation>	"I shared experiences creating TP with my mentee, which is a stable and common part of the mentor's role" (*Mentor D, 13).*
6) [Data collection for mentors' educational improvement]	
<Interest in other fields>	"I was able to make contact with a faculty member is focusing on unfamiliar fields and areas" (*Mentor D, 10).*
<Learning teaching methodology >	"Through mentoring, I was able to learn teaching practices from my mentee" (*Mentor E, 2).*
<Interactive data collection at first hand>	"Through mentoring, I was able to could ask about their teaching practices at first hand and hear the answers from them directly" (*Mentor I, 238).*
7) [Learning from other mentors]	
<Knowledge of mentoring>	"Conversation during the meeting helped me understand how to support my mentee and what checkpoints should be to observed, and these were important opportunities for a novice mentor" (*Mentor E, 3).*
<Noticing lack of mentoring>	"I missed important perspectives by not listening to other mentors' reports" (*Mentor K, 265).*
8) [Multi-vocal support system]	
<Advice from other mentors>	"In the peer conference, we received comments from other mentors as well

	as our supervisor" (*Mentor J, 340).*
<Conversational circulation >	"In the peer conferences, we obtained information from other mentors and returned to our mentees, able to discussion things with them. We were able to guide and support our mentees based on the discussion with other mentors" (*Mentor G, 93).*
9) [On-the-job-training]	
<Follow up to failure>	"I am used to mentoring, but I was so embarrassed by my lack of success at it. Had I thought that I was not to be a mentor" (*Mentor A, 36).*
<Overcome personal limitations>	"Because of my first experience mentoring, I generally focused on only a limited part of my mentee's issues. Thanks to the peer conferences, I expanded my perspective" (*Mentor D, 88).*
<Milestones in mentoring>	"In one peer-conference, a supervisor mentioned the idea of a checkpoint, which helped me a lot" (*Mentor C, 99).*

Mentoring Experiences between Mentors and Mentees

Following the first research question, "What did you do in your role as a mentor?" the nine itemized subcategories were aggregated into three main categories: [Values of teaching portfolio], [Human-relationship management skills], and [Attending to the mentee's awareness]. Among these three main categories, the first category [Values of teaching portfolio] indicated a positive evaluation by the mentors of creating teaching portfolios as a communication tool among academic professionals. The other two main categories indicated effective attitudes and communication techniques that would be within the toolkit of a good mentor.

The second research question "What problems and difficulties did you experience during the mentoring?" prompted us to aggregate four itemized subcategories into one main category: [Reflection on mentor immaturity]. This main category included the following four subcategories: <Difficulties in human relations>, <Inductive approach>, <Self-awareness of immaturity>, and <Lack of a sense of achievement>. Especially in the case of an unbalanced mentee–mentor relationship, novice mentors become anxious and hold back from asking questions or giving advice to older mentees, contenting themselves with merely listening to their stories. Novice mentors reported the excellence of their mentees excellence and asked the advice of other mentors in the peer-mentoring conference, as shown in the quotations from Mentor K (*unit 257*) and Mentor C (*unit 24*) shown in Table 3. Novice mentors tend to be anxious and hesitate to ask questions of and give advice to older mentees.

The third research question, "How do you feel about your own development as a professional or a mentor?" suggested aggregating six itemized subcategories into two main categories: [Satisfaction with mentee's growth] and [Data collection for mentors' educational improvement], which identified the benefits in being a mentor.

The category [Satisfaction with mentee's growth] included the following three subcategories: <Change in the mentee>, <Feeing empathy with the mentee>, and <Escorting the runner for TP creation>, which showed that the mentoring experience promoted growth and change as an educator.

The other main category [Data collection for mentors' educational improvement] suggested that mentors could learn from mentee's the rich educational experiences of mentees in mentoring, as occurred in Mentor E's (*unit 2*) report, as shown in Table 3. This category indicated that mentors can enrich and expand their teaching skills in mentoring. In particular, novice mentors who did not have much teaching experience encountered various teaching methods and strategies as indifferent subjects of conversation with their mentees. Experienced mentors, through mentoring with young faculty members, found opportunities to come to know more about other the worries and anxieties of other teachers, which they never experienced.

Factors contributing to the peer conferences that fell under the fourth research question were grouped into three subcategories [Learning from other mentors], [Multi-vocal support system], and [On-the-job training].

In the analysis, the function of the peer conference was found to have multiple dimensions: <Knowledge of mentoring>, <Noticing lack of mentoring>, <Advice from other mentors>, and <Conversational circulation>. In the peer conferences, mentors collaboratively examined <Follow up to failure> and <Overcome personal limitations>.

At the peer–mentor meetings, mentors recognized mistakes and changed their mentoring strategies through discussion with others, which was a form of on-the-job training. For example, a younger mentor reported that "Conversations during in the meeting helped me understand how to support my mentee and what checkpoints should be observed, and these were important opportunities for a novice mentor" (*Mentor E, unit 3).* Even experienced mentors, such as Mentor G and Mentor J, also emphasized the importance of other mentors' opinions.

Discussion

This study was designed as qualitative and exploratory, intended to define how mentors perceive mentorship as professional development and how they would judge a peer-mentoring conference, relative to its

function as a peer-support system. The authors focused on the mentorship experience as it occurred between mentors and mentees and the supportive collaboration that was formed among mentors. Through a three-day teaching portfolio workshop at Osaka Prefecture University College of Technology, discussions at the final meeting were analyzed using the SCAT method. With SCAT, the authors integrated qualitative data analysis with theoretical coding, which proved efficient and valid as theorization from the relatively small-scale data provided by the 11 mentors. The qualitative data analysis revealed the following five points:

First, with regard to the first research question on the mentor's role, most mentors reported that asking questions in a timely fashion and taking an accepting attitude toward their mentee were effective. Relative to the category [Values of teaching portfolio], the mentors also recognized the importance of other communication skills and attitudes, such as [Human relationship management skills] and [Attending to the mentee's awareness], to help mentees identify their problems. They concluded that their role as mentors was to help their mentees find new value in their practices.

Second, several mentors reflected that they were immature. For example, Mentor K stated, "I only listened to my mentee talk and could not help them reflect on their practices and expertise by asking questions" (*unit 257*). His mentee was a full university professor and had acquired rich experience as an educator and researcher. Faced with this, Mentor K was anxious, hesitating to ask questions and give advice to an older mentee, due to the lack of balance between the mentee and mentor.

Third, dialog between mentors and mentees allowed mentors to directly experience different teaching methods and alternative modalities of learning and styles of teaching. As a benefit of becoming a mentor, a professor (*Mentor I)*, who taught information science at a technical college, said "Through mentoring, I was able to ask about their teaching practices at first hand and hear the answers from them directly" (*Mentor I, unit 238*). He emphasized that meaningful discussion with his mentee was useful for him, as he had never received formal teaching instruction teacher. Listening to his mentee's expertise, he discovered transformative pedagogy and teaching tips that were used in nursery education and training. This collaboration with his mentee turned into professional development for the mentor himself. Previous researches focused on the professional development of mentees in preservice education (Zeichner &Wray 2001, Zwart et al.2008), but we identified the benefits in being a mentor.

Fourth, from a psychological point of view, the mentors as a whole were satisfied with the change they saw in their mentees change. Even experienced mentors reflected on their own educational experiences in their discussions with younger mentees. For example, "Through mentoring with young faculty members, I came to understand some of the worries and anxieties in young people. I realized that the hardships I experienced in my young days were limited and not serious" (*Mentor J, unit 332).*

Finally, relative to the function of the peer conference, novice mentors came to benefit from the actual expertise and management style of other mentors to help develop teaching portfolios. This study concluded that the peer conference contributed to the enhancement of the professional growth of both mentees and mentors, with on-the-job training taking place for new mentors. Although Kurita (2011) indicated a strategy for successfully implementing the teaching portfolio in higher education institutions in Japan, she focused on planning the appropriate structure of the portfolio, providing comprehensive information, and supporting networking among institutions. This research identified assessment of mentee satisfaction, the supervision of a supervisor, and self-reflection based on real mentoring experiences in peer conferences.

This study, however, had some limitations. Because it was qualitative study, there were limitations to the analysis of the mentor–mentee coaching dyads. However, its findings might be useful for future qualitative studies that would require clarity on mentorship and peer conferences.

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