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MENTORSHIP: ADULT FORMATION FOR EDUCATORS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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Catholic history is filled with examples of seasoned believers sharing their faith and witness with younger generations in order to help inculcate them into the ethos of Catholicism. This essay presents a model for mentoring in Catholic schools, arguing that such collaboration is not only institutionally life giving, but also congruent with the stated community-building purposes of the school. Noting that even Jesus sent his disciples out "two by two," the author describes the spirituality required of teachers as best experienced through sharing.

The most recent Roman document on Catholic schools asserts that Catholic-school teachers have the main responsibility for developing a "unique Christian school climate" (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, #19). Although this statement, and indeed the entire document, can be read as the Church's placing value and importance on the role of the teacher (Dwyer, 1998), it also begs the question of what support, such as personal and professional development, teachers receive in this enormous undertaking. In the experience of many Catholic educators little attention has been paid to their personal and professional development (Crocker, 1990; English, 1998, in press). In light of the myriad challenges that Catholic educators encounter, one can only speculate on the reasons for such indifference. The formation of these educators in their role as catechists has been neglected, even though the *General Directory for Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997) stresses that "adult catechesis must be given priority" (#258) and notes that continuing formation for catechists is a necessity (#233). Furthermore, although the *Directory* indicates that such formation should attend to the personal and spiritual needs of catechists, it does not specify the exact nature of this formation. Is it spiritual, educational, theological, physical, emotional, social, or other?

This article explores the need for and potential of providing mentorship

for Catholic school educators. It also maintains that providing skilled, experienced educators (mentors) to support or guide colleagues, especially those who are new to the teaching profession (mentees), is effective in addressing the concerns of Catholic school teachers and in improving their professional knowledge and skills.

Although the term mentorship gained currency in educational circles beginning with the publication of Daloz's book *Effective Teaching and Mentoring* (1986), the practice of mentorship among members of various religions predates Daloz by centuries. Within Judaism, for instance, the presence of a guide or Hasidic master has been commonplace for those seeking to develop or increase religious knowledge or discipline (Wiesel, 1972). Within Christianity, the spiritual director has purposes similar to those of the Jewish Hasidic master. A noted example of formalized spiritual mentorship for Christians is the requirement of a spiritual guide or mentor for members of religious communities (Culligan, 1983; Sellner, 1990). Among educators working in religiously affiliated institutions, this mentor or guide concept has rarely been incorporated systematically, though it is evident from the many documented accounts of informal mentorship that a mentor can provide initiation into the teaching profession and serve as a source of continuing professional education (Lee, 1995). Despite the promise of mentorship for these purposes, no substantive treatment of formalized mentorship as a formational strategy for educators in Catholic schools is available.

Meanwhile, the general education literature has given considerable attention to the potential of mentorship in promoting adult learning and development. Following the publication of Daloz's (1986) work, educators documented the importance of implementing mentorship programs. The basic premise of this research is that adults who are effectively initiated into the teaching situation and who are continuously supported in their professional lives are likely to remain longer in the profession, feel more encouraged, and experience more academic success with learners (Bloom, 1995; Cohen, 1995; Galbraith & Cohen, 1995; Murray, 1991; Schulz, 1995; Sloane-Seale, 1997; Wunsch, 1994).

Within the field of education, mentorship has been given considerable attention by researchers and practitioners. Following the heightened interest in mentorship created by Daloz (1986) and Levinson (1978) in the early 1980s, educators began to see the potential for mentorship to address the problems of teacher retention, new teacher concerns, and staff morale. Researchers such as Odell (1990) demonstrated that the incorporation of mentorship into educational practice was an effective induction strategy. Journals such as *Action in Teacher Education*, *Journal of Teacher Education*, *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, and *ORBIT* devoted entire issues to mentorship. In fact, years after the initial attention to mentoring, the journal *Theory into Practice* has recently shown a renewed interest in highlighting the benefits of

mentorship. As a testament to the continuing viability of mentorship, the ERIC educational research database currently generates in excess of 3,000 items when the category of mentors is searched.

Although mentorship has been promoted by researchers as having promise for professional learning and development, there is little evidence that formalized mentorship programs have been embraced wholeheartedly by Catholic-school administrators. Even among those researchers who have explored informal mentorship there is considerable diversity. Writing from the perspective of the Jewish community, Lee (1995), for instance, provides a variety of descriptions of mentorship being exercised among Jewish professionals. She highlights the importance of such guidance and direction as being integral to the career and psychosocial development of professionals and to the continuance of the religious community. Similarly, Christian religious educator Matthaei (1996) promotes the faith mentor as an important person in the life of a maturing believer. Effective faith mentors, according to Matthaei, are those who are caring and accepting, challenging, discerning, dependable, and able to teach skills. For these mentors to be effective, Matthaei argues that they must be equipped, empowered, and supported in their professional mentoring tasks. Clearly, there is a need for such formational support for mentors of educators in Catholic institutions.

In *Religious Education*, Schaller (1996) promotes mentorship as a means of personal transformation for women. Schaller argues that mentorship can be an effective means of enhancing the spiritual development of females within a congregation. She sees mentorship as an educational strategy which can promote the growth of religious education. In essence, it is difficult to find a voice in opposition to mentorship, given that it is a common-sense phenomenon—the human support of one person guiding and sponsoring another, providing initiation into a new field of work, and coaching the person to become a competent professional. Because there is every indication that mentorship can be effective, the question is: What are the specific benefits for Catholic education?

BENEFITS OF MENTORSHIP FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATORS

Mentorship has been shown to have considerable benefits for both new and veteran educators. It contributes to the mission of a Catholic school and promotes development and learning as well as self-direction and autonomy, a collaborative workplace culture, a continuous learning culture, and positive spirituality. These are benefits that are widely recognized as valuable for learning and growth.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE CATHOLIC MISSION

Teachers in Catholic schools frequently struggle with the multiple demands of teaching, parenting, and receiving lower salaries than teachers in public schools. Yet many thousands of dedicated teachers continue in their educational ministry in response to a call or sense of mission in their lives. Building on this sense of commitment, Catholic-school administrators can initiate mentoring as a means of supporting these teachers and inducting new teachers to carry on their mission. Administrators can build on the teachers' call to minister to and educate the young in an environment of faith and invite them to extend their outreach not only to children but to colleagues as well. The opportunity to pass on one's lifework to others will appeal to teachers who are dedicated to their educational mission. Those who have given so much to education need encouragement in their educational ministry. By participating in a formalized mentoring program, they can jointly live out the Gospel call to teach the young.

Just as Jesus "called to him the twelve, and began to send them out two by two" (Mk 6:7), so too ought Catholic school teachers be sent out in twos. The scriptural message is clear—support for those who preach and teach is an integral part of Jesus' plan for ministry. Jesus' model of ministry incorporated significant elements of collaboration and group support; Jesus modeled all integral elements of mentorship. Catholic school teachers should take seriously this Scriptural basis for ministry in their work lives. Those who do not realize and assume their responsibility to be available to and mentor new teachers should be reminded of Jesus' example and of the positive rewards of being a mentor.

Not only is mentorship demonstrated in Scripture, it is also a strong, rich part of Catholic history and tradition. The use of the sponsor as a guide and companion for the catechumen in RCIA is a prime example of the importance that Catholics have traditionally placed on mentoring. Catholic religious history is replete with other examples of mentors. In the 13th century, mystics in Helfta, Germany, mentored each other in the religious community way of life. Because of the teaching and mentoring among the women in the cloister, Helfta blossomed into a center of mysticism, women's writing, and mutual support. The nuns formed strong alliances, mentored new members, and encouraged each other to record their visions and their spiritual exercises. One of the nuns, Gertrude of Helfta (1993), served as a mentor for Mechtilde of Hackeborn by recording her visions and praying for and counseling her. In turn, Gertrude was mentored by other nuns and eagerly sought their advice and support, which were essential to her life and work. Because the nuns assumed the responsibility of inducting one another through their novitiate, ongoing spiritual direction, and mentorship, knowledge of the tradition of Helfta mysticism, prayer, and community has survived for seven centuries.

This is a powerful lesson for Catholics who want to embrace the best of their tradition.

SUPPORT FOR ADULT DEVELOPMENT

One of the most acknowledged benefits of mentorship is its potential to assist in the intricate process of professional development. Levinson, in the seminal work *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (1978), profiles the mentor as the promoter of the dream, the one who helps the male along the way, guiding and directing his personal and professional life, helping him attain career goals and achieve his life's dreams. Though writing about males, Levinson highlights the guiding or leading function of the mentor, the one who assists in the growth and development of the adult. Similarly, Cohen and Galbraith (1995) note that mentoring helps adult learners adapt to personal, social, and workplace changes. In a Catholic education situation the mentor provides guidance and direction, fostering the formation and development of the new colleague as a welcomed member of the teaching profession and as a bona fide faculty member.

The promotion of adult psychological development, including that of the mentor, is one of the more positive attributes of mentorship (Schulz, 1995). Mentorship can provide an opportunity for older, more experienced educators to assist others who are entering a new work situation and its challenges. As Baldwin (1984) notes, mentorship may prove beneficial to aging faculty in their life stage of filling generative needs. This is consistent with Erikson's (1963) stage theory which shows that midlife professionals need and want to pass on what they have learned to new colleagues and to negotiate their own life crisis of generativity versus stagnation. Providing mentorship for less experienced colleagues is a concrete and rewarding means of leaving a legacy and of ensuring that one's lifework is continued. This benefit holds particular promise for Catholic-school teachers who are able and willing to communicate their knowledge and skills to those who come after them in the profession. Since most religious groups, and certainly Catholics, identify continuity and learning from tradition as important, the notion of passing on one's work may be especially relevant.

The mentorship opportunity of passing on one's life work to a mentee is not without problems, however. Mentees may not want to perpetuate some elements of the religious or educational tradition or may fear becoming clones of the mentor. The credibility of the mentoring process demands respect for individuality and intellectual integrity.

From a study of 25 females who took part in an assigned mentorship program, Sloane-Seale (1997) found that mentorship enhanced adult learning and career development. Schulz (1995) argues that mentors can help female mentees move on to new life challenges by supporting their initiation into the

profession and by sharing the wisdom of their years of experience with the mentee. Given that women constitute the bulk of Catholic-school educators, it is significant that mentorship has been promoted as especially helpful in guiding women's development. In a similar vein, Bloom (1995) observes that the effective female mentor is called to encourage, lead, listen to, question, and connect with the mentee. It would be simplistic to think that any one person can fulfill every aspect of a mentor's role, nor does every person desire a mentor (Daloz, 1988). The complexities of human nature temper the great hopes that have been documented for mentorship. In a Catholic-school setting, however, mentors can assist mentees in adjusting to the school culture, policies, and unwritten norms, thereby aiding their personal and professional initiation.

Extensive longitudinal studies on mentorship's contributions to adult development are not available. Although it stands to reason that mentoring has the potential to contribute positively to both the new and more experienced teacher's development, much of the evidence is anecdotal and has not been systematically studied. It would seem reasonable, therefore, to proceed with cautious optimism in initiating mentorship. Such optimism should be tempered with the reality that mentorship has potential for interpersonal conflict (Cohen, 1995) and may not yield immediate psychosocial benefits.

PROMOTION OF SELF-DIRECTION AND AUTONOMY

Mentorship is a means of increasing self-directedness and autonomy in the mentee. The proactive mentor supports and encourages the mentee to take on new teaching challenges and to explore new workplace possibilities. The Catholic-school mentor can also teach specific skills and knowledge that are relevant to Roman Catholicism (e.g., Catholic social teaching) and thereby increase the mentee's confidence, ability, and perception of support. As Daloz (1986) points out, the mentor asks hard questions, challenges the mentee, and brings the learner to a point of autonomy in life. By providing initial support and instruction, the mentor readies the mentee for independent teaching.

Formalized mentorship, where the more experienced person counsels, directs, guides, and inspires the other, is a significant way of promoting self-direction in the mentee. As Candy (1991) points out, adults need assistance and encouragement to become self-directed in their life and work. While they may often consult with colleagues to great benefit, self-directed individuals independently explore work possibilities and direct their own learning projects. An effective mentoring initiative can foster self-direction among new Catholic teachers.

Interestingly, self-directedness is part of the progression in a spontaneous mentoring relationship. The documented progression of mentorship through

identifiable stages ultimately leads to the autonomous new Catholic educator. From a seminal, qualitative, interview study on the phases of 18 informal mentoring relationships, Kram (1983) delineated four distinct stages in the process of mentorship. She labeled these initiation, the stage in which the mentor and mentee are learning to appreciate one another and their respective needs and abilities; cultivation, the development of a working relationship between the two members of the mentoring pair; separation, during which the mentor and mentee gradually begin to grow apart; and redefinition of roles, a stage which may not occur, depending on the mentor's ability to free the mentee to be independent. Effective mentors encourage Catholic-education mentees to separate and function as colleagues.

To prepare mentees for separation and success, the mentor presents difficult terrain for them to negotiate. Mentors need to let their mentees move on. This movement toward separation when the mentee is ready is an important mentor task that should be anticipated by both the mentor and mentee. The task of the mentor is not to promote dependence, but rather to work toward mentee interdependence and eventual autonomy. In a Catholic school setting, working toward a new stage in the mentoring relationship is both challenging and necessary, especially since religious institutions negotiate the tensions of maintaining the status quo, pushing new boundaries, and encouraging individuality. Self-directedness exists along a continuum, and individuals have varying degrees of potential to become self-reliant (Chovanec, 1998). Nonetheless, the constant striving to promote self-directedness in mentees is a worthwhile endeavor.

CULTIVATION OF A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE

Mentorship provides a unique and positive means of promoting a nurturing environment for Catholic school teachers. By its very nature, mentorship cultivates group work patterns, fosters interdependence among employees, and sponsors mutually beneficial relationships (English, 1998). Mentorship promotes proactive collaborative behaviors among mentors and mentees, such as the sharing of teaching strategies and the exchange of information on workplace expectations. The use of mentorship can do more than personally energize the mentor and mentee—it can yield benefits for the entire Catholic religious community (Schulz, 1995).

Mentorship works toward what Treston (1995) promotes as collaboration or co-leadership that does not deify hierarchy but rather promotes the leadership and growth of the Church as a community partnership. He observes that co-leadership has a Biblical basis, and emphasizes that it is “an act of faith in the creative energy of the Spirit” (p. 32). Mentorship promotes vertical relationships in the Catholic school, and distances itself from hierarchy since its basic premise is that each person has gifts and ideas to share in the faith com-

munity. Mentorship acknowledges that meaningful knowledge is created when people come together to share wisdom and experiences. Through sharing knowledge, expertise, and skills, the Catholic-education mentor and mentee embody an ecclesial model that is circular rather than triangular and develop a vibrant and active school. One caution about the limits of mentorship and collegiality needs to be sounded, however. Inhospitable environments, such as those harboring weak administrative support for mentorship, make it difficult if not impossible for mentorship to realize its potential. Therefore, careful attention to the existing educational climate is crucial before initiating mentorship (Hoffman, Edwards, O'Neal, Barnes, & Paulissen, 1986; Kilgore & Kozisek, 1989).

Catholic school leaders must play a key role in the development of this culture by promoting mentorship and by supporting it in tangible and intangible ways, through verbal comments, financial support, and active interest and involvement in mentorship. School administrators recognize that collaborative cultures have many positive results, including increased dialogue, learner achievement, and collegiality (Clark & Clark, 1996). Most importantly, collaborative work environments are particularly helpful to new teachers because they model the optimum work stance—one that is based on respect and mutuality and in which each teacher is welcomed to contribute and work toward the building of a positive faith community. Because it fosters cooperation, interdependence, and creativity in Catholic education, mentorship promotes the development of the ideal in religious organizations: people working together collaboratively. Ideally, religious institutions desire to embody these characteristics. The challenge is to have administrators take a strong positive stance for mentorship. Without their support, its efficacy diminishes.

CREATION OF A CONTINUOUS LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Another positive aspect of mentorship is that it assists in the creation of a continuous learning environment or learning organization. The learning organization is one which acknowledges that although individual formal education may have ceased, continuous learning opportunities must be available to both faculty and students. In a learning organization the workplace culture embraces learning and growth (Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993).

Mentorship fosters ongoing learning in the Catholic school and promotes a collective belief that there is value in one-on-one instruction and mutuality in ministry. Mentorship is viewed as lifelong learning and promotes other proactive learning behaviors such as further development through seminars and conferences. Mentorship demonstrates that learning is a focus and a value for the entire Catholic community.

Mentorship promotes informal and incidental learning within Catholic education. Distinguished from the formal preparation that comes from pre-service education in schools of education or theology, informal learning is experiential learning, while incidental learning is a by-product of the primary learning activity (Watkins & Marsick, 1992). Informal opportunities may consist of any number of activities, including mentorship, networking, and coaching. Catholic educators often come to a point in their careers where they participate infrequently in formal education; therefore, they will show an interest in informal learning opportunities such as mentoring and coaching. The primary insight of informal and incidental learning for these professionals is that much valuable learning can occur outside formalized educational structures and within the context of day-to-day interaction with colleagues. This is consistent with Dewey's (1938) observation that all genuine learning comes from experience (see Jarvis, 1987). Mentorship is a form of informal learning used in the teaching profession to advance the initiation and effectiveness of the new professional, and to allow more experienced colleagues to provide individualized instruction for members of the next generation.

Mentorship also serves as a means of continuing professional education (Cervero, 1988). Through one-on-one pairing with veteran colleagues, inexperienced Catholic educators learn new knowledge, skills, and attitudes to help them deal with their profession and manage the options that are presented. Mentorship, seen from this perspective, helps to bridge the distance between formalized preservice training and the world of work which too often is competitive and nonsupportive of junior colleagues. The commitment to continuing professional education in the form of mentorship is necessary if Catholic school teaching is to be regarded as a profession. Most members of the Catholic teaching profession concur with Lee's (1973) advocacy for the professionalization of the field, including support for continuing professional education. Mentorship contributes to professionalization by providing induction of new members and modeling positive mentor behavior to neophytes, akin to medicine and law.

Cohen and Galbraith (1995) also note that the concept of mentoring is consistent with the adult and continuing education promotion of lifelong learning. Mentorship does not replace preservice training, but it does promote the mentor's sharing of knowledge, experiences, and ideas to the mentee, when he or she is inducted into the profession. The notion of continuous learning is important for religious institutions which frequently profess commitment to scholarship, education, and learning, but which often do not actively support them. The challenge for Catholic schools is to embrace mentorship as informal learning, and to provide continuous support for mentors and mentees. Mentorship is a concrete means of living out declared allegiances and commitments to the profession of Catholic school teaching.

FOSTERING VIBRANT SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is the daily enactment of personal and professional beliefs. It is the integration of one's being with one's world, in the school, in the home, and in the entirety of life (Warren, 1989). Mentorship as a form of informal and incidental learning can promote the formation of a teacher's spirituality because of its emphasis on communication, the interpersonal, the development of the experienced teacher, and the mentee (English, 1998). Mentorship has the potential to reach each person and to enrich personal and communal life. Because the spiritual dimension of mentoring is integral to the content and process of the Catholic educational endeavor, it must be cultivated. Mentorship may be one way of actualizing the ideals and practices promoted by religious communities. To assume that every individual in a Catholic school supports and is interested in nurturing their own or another's spirituality is naive. Realistic Catholic school administrators will recognize that consensus on this issue may be unattainable, and thus may need to focus their attention on those who are active supporters of spiritual and religious development of teachers and students. Mentorship can be one means of assisting Catholic school educators in edging closer to the integration of one's life, work, and prayer.

Mentorship is consistent with the ideals and directions of Catholic religious institutions. In particular, it sponsors the notion of teaching as a cooperative, not competitive, ministry. A full-scale mentorship initiative can nurture communal spirituality by providing time for visioning, support for the mentor and mentee, reflection and personal development, and relationship building. Ultimately, a full spiritual base must undergird the entire process of mentorship.

SUMMARY

Mentorship is an intense, life-affirming way of promoting the human and spiritual life. It promotes the interpersonal ideals of Catholic-school teaching as a profession in which care is extended to others, reciprocal relationships are established, and an ethic of care is paramount. Mentorship for Catholic-school teachers is consistent with the essence of the profession, promoting the growth and development of the members and embodying a vibrant spirituality. It provides essential benefits for adults: development, self-direction, collaboration, continuous learning, and spiritual growth. Catholic school teachers need the formational strategy of mentorship to assist them in their faith development work.

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