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ARTICLE



Mentoring supports and mentoring across difference: insights from mentees

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring relationships in higher education are recognized as a critical factor in preparing and socializing doctoral students and junior faculty for academic roles. We examined the practices of 12 educational leadership professors who were recipients of the Jay D. Scribner Mentoring Award, from the perspectives of 103 mentees who submitted letters in support of their nominations. The process-based relational mentoring framework was adopted for thematic analysis and two core interpretative dimensions formed: effective mentoring practices that were universally acknowledged as effective and considerations for mentoring across difference. Mentees reported effective mentor traits and practices, including being approachable and accessible, demonstrating humility and genuine care for others, and tailoring the experience to mentees' individualized needs. Findings also included insights related to mentoring across difference, in which mentors and mentees differed by gender and race/ethnicity.

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Introduction

Acquiring the skills and dispositions to succeed in academia is no small task. Professors must be productive across research, teaching, and service areas. Accordingly, preparation of doctoral students needs to be multifaceted, and junior faculty can benefit from ongoing guidance. Moreover, faculty members' successes will transfer to their students, who will comprise the next generation of scholars and leaders. Educational leadership (EDL) – the focus of the present study – fits within this pattern, as leadership preparation program quality relies heavily on the effectiveness of faculty members (LaMagdeleine, Maxcy, Pounder, & Reed, 2009).

What can be done to effectively prepare our doctoral students and junior faculty? Most view mentoring relationships as crucial in higher education and other work contexts (Johnson, 2016). However, researchers reveal that quality

professor-student and professor-junior faculty relationships are uncommon (Johnson, 2016; Mullen, 2009). Concerns involving mentoring access and quality are particularly pronounced for underrepresented students and junior faculty (Young & Brooks, 2008), which stems at least in part from challenges related to mentoring across difference (e.g., situations in which mentors and mentees differ by gender, ethnicity, race, etc.; Wilson-Ahlstrom, Ravindranath, Yohalem, & Tseng, 2017). Such issues may be particularly acute within EDL, which historically has been White-male dominated but more recently has been undergoing considerable demographic shifts (Hackmann & McCarthy, 2011).

Accordingly, the purpose of our study was to examine the practices of EDL professors who have been recognized as exemplary mentors of doctoral students and novice faculty, to discern supports they provided to mentees and note how they mentored across difference. To do so, we analyzed mentees' letters written in support of 12 recipients of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Jay D. Scribner Mentoring Award.¹ We addressed two research questions: (a) What types of mentoring activities, features, and supports are identified and valued by mentees of exemplary mentors? (b) What strategies or practices may be helpful when mentoring across gender and racial/ethnic differences? In the literature review that follows, we reviewed mentoring research, focusing on higher education and EDL. We also describe concepts, issues, and opportunities related to mentoring across difference.

Mentoring within higher education and educational leadership

Mentoring can be defined as an interpersonal relationship in which a more experienced or skilled person (mentor) intentionally guides, supports, and counsels a less experienced or skilled person (mentee; Johnson, 2016). The mentees' development is the primary focus, but mentors also can experience benefits (Malin & Hackmann, 2016). Mentoring may be formally established through university programs or experiences provided by professional associations, or it may arise informally. Extant research has primarily addressed informally arising relationships in higher education (Johnson, 2016) and, although much scholarship exists, some key issues remain. The majority of mentoring research is based within corporate contexts (Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008), which differ markedly from higher education. Mentoring goals can vary greatly, and relational aspects and activities depend on personal and contextual factors. In EDL, for instance, most students maintain full-time employment in PK-12 systems while completing their doctoral studies (Baker, Wolf-Wendel, & Twombly, 2007). Further, many do not assume university faculty positions until later in their professional careers (Hackmann & McCarthy, 2011). Consequently, compared with other disciplines in higher education, the EDL mentoring experience likely includes considerable uniqueness. Accordingly, the uniqueness epitomized in this study addresses

mentees' perceptions of their effective mentoring supports provided by exemplary EDL mentors.

Some researchers have asserted that gender and racial/ethnic similarities between mentee and mentor can contribute to higher quality mentoring relationships due to their shared backgrounds and experiences, although others have cautioned that these surface similarities do not guarantee success (Paustian-Underdahl, King, Rogelberg, Kulich, & Gentry, 2017). In EDL, females and faculty of color are underrepresented in senior faculty positions (Hackmann & McCarthy, 2011). Consequently, cross-gender and cross-race mentoring is often essential. Mentoring across difference may require mentors in such dyads to surface and address the mentee's specific needs. Next, we note the extant mentoring research involving doctoral students and junior faculty.

Mentoring of doctoral students

Higher education mentoring relationships in the United States tend to emerge informally (Johnson, 2016), and some systemic features constrain mentoring's availability and strength. For example, professors tend to direct their pursuits to promotion and merit criteria, which often do not include mentoring expectations. Some may lack key skills and/or may be concerned about time and resources required to build a quality relationship (Johnson, 2016). Because mentoring often is not a job responsibility, professors can readily opt out of this professional obligation (Johnson, 2016), leaving doctoral students and junior faculty on their own to search for willing mentors.

Graduate mentoring typically aims to prepare students for career success, in academia or one's profession. It tends to be longer-lasting and more intensive than undergraduate mentoring (Johnson, 2016). Tenenbaum, Crosby, and Gliner (2001) described quality graduate mentoring as fulfilling three support functions: psychosocial ('role modeling, empathizing, and counseling,' p. 327), instrumental ('coaching, sponsorship, exposure, and...challenging assignments,' p. 327), and networking ('how often advisors helped students make connections within the field,' p. 332). Graduate mentoring research in the field of educational leadership has primarily focused on students' preparation for PK-12 administrative experiences (Clayton & Thessin, 2017; Daresh, 2004). More recently, formal mentoring supports of practicing school administrators have been described as leadership coaching (Lochmiller, 2014; Wise & Cavazos, 2017). The mentoring research for the EDL professoriate also primarily has emphasized the experiences of women or underrepresented students (Irby, Boswell, & Jeong, 2017; Kottkamp & Rusch, 2009). Students of color may be unaware of and negatively affected by a hidden curriculum, 'a system of privilege and exclusion embedded in academic contexts' (Reddick & Young, 2012, p. 415).

Welton, Mansfield, and Lee (2014) surveyed doctoral students, analyzing mentoring experiences by gender. Few statistically significant differences were

found, but most described mentoring as inadequate and suggested they would benefit from expanded research and writing supports. Young and Brooks (2008) interviewed EDL professors regarding their experiences supporting graduate students of color; they argued for race-sensitive mentorship, noting color- and difference-blind approaches perpetuate inequities and send negative messages to these students about the value of knowledge they possess. Ovando, Ramirez, and Shefelbine (2013) surveyed 18 diverse (relative to gender and ethnicity) EDL doctoral program completers, identifying mentoring as a key facilitator of degree completion. Students cited mentoring as crucial and valued professors who were responsive – willing to meet and provide support. Consequently, these students described being better positioned to meet academic challenges.

Collectively, although research involving EDL doctoral students discloses mentoring is valued, its quality and availability is often reported as insufficient. This issue is often compounded for females and/or students of color, who may be more likely to experience difficulties accessing quality mentoring supports. As such, EDL students' challenges in relation to mentoring appear to mirror what has been reported in other disciplines (Johnson, 2016). Yet, even though some researchers have explored educational leadership mentoring of students of color and females, it has not fully addressed mentoring relationships across difference, involving cross-gender and/or cross-racial dyads.

Mentoring of junior faculty

Mentoring can be an essential aspect as novice faculty members transition into the professoriate, so they are adequately socialized and understand professional expectations. Wilson-Ahlstrom et al. (2017) posit, 'having a good mentor early in a scholarly career can mean the difference between success and failure' (p. 1). For underrepresented junior faculty, for varied reasons, quality mentoring can be critical in promoting their career advancement, and its absence or insufficiency can be debilitating. Underrepresented faculty may be housed in departments and/or colleges in which they are the only person of color. As such, they will not be mentored by institutional colleagues with similar backgrounds (Wilson-Ahlstrom et al.). Guramatunhu-Mudiwa and Angel (2017) described their cross-racial faculty mentoring relationship in a predominately White institution, describing the importance of trust, care, and understanding dynamics of power.

More research is needed to understand the mentoring needs of junior faculty of color. Williams and Williams (2006) sought to learn from African American junior professors how they could be better supported, and they frequently requested involvement in formal mentoring programs. Most desired an African American mentor, though some said racial similarity was not as important as awareness of and sensitivity to issues they faced. Martinez, Chang, and Welton (2017) studied how junior faculty of color accessed social

capital when experiencing marginalization and racism. Quality mentoring was highlighted, including ‘constellation mentoring’ (p. 11) involving multiple mentors and mentees working collaboratively. Others have also cited the value of the formation of professional mentoring networks, with mentees accessing supports from multiple mentors (Johnson, 2016; Niehaus & O’Meara, 2015).

Junior faculty mentoring observations are thus consistent with what was reported regarding doctoral student mentoring. Junior faculty benefit from mentoring relationships, whether formal or informal, dyadic or networked. Quality relationships foster trust and learning, as well as an ‘increased sense of work, new knowledge, a sense of empowerment, increased zest, and a desire for more connection’ (Kram & Higgins, 2007, p. 3). Quality mentoring for junior faculty is not readily available, an issue that is compounded for junior faculty of color.

Theoretical framework

Our study was intended both to better understand effective mentoring relationships in educational leadership and how they may vary within the context of mentoring across difference. Accordingly, we developed and applied a conceptual framework grounded in process-based relational mentoring (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Kram, 1983; Ragins & Verbos, 2007) and mentoring across differences involving hidden obstacles and learning potentials (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005; Thomas, 2001).

In contrast to traditional mentoring conceptualizations, grounded in exchange norms, relational mentoring ‘widens the lens of mentoring to include mutual and interdependent relationships that function using communal norms to predict growth, learning, and personal and professional development’ (Ragins & Verbos, 2007, p. 96). Relational mentoring aspects include relational processes (e.g., reciprocity, mutual learning, and growth), interpersonal attributes (e.g., sensitivity, empathy, compassion, empowerment), and future-oriented developmental relationships (e.g., life satisfaction, balance, integration of conflicting roles; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). The mentor accordingly aims to promote mentee development, providing instrumental and psychosocial supports and balancing competing forces or roles (e.g., work-life balance, autonomy, and interdependence) during mentoring experiences (Duck, 2007). Process-based mentoring refers to Kram’s (1983) description of a complete mentoring circle that includes the phases of initiation (how the mentoring relationship forms), cultivation (how instrumental and psychosocial supports function), separation (mentee’s assumption of autonomy and termination of mentoring), and redefinition (formation of new roles of collegiality and friendship).

Within our framework, we also integrated mentoring across difference to further address the complex nature of relationship building within cross-race and/or cross-gender experiences. Mentoring across differences can manifest both as advantageous factors for inclusive and genuine learning or as challenges to the formation of healthy mentoring experiences. Akkerman and Bakker (2011) reviewed research disclosing the *potential for learning* is especially high at and across boundaries. Mullen (2016) termed mentoring experiences that differ by race and gender as 'diverse mentoring,' claiming 'it is unreasonable to assume that only female mentors can mentor female colleagues or only that mentors of color can mentor colleagues of color' (p. 133). Accordingly, we reason, diverse mentoring relationships (which may require crossing racial, ethnic, gender, and/or other boundaries) certainly can include challenges but also include vast potential for enriching conversations, mutual learning, and new understandings. Indeed, we surmised the mentors may be positioned to learn as much or more than their mentees in such relationships, if they are open to it.

Examples of successful instances of mentoring across difference (especially cross-race) are available in the research literature, albeit outside the EDL context. Stanley and Lincoln (2005), while acknowledging 'cross-race mentoring for diversity and faculty development is challenging for mentor and protégé alike' (p. 50), narrated their overall positive experiences and also testified to the 'rich learning' (p. 50) they experienced. Likewise, Thomas (2001) described cross-race mentoring in the corporate world, noting how pivotal it was to mentees' career advancement and success. He also highlighted their vast and transformative learning potential for both mentors and mentees:

race differences enabled them to explore other kinds of differences, thus broadening the perspectives of both parties. That education was invaluable because people who can fully appreciate the uniqueness of each individual are more likely to be better managers and leaders. Indeed...mentors have frequently reported those relationships were the most fulfilling in terms of their own growth and transformation. (pp. 105–106)

Yet, exploring advantages is not meant to diminish the possibility for conflicts and misunderstandings. Thomas (2001) reported several potential obstacles to effective mentoring relationships. The first is a mentor may hold negative stereotypes about his/her mentee and may not provide 'that support until the prospective protégé has proven oneself worthy of investment.' (p. 104). The second obstacle involves identification through shared similarities: If the mentor cannot see parts of his/herself in the mentee, he/she may experience difficulties personally identifying with the mentee and 'might not be able to see beyond the protégé's weaknesses' (Thomas, p. 105). Third, mentoring across differences may suffer from 'protective hesitation,' causing 'both parties [to] refrain from raising touchy issues' (p. 105). Thus, both parties engaged in mentoring across differences may be reluctant to develop an intimate

relationship and to be vulnerable with one another. Blake-Beard (2009, p. 15) noted, 'mentoring is always fraught with the concern of how to cross boundaries, how to bridge cultural differences to show yourself, and to accompany another on their journey.' Accordingly, as we address mentoring across difference, we are attentive to both tensions, challenges, and suggestions of elevated learning.

Integrating process-based relational mentoring and mentoring across differences enables us to consider mentoring relationships from a broader perspective. Under this framework, we identify the activities, features, and supports that characterize quality relationships, and investigate how they may engage or relate with mentoring across racial or gender differences.

Methods and data sources

We explored the mentoring experiences and relationships from mentees' perspectives. To identify core themes, we content analyzed nomination letters submitted for the 12 Jay D. Scribner Mentoring Award recipients honored between 2006 and 2016, who are EDL professors in the U.S. Of these, 6 are White males, 4 White females, and 2 minority females. One hundred and forty-eight letters were submitted in support of these individuals' nominations, and we retained letters from those who reported being directly mentored by the recipients. Our analyses were based on 103 nomination letters. Of these, 69 (67%) were written by females and 34 by males (33%); 63 were White (61%) and 40 were persons of color (39%). This study represents the first phase of our research; the second phase involved interviews of the 12 recipients and a subgroup of their mentees.

Because less is known regarding exemplary mentoring experiences from EDL mentees' perspectives, we followed the constant comparative method in coding and identifying tentative themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Building on our repeated readings of the nomination letters, we gained familiarity with the materials. The first author extracted core themes and categories explaining the mentoring experience and relationship at the within-subject level. Then, the second and third author recoded. Finally, we jointly reviewed the discrepancies regarding the core themes to reach final agreement. Under the guidance of a process-based relational mentoring framework emphasizing mentees' perspectives, effective relationship building, and mentoring across gender and/or racial/ethnic differences, we analyzed the mentoring activities, features, and supports that mentees highlighted in their letters. We also identified strategies or insights that can be utilized to traverse possible obstacles when mentoring across difference.

Findings

In this section we present our study findings. As noted above, we applied the process-based relational mentoring framework to address our research questions. Upon integrating emergent categories, we identified two core interpretative dimensions: universally effective mentoring practices and considerations for effectively mentoring across difference.

Universally effective mentoring practices

The integrative dimension of effective mentoring practice included the following subthemes: mentor accessibility, instrumental supports, psychosocial supports, relationship building, and career advancement. These subthemes are described in this section.

Mentor accessibility

Mentee nomination letters revealed that the mentor's accessibility was essential to the relationship's formation and maintenance. Being approachable helps potential mentees assess the professor's sensitivity and willingness to invest in the experience. Approachable mentors tended to evidence the following attributes, as identified by their mentees: (a) a humble and caring disposition, (b) strong commitment to mentees, and (c) willingness to align mentoring supports with mentees' specific needs.

Humble and caring disposition

Mentees reported their mentors were humble, honest, generous, caring, and friendly, and these qualities promoted positive rapport. One mentee reported being nervous when preparing to meet a 'big name' in her field, but her mentor's 'down-to-earth approach and the wonderful combination of humility, extraordinary knowledge, and wisdom' put her at ease. A female mentor was described as 'a humble and approachable person who loves to share her extensive knowledge with others and especially her students.' Genuine caring and concern for doctoral students or junior faculty was described by mentees as 'natural,' 'spontaneous outpouring,' 'perpetuated in everything the mentor does,' and going 'above and beyond the call of duty to help others.' Another mentee stated, 'it is his [mentor's] genuine interest and concern for their [the mentees'] fledgling careers that is the most notable.'

Strong commitment to mentees

From mentees' accounts, all 12 mentors displayed strong commitments to forming supportive relationships and to their mentees' advancement. Mentors' commitments were primarily epitomized through their generous investment of time and energy. One mentee reported his mentor 'always has

time for her students' and 'always [has been] there to mentor us as professionals.' Mentees stated their mentors displayed some version of an 'open door' policy; one noted her mentor's 'door was always open to us, even if we didn't have an appointment.' Another mentee revealed her mentor's 'willingness and availability are outstanding traits because she always makes time for me.' Commitments to mentoring experiences were embodied through descriptions of regular meetings and activities that occurred between mentors and mentees. One indicated her mentor 'regularly organizes meetings to brainstorm ideas for research questions which can be answered using the data which he has available through the [research center].'

Aligning supports to mentees' specific needs

Mentors tailored their supports to mentees' unique needs, adjusting their own research projects and plans rather than pushing mentees to conform. For instance, a mentee indicated, 'Whenever I call to schedule a meeting, she readjusts her calendar to make time for me.' Another mentee noted how supports were personalized: 'She instructed and explained by asking questions rather than telling me what and how to revise a manuscript...Over time, my mentor has allowed my voice to emerge during our discussion about research, affirming my development as a scholar.' Some mentees mentioned their mentors' willingness to listen and make changes to adapt to students' needs in teaching or research training. One indicated the mentor 'really listens to graduate students. He actively solicits our reflections on what the program can do to better prepare us professionally, and he works to ensure that those supports are provided.'

Instrumental supports

Instrumental supports include experiences and resources that are provided to promote the mentee's development of the knowledge and skills needed for success in the professoriate (Kram, 1985). Instrumental supports included the following: developing teaching skills, research-oriented training, and demystifying the codes of academia.

Developing teaching skills

Mentors provided opportunities and resources for doctoral students and junior faculty to advance their instructional skills through collaborative work. One junior faculty mentee noted, '[my mentor] provided me with ample hands-on learning opportunities that included revising syllabi, planning lessons, co-teaching with local schools and districts.' Another noted, when he was a doctoral student, his mentor asked him to prepare for class together and gave him opportunity to 'take a small part in teaching a class.' Another described a personal benefit: 'as a result of co-teaching a Supervision of Instruction course, I received [a scholarship].' Another stated, when she was a teaching assistant, her mentor afforded me the opportunity to co-facilitate

numerous online class sessions for graduate students enrolled in a writing preparation and proposal development course, providing me another kind of pedagogical experience with which to prepare for a future role as a university professor.

Research-oriented training

Mentors worked closely with mentees to strengthen their research skills. Mentors typically provided comprehensive guidance through the entire research process – from initiation of the project through publication. Mentors conducted research alongside mentees, modeling effective research practices so mentees could strengthen their research skills. Mentors actively engaged with mentees to ensure they experienced success with presentations and publishing, collaboratively writing and submitting conference proposals, giving conference presentations, developing papers and manuscripts, and publishing in academic journals. One stated her mentor ‘organized mock presentations...to provide us opportunities to practice our presentations and receive feedback from our peers and him.’ Another summarized how her mentor assisted with presentations and publications: work on ‘large conceptual issues such as developing a theoretical framework,’ send back with ‘detailed conceptual feedback,’ correct minor ‘grammatical missteps,’ practice the mock presentation, give the actual presentation, and refine the paper to submit for publications consideration in peer-reviewed journals. In addition, mentors supported mentees’ development as journal reviewers and learning grant-writing skills. One noted his mentor asked him to serve ‘as a regional editor for the [academic journal] because he thought it would help develop my peer-review writing skills.’ Another indicated her mentor helped to enhance her ‘understanding of the grant writing and application process, the way I analyze data in group research projects, or the way I engage in editorial board work and meetings.’

Demystifying the codes of academia

Through their mentors’ guidance, mentees asserted it was critical to their professional success to understand the policies, practices, and politics within their institutions, including those that were hidden. This information was especially key for novice faculty, as they processed expectations for promotion and tenure and learned how to work collaboratively with their colleagues. One noted her mentor helped to ‘decod[e] the mysteries of academia for “non-traditional” students.’ Another reported her mentor’s ‘assistance in helping me navigate my way through the complex educational landscape of the academy has enabled me to excel professionally far beyond what I ever imagined.’ Another noted his mentor regularly coached him how to navigate the political environment within his department, identifying ‘who to watch out for and who to be careful around.’ Given that ‘academia can still be a sexist, racist, and

homophobic space,' one self-identifying queer mentee reported it was critical to work with a scholar who fights cultural obstacles 'for young LGBT scholars and scholars of color.'

Psychosocial supports

Psychosocial supports include affective or social caring behavior toward the protégé through role modeling, counseling, encouragement, friendship, or empowerment (Kram, 1985). Psychosocial supports are closely aligned with process-based aspects of relational mentoring (Ragins & Verbos, 2007). We identified two fundamental functions emerging from psychosocial supports and processes: providing a sense of safety and providing affirmation to the mentee. To promote mentees' psychological safety and well-being, mentors helped them cope with stressors by providing cultural, political, economic, and psychological supports. One mentee noted, 'my husband and I had just welcomed a very needy preemie into our family and my stress levels were through the roof.' Her mentor provided comfort and concern and 'took the time to validate my feelings.' Some mentors were reported to actively seek out financial supports for their graduate students who 'have been recruited to the university,' to 'present at national conferences,' or who were 'in financial crisis.'

Besides psychological safety, mentees benefited from inspirational and encouraging affirmations. One mentee noted, 'always, [his mentor] was behind me pushing, cajoling, motivating, inspiring...in his own inimitable way. He never seemed to miss an opportunity to include and groom me.' Another mentioned, 'she [my mentor] provides the perfect amount of motivation and push that is needed to support students...She was always in constant communication with me which made me feel as though I was not alone in the process.' Another described being motivated by her mentor's example 'to recognize systems that may be discriminatory to students with disabilities and act as a positive agent of change.'

Relationship building

Relationship building was highly valued, playing a pivotal role in initiating and maintaining quality relationships. Four subthemes emerged: (a) sustained mentoring experiences, (b) formal and informal mentoring opportunities, (c) developing interpersonal relationships, and (d) modeling work-life balance.

Sustained mentoring experiences

Most mentees reported they have maintained long-term relationships with their mentors, often beginning with their doctoral programs and extending beyond their attainment of promotion and tenure as faculty members. One reported her mentor 'does not see her job as completed with the conferring of the degree, but instead maintains on-going relationships with those students who have now become colleagues.' Another's mentor has kept in touch for more than 20 years

and 'continues to look out for me to this very day.' Another reported the mentoring relationship has been sustained through the years, although it has evolved as her academic identity has changed. She noted that in the past, 'I felt like a student she believed in, a student she supported, a student she coached. Now, I feel like her colleague and her friend.' Although most mentoring relationships were described as long-term in nature, some described short-term mentoring supports that were essential for their career development. A mentee indicated:

Through my own very limited, but nonetheless important-to-me, relationship with her [mentor], I'm inspired to do more and be more, to use scholarship and my stature in the professoriate to inform myself and others about the toughest issues we face as an educational system and a society, and to generously offer my own expertise and counsel to support others in their academic and professional journeys.

Formal and informal mentoring opportunities

Mentors and mentees entered into relationships through formal programs offered through professional associations and higher education institutions as well as through informal connections. Relationship building included informal and formal meetings, and mentees reported their mentors were involved in both formats with their numerous mentees. One explained, 'Not only does she advocate mentorship through formal structures, but she has personally mentored a number of graduate students and junior faculty members.' One observed his mentor formally served as a mentor 'for the Scholars of Color program of AERA.' Another reported she and her mentor 'regularly met – both informally and formally – to discuss issues related to my professional interactions.' Many described how the Scribner recipients aggressively advocated for expanding mentoring opportunities for doctoral students and novice faculty. For example, a mentee reported her mentor worked to promote a 'culture of mentoring in [numerous] venues at the local, state, national, and international levels' and professional organizations, such as 'the Mentoring SIG for AERA.' Mentors created networking opportunities for mentees, including them in 'institutional events and academic gatherings.'

Developing interpersonal relationships

Mentees cited the formation of deep personal relationships with their mentors, which included the development of relational trust. A mentee observed, 'we have built on a synergistic relationship and have established a strong personal relationship. I know that I can always count on her.' Another described how her mentor 'shared her personal story and was deliberate in establishing a relationship of trust and respect.' Close relationships permitted mentees to ask mentors "'dumb questions" that you need to know but don't know how best to ask.' One mentee reported this personal relationship meant his mentor 'weaved personal accounts – recalling his stint as a graduate student' and showed 'willing[ness] to be

vulnerable.’ Due to this strong relational bond, the mentee ‘found the strength to push myself academically.’ Forming personal bonds meant mentors and mentees often ‘exchanged personal information about family and friends and what was “going on” in our lives.’ One noted her mentor ‘made us laugh and learned about our personal lives; she is an immensely serious scholar but also a genuinely fun person.’ The personal relationship with the mentor was essential for a junior faculty member who works in a major research university ‘that can be cold and intimidating.’ Another explained mentoring ‘extended beyond the confines of professional conferences. On many occasions my phone would ring after midnight my time, 2 a.m. his time, rousing me from a deep sleep.’ He noted, ‘from these late night discussions came several journal articles and a couple of books. The phone calls and emails continue even to this day.’

Modeling work-life balance

The professoriate can be all-consuming; therefore, it was important that mentors demonstrated the necessity to maintain healthy work-life balance. From mentees’ reports, modeling this balance occurred in two ways. First, mentors modeled how to keep work responsibilities in check. One noted his mentor ‘was successful in his work, but still managed to develop other aspects of his life: family, church, travel and so on.’ Another reported her mentor ‘knows that learning is also about relationships. To know him is to know the pride he takes in his family...He and his wife never miss attending the opera.’ Second, mentees described instances in which mentors demonstrated concern for their personal well-being, helping them manage family-work tensions, as well as integrating into their new surroundings. One recalled her mentor ‘gave me time to sort out my life before she resumed her gentle dissertation nudges...it was okay to take life slowly for a while until things calmed down.’ Another noted when she moved to the community for her faculty position, she was recently divorced and with a young child, and she ‘felt much more comfortable’ when her mentor ‘extends personal concern for my well-being’ and invited her ‘a lunch on Christmas Eve and a dinner on Christmas Day.’

Mentoring within the context of gender and/or racial/ethnic differences

In this section we share findings related to mentors and mentees working across gender or racial/ethnic differences. We noted three themes: (a) addressing challenges or obstacles, (b) universal features of mentoring, and (c) sources of strength and encouragement. Of the 103 mentees who reported receiving direct mentoring from award recipients, 69 were females and 34 males; 63 were White and 40 were persons of color. Sixty-eight dyads were same-gender and 35 cross-gender. Regarding cross-racial/ethnic mentoring, 71 dyads were White-White or minority-minority and 32 were cross-racial difference dyads (White-minority or minority-White).

Addressing challenges or obstacles

Because nomination letters were submitted by individuals who self-selected and experienced positive mentoring, we surmised (and confirmed upon analysis) mentees would not directly cite persistent challenges or obstacles they experienced with mentoring across difference. Yet, we were interested in discerning whether they described how they may have encountered and resolved any issues involving cross-gender and/or cross-racial mentoring. Thus, we compared mentoring practices across difference with that of mentoring with similarities (gender or race/ethnicity), to identify differing experiences. For example, supportive actions highly valued in same-gender mentoring dyads, but not revealed in cross-gender mentoring, may still be regarded as potential obstacles facing mentoring across difference (e.g., forestalling initial relationship formation and/or making its further development more challenging). Similarly, challenges experienced within cross-race dyads may be indirectly revealed in same-race dyads. The number of same-gender mentoring dyads was close to two times that of mentoring across differences: 68 versus 35. Around one third of male (12 out of 34) and female mentees (23 out of 69) had faculty mentors who were the opposite gender.

We identified two consistently reported explanations of how gender differences may be viewed as an obstacle for mentees. The first relates to the fact that mentors who have had similar gender-related life or professional experiences sometimes are perceived as better equipped to empathize with what their same-gender mentees are experiencing. For instance, female mentees noted the desirability of having female mentors who could help address 'emotional needs' and 'provide sensitive guidance on how to navigate (psychological tensions).' Female mentees appreciated those who could help address and model how to 'maintain [a] healthy work-life balance.' One female mentee reported her female mentor 'continues to be a mother-scholar-teacher-mentor' and 'has given her advice on successful work life balance, particularly as a woman in higher education.' Another consideration of gender differences as obstacles relates to a patriarchal culture that exists in many higher education institutions. One female mentee – a junior faculty member – noted she was distressed by the departmental culture promoting 'the paternalism and blatant dismissal of women faculty as equals,' and her female mentor helped her 'to learn to be proactive and an advocate for herself.' Another female mentee appreciated that her mentor 'shares her own academic journey as a female' and 'a brilliant, caring, and giving individual.' Thus, mentors were able to surface and address these issues for female mentees.

In terms of mentoring with regard to racial differences, there were 71 same-race mentoring dyads, which is approximately two times the 32 dyads across racial differences. One challenge is White mentors may not recognize that some mentees of color seek an encouraging, supportive process to strengthen their academic skills, build self-confidence, and foster the development of

mutual trust and collaborative work. Some mentees from underrepresented groups reported they did not initially possess the self-confidence and associated motivation to pursue the doctoral degree or pursue a university professorship. One mentee of color noted she never thought it was possible to pursue the doctoral degree because she came from a 'low-income, single parent, and urban community.' One female mentee of color reported 'at times (she) suffers from the well-documented "imposter syndrome" that females, people of color, and other members of non-dominant groups regularly experience in the academy.' Moreover, a university institutional culture that promotes independent work, self-confidence, and personal advocacy seems contradictory with the mentoring culture that values personal caring, compassion, and interdependency. Higher education, noted one mentee, can be 'cold and intimidating,' which another reported 'may be isolating for students with complex needs.' Added a mentee of color, 'academia can still be a sexist and racist' space, which can present challenges for underrepresented students and scholars of color. Altogether we deduce that mentors in cross-race relationships must at minimum be sensitive to and empathetic about the significant challenges these environments (e.g., major research universities and cultures, predominately White institutions) can present.

Universal features of mentoring

Through comparing same-gender and/or same-race mentoring practices with mentoring across difference, we found although psychosocial supports within relational mentoring experiences were deeply affected by gender and/or race/ethnicity differences, instrumental supports were valued by all mentoring dyads. Exemplary mentoring relationships primarily emphasize instrumental supports, regardless of whether dyads are same-sex, same-race, cross-sex, or cross-race. For example, one White female mentee described detail-oriented guidance from her mentor: 'she reads every word. She writes thought provoking comments throughout each chapter. Her close attention to detail improved my scholarship and challenged me to write with greater precision.' A male mentee of color noted his mentor 'has worked very hard to create publishing opportunities for these students and their mentors in top journals.' Instrumental supports were embodied in multiple ways, as mentors helped mentees enhance their teaching and research skills, as well as supporting them on their promotion and tenure journeys. One male mentee of color noted his mentor provided professional guidance about 'the tenure process, building a research agenda, suggestions for submission of manuscripts, writing with a clear purpose, and collaborating on several research projects.'

Sources of strength and encouragement

Through some descriptions, we learned mentor-mentee differences could be illuminated and seized upon as a positive force to facilitate strong relationships. We identified three strategies from mentees' perspectives, which can

transform gender or racial differences into generative strengths or benefits for successful mentoring. First, the mentor must be sensitive about potential challenges or stressors a mentee may experience, related to gender or racial/ethnic differences, that can affect relationship quality and the mentee's overall experience. The sense of safety, feeling trust, being intrinsically motivated, and positive confirmation from the mentor will prepare a mentee for high-quality connection with his/her mentor. For example, a mentee commended her mentor, who intervened on the principle that 'we have to do something when there are faculty members here that do not feel safe in their jobs because of their identity.' This awareness was expressed, regardless of whether the mentee was male, female, White, a person of color, etc. One minority female mentee stated her White female mentor cared 'a lot about the level of understanding of each student' and 'was instilling in her the passion for the professorate.' One minority female stated her White female mentor's affirmation, 'you are not counterfeit and don't you forget that,' provided encouragement when she experienced 'imposter syndrome.' Similarly, a minority male mentee reported he gained self-confidence when his White male mentor stated, 'being Dr. (mentee name) is not only possible, but probable.'

Willingness to communicate one's vulnerability is another powerful strategy to transform racial or gender differences into strength. For mentors, doing so meant humbling one's own knowledge and position, diminishing hierarchical differences, and hearing and supporting the mentee. A minority female noted her White mentor 'would not have taken a position of authority, forcing her to accept her view.' Another minority female mentee reported her White mentor helped her revise a manuscript in a caring way to 'see where (she) could grow' and 'without inciting defensiveness on (her) part.' A minority male mentee found the 'strength to push myself academically' through the openness and encouragement of his White mentor.

For mentees in cross-gender or cross-racial/ethnic dyads, being vulnerable involved the willingness to open oneself to personally commit to and actively engage in the mentoring process. A minority female mentee shared she was 'hesitant when initially meeting with her mentor because she never had a mentor across the boundary of race.' Yet, when she 'allowed herself to be open to this relationship,' she found her White female mentor 'truly cares about her well-being and development.' Another minority female mentee stated that while she initially 'was somewhat on guard' around her cross-gender and cross-race mentor, she quickly realized his generosity was part of his caring disposition of being supportive of junior faculty.

Self-reflection and critiques on the institutionalized culture of inequality and privilege provided another mechanism to promote mentoring relationships across gender and racial differences. One mentee of color reported her cross-racial female mentor 'made her personally reflect on her own biases and misinformed socialization in ways that caused important changes in my

personal and professional disposition.’ One female mentee reported her male mentor encouraged her to question educational systems that could be isolating and inequitable for underrepresented students and to ‘act as a positive agent of change.’ Another female mentee emphasized her male mentor’s critical lens of surfacing social justice issues ‘not only changed the course of her career trajectory, but it also set her on a course of being passionate about academic work on schooling issues that affect those who are often marginalized in K12 schooling setting.’ Mentors’ dedication to equality, diversity, and social justice inspired mentees to ‘emulate the way that the mentor reaches out to emerging scholars and gives clear advice, focused entirely on the new scholar’s best interests and with no hidden agendas.’

Discussion, implications, and recommendations

Through analysis of letters written in support of Jay D. Scribner Mentoring Award recipients, we examined mentee perceptions of how mentors promoted their preparation for and entry into the EDL professoriate. Our qualitative study was limited in three ways. First, because our research relied on nomination letters that likely addressed specific criteria for this award, our analysis was restricted to this written content. Extensive interviews of mentees could provide additional insights into mentoring practices they may not have included in their letters. Interviewing of both mentees and mentors will be conducted in the second phase of this project. Second, although additional individuals have been nominated for the Scribner award who also may meet the criteria for serving as exemplary mentors, we included only the mentees of the 12 individuals who received this award. Third, we acknowledge that only individuals who experienced positive mentoring from the Scribner recipients would have volunteered to write letters supporting their nominations. In addition, even if negative situations had occurred, mentees likely would not describe these aspects within nomination letters that were intended to highlight exemplary actions of these educational leadership faculty members. Yet, analysis of written statements from the 103 professionals reporting their involvement in quality mentoring provided a rich dataset and potentially valuable insights – both for doctoral students and novice faculty members who seek quality mentoring and for professors who seek to improve the richness of their mentoring supports.

We were interested in the relational aspects of mentoring (Ragins & Verbos, 2007), as one component of our conceptual framework. We found that mentees reported numerous process-based mentoring aspects of their mentors, including being accessible and approachable, attending to both psychosocial and instrumental supports, and being intentional with forming close working relationships and supportive bonds. Also, consistent with our framework, we explored how mentees and mentors functioning in cross-gender and cross-race dyads acknowledged and

drew upon their differences to strengthen the quality of their mentoring relationships and activities (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2017; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005). Approximately one third of the mentees in our study participated in cross-gender dyads, and nearly one third also participated in cross-race dyads. As a reminder, 6 of 12 (50%) Scribner recipients were White, and 2 (16.7%) were persons of color. Mentees participating in cross-race and/or cross-gender mentoring valued their mentors for helping to surface and address challenges they encounter, displaying sensitivity and genuine concern, and being consistent sources of strength and encouragement. In this section, we provide three recommendations, connecting our findings to the extant mentoring research.

Veteran educational leadership faculty members should match historically underrepresented EDL doctoral students and junior faculty with supportive mentors who are committed to mentoring across difference

Our analysis revealed some mentees who were mentored across cross-gender and/or cross-race differences, as well as those who have been historically underrepresented in the EDL professoriate, acknowledged initial trepidations about their competence and self-confidence as they entered these relationships. Concerns included traversing an institutional culture that may display sexism or racism, maintaining work-life balance, and feeling capable of earning a doctoral degree. Mentees reported mentors provided instrumental supports while also attending to psychosocial supports, which were particularly valued for females and persons of color. Indeed, some mentors overtly stated a deep commitment to social justice and advocated for the diversification of the professoriate. Thus, cross-gender and cross-race mentoring was celebrated as a strength as they encouraged mentees' advancement and entry into academe. This finding has important implications for our field. As Reddick and Young (2012) noted, mentors help mentees successfully navigate through institutional contexts and cultures that often privilege others and exclude females and persons of color. As mentors, faculty members must be compassionate, supportive and aware of issues related to gender and race/ethnicity that mentees may experience as they prepare for and enter the professoriate.

Educational leadership faculty members should examine institutional policies and practices to identify needed changes in institutional norms and departmental cultures that may restrict mentoring access

As we noted in stating our limitations, mentees who submitted nomination letters had experienced positive mentoring across difference. Therefore, they likely would not have acknowledged any challenges or inadequacies on the part of their mentors that may have impeded the development of their mentoring relationships. Challenges noted by mentees related to initial feelings of inadequacy, personal factors, and institutional cultures that may have hindered their

development as scholars, and they acknowledged that mentors served as advocates to help them overcome these issues. Their statements provide encouraging findings, compared to previous research that has disclosed inadequate access to quality mentoring for underrepresented students (Mansfield, Welton, Lee, & Young, 2010; Welton et al., 2014). Nationally, the EDL professoriate has become more diverse in the past two decades, with females (45%) and persons of color (15%) of the EDL professorate, but lower proportions of females and racial/ethnic minorities are veteran faculty members (Hackmann & McCarthy, 2011). Yet, research has reported that individuals who are historically underrepresented in our field may experience departmental and/or institutional cultures that they perceive as racist and unwelcoming, finding themselves working with toxic, unsupportive cultures in which they feel marginalized (Martinez et al., 2017). It is important for tenured faculty members to be conscious of challenges experienced by underrepresented doctoral students and novice faculty, including departmental faculty members who may not be fully supportive, actively surfacing issues with their colleagues and working to promote more inclusive, supportive institutional cultures. In addition, educational leadership faculty members should examine institutional policies and practices that may limit individuals' access to quality mentoring and work with academic leaders to promote reforms.

Encourage doctoral students and junior faculty to participate in both formal programs and informal mentoring

While acknowledging the desirability and necessity of gender- and race-conscious mentoring for underrepresented professionals, it is important to underscore the reality that many doctoral students and junior faculty members are not afforded an opportunity to engage in effective mentoring experiences (Johnson, 2016; Mullen, 2009; Sedlacek, Benjamin, Schlosser, & Sheu, 2007). Simply stated, every individual who desires a mentor deserves access to someone who is invested and fully committed to delivering a quality experience – as was provided to the 103 mentees in our study. Our findings highlighted mentor dispositions and activities that should be uniformly available to all mentees. In fact, mentees universally provided personal testimonials indicating how both informal and formal supports afforded to them were critical to their success in the EDL professoriate. Formal programs, such as the UCEA Barbara L. Jackson Scholars program for underrepresented students and the AERA Politics of Education Special Interest Group William L. Boyd national educational politics workshop, offer opportunities for individuals to receive mentoring from individuals beyond their own institutions.

Conclusion

Through our research, we found desirable mentor traits and practices, consistent with process-based relational mentoring (Kram, 1983; Ragins & Verbos,

2007) and mentoring across difference (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005; Thomas, 2001), including being approachable, accessible, and trustworthy, demonstrating humility and genuine care, and being willing to tailor the experience to mentees' specific developmental needs. Instrumental supports focused on skills necessary for success in the professoriate, including teaching skills development; enrichment of research and writing skills; and understanding how to negotiate institutional rules and practices, including promotion and tenure processes. Mentees also reported receiving psychosocial supports, including helping them cope with stress inherent in their roles and providing encouragement as they prepared for the professoriate. Importantly, quality mentoring experiences involved the formation of supportive mentee-mentor relationships, which included relational trust, a willingness to be vulnerable, and long-term experiences that often resulted in deep friendships. These universal practices were consistent with process-based relational mentoring outlined in the conceptual framework for this study (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). We encourage veteran faculty members to closely review the findings from this study, so that they can self-assess their own practices as instructors, advisors, and mentors of students and their junior faculty colleagues. As they prepare for the professoriate, each individual deserves to have supportive professors and colleagues who work closely with them, to ensure that they are well positioned for success.

Note

1. The Jay D. Scribner Mentoring Award is bestowed annually to 'EDL faculty who have made a substantive contribution to the field by mentoring the next generation of students into roles as university research professors, while also recognizing the important role(s) mentors play in supporting and advising junior faculty' (UCEA, n.d.).

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