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I Need Help! The Journey of a Novice Interpreter with Their Mentor and Coach

Daniela Lopez Ramirez

Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

Western Oregon University

August 1, 2022



WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED

Action Research Project Title:

I Need Help! The Journey of a Novice Interpreter with Their Mentor and Coach

Graduate Student: Daniela Lopez Ramirez

Candidate for the degree of : Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment of the requirements of this master's degree.

Committee Chair:

Name: Amanda R. Smith

Signature: _____

Date: 12.1.22

Committee Member:

Name: Dr. Elisa M. Maroney

Signature: _____

Date: 12.1.22

Dean of Graduate Studies and Research:

Name: Dr. Hillary Fouts

Signature: _____

Date: 12.1.22

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Abstract

I Need Help! The Journey of a Novice Interpreter with Their Mentor and Coach

Coaching and mentorships are not something uncommon within the interpreting field, as it is important to have someone with experience serve as a guide to students and novice interpreters. Seasoned interpreters have knowledge about the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of the interpreting profession, therefore having them support upcoming interpreters is a key factor in helping the field flourish. Many upcoming interpreters are either assigned a coach or a mentor, in which most individuals, including myself have interchanged the terms “coach” and “mentor,” as we view them as similar, if not the same. Surprisingly coaching and mentoring differ in their own unique ways and having experienced being an apprentice for both, is what led me to witness and notice the differences and similarities. Therefore, the purpose of this action research project is to study the differences and similarities between a coach and a mentor, by researching the following questions: What were the different impacts that a mentor and coach had on me as a student and novice? What were the similarities that were observed between these two roles? I took these questions into consideration when I conducted my methodology, which was a compilation of notes from my mentorship and data collected with my coach. The results show that there are factors that make a distinction between a coach and a mentor, but both roles conclude with similar outcomes – growth, support, development, and guidance.

Keywords: Coaching, mentoring, novice interpreter, apprentice, proteges, and student interpreter

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

This introductory will bring insight on my experiences with my mentor and coach, as a student interpreter and novice interpreter. As well as, discovering the differences and similarities between a coach and a mentor. It will specifically highlight the benefactors of acquiring both a mentor and coach, as it can significantly and positively impact the upbringing of a student and novice interpreter. Both mentors and coaches have the great ability and responsibility to highlight and edify the apprentice in a unique manner.

Growing up I have always had some type of mentor and coach guide me through the stages of life. These coaches and mentors would assist me in various forms such as, training me how to play soccer, assisting me on how to improve my skills as a student, or guiding me to have a deeper spiritual connection within my beliefs. Most of us could say, that we have had some type of coach and mentor figure that has helped us for the better. Having a mentor and coach was not something new or foreign to me, but what I found external was the differences both roles carried. I began with the Merriam-Webster (2022) definition of mentor as a trusted counselor or guide. A mentor is someone in whom we can easily confide our vulnerabilities, while being at ease knowing we are in the hands of a trusted individual. A coach is someone who trains us intensively as by instruction and demonstration (Merriam-Webster 2022). A coach is an individual who has one goal in mind, to train us to better ourselves whether they prepare us through instruction, demonstration, or both.

In most Interpreting Training Programs (ITPs) it is accustomed to assign a mentor to a student interpreter. The mentors are usually a seasoned interpreter with experience in the interpreter field, and this is done strategically by the ITPs and Interpreter Education Programs

(IEPs). Boeh (2016) studies mentorship within the field of interpreting, as mentorship has been shown to help novice interpreters overcome the steep learning curve that exists between graduation from college preparation programs and work readiness. That was the sole reason I was assigned a mentor in my undergraduate ITP because my professors and program advisors saw a gap between recent graduate interpreters and work readiness. Thankfully, that approach was successful because I was assigned my mentor from February 2021 to August 2021, graduated from my ITP in May of 2021 and got my first interpreting job at the end of August 2021. Within that timeframe I gained various things from my mentor, such as how to improve specific interpreting skills, develop confidence, learned to properly analyze my work, and most importantly acquired a trusted friend. A friend in whom I could depend on for help with my most vulnerable areas in my work, and in my overall life. There were many instances where my mentor and I did not even discuss interpreting work but would simply converse about everyday life and current events for two hours or more. Through this mentorship, I was able to obtain career-related support and social support. Young and Perrewé (2004) define career-related support as that provided when a mentor offers technical advice and social support when a mentor listens to proteges concerns and offers encouragement. I was able to obtain the best of both worlds; develop a bond and relationship with my mentor, whom I respected, and gained valuable wisdom and advice.

I have acquired many beneficial things in my graduate ITP at Western Oregon University (WOU), but the one thing that has benefited me the most was being assigned a coach. For Fall Quarter 2021, Winter Quarter 2022, and Spring Quarter 2022 I was assigned a coach from December 2021 to May 2022, for three of my Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies (MAIS) courses – Professional Field Experience I (INT 619), II (INT 620), and III (INT 621). I

was given a coach with the purpose of seeking professional development, by identifying one specific area in my work that I would like to improve, in hopes that my coach would guide me that area. My coach and I were successful in this area and made progress in other areas as well! I was able to improve certain persisting problem areas in my work in a span of two months, through the guidance of my coach. Whitmore (2017) states, “Coaching is unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them” (p. 12-13). The objective for coaching was allowing my coach to assist me in achieving certain goals through a series of training sessions, in which I felt them guiding me through the right path, without them having to teach how to obtain victory. My coach always made feel like I was the one who achieved the goal and conquered the task, because at a certain point they would stop assisting me to allow me to grow and learn on my own. Of course, my coach was always there to give me advice, assistance, and guidance if I truly needed help, while emphasizing that they believed in my capabilities to achieve the task on my own. I believe that coaching helped accelerate my professional development, by helping me achieve my goals, and deepened my understanding on what I need in order to improve my work.

Statement of Problem & Purpose of the Study

The objective of this research is to shed light on the differences and similarities between a coach and a mentor with a student and novice interpreter. When your research a synonym word for “mentor,” “coach” is one of the words that appears and the same can be said for “coach.” Being a person that has undergone the process of both a mentorship and coaching, I have witnessed that there are differences, as well as similarities. Therefore, this research will highlight the differences and similarities within coaching and mentoring based on my experience, as a previous undergraduate student and a novice interpreter.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This portion of the literature reviews will describe the benefits of attaining a mentor and coach, within an interpreting career, as there have been positive outcomes. Results such as, professional support, building confidence, achieve professional goals, autonomy, etc. According to the literature reviews a mentor and coach have proven to produce different outcomes and expectations, but with end result being growth.

Mentoring

Napier (2010) conducted research on an interpreting mentor program in Australia in which the goal of the mentoring program was to assist new graduates in the transition from student to practitioner in the workforce. Her data revealed that both the mentors and mentees felt they benefited from the mentoring program. Napier's (2010) research showed evidence of increased confidence across a range of interpreting scenarios, which was reported by the mentees, as they acquired the ability to manage stress, learned professional business tasks, and discussed various interpreting situations. Mentees believed that having a mentor made a difference and had a significant impact on their ability to cope with difficult situations and improve their technical skills. Most mentees saw the program as an opportunity to continue their schooling and develop technical skills but were surprised to receive much more in the way of personal and professional support.

Woods (2019) reveals that confidence is an important factor to acquire for new interpreters, as confidence helps shape their identity. It is not uncommon for many novice interpreters to struggle with confidence, because interpreting at times can be a tough profession to enter. If novice interpreters do struggle with a lack of confidence, there are various strategies that may help support their confidence with interpreting and one of the strategies is mentoring

(Woods, 2019, p.24). Having seasoned interpreters support novice interpreters, is essential for building confidence in upcoming interpreters. After Woods (2016) conducting their study, they still meet with a mentor almost every Wednesday and states the following about them: “My mentor is an expert interpreter, which he leads/guides me in areas of my interpreting that I am lacking confidence in to help build my skills and confidence” (p. 34).

Interpreting mentors provide more than just confidence, but also have been proven to help mentees achieve professional goals. Bentley-Sassaman et al. (2014) created an Educational Interpreter Boot Camp for two years, 2012 and 2013, in which the goal was to increase the number of qualified educational interpreters in the state of Pennsylvania. Bentley-Sassaman et al. (2014) specifically sought out how to achieve a 3.5 or higher on the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA). Therefore, they created a Boot Camp that focused on providing targeted skill development, which was led by two instructors and intensive one-on-one time with a trained mentor. Their research revealed that most of the mentees noticed an increase in their results. Some mentees met or exceeded the 3.5 goal and most of the mentees saw an increase in the targeted skill sets as well as the overall EIPA score.

Coaching

Whitmore (2017) studies the essence of coaching, as individuals all have a built-in, natural learning capability that is actually disrupted by instruction. This natural learning capability is embedded in people from a young age, as how did they learn to walk? Did not a mother, father, or loved one instruct them? Whitmore (2017) believes that coaching is successfully achieved through the development of autonomy for the apprentice, as the coach serves to guide step-by-step to success and not to coddle the apprentice throughout the coaching

experience. After all, when we have a loved one teaching us how to walk, they help us to certain extent where we do not fall, but later it is up to us to continue going and avoid falling.

Flaherty (2010) believes that the most powerful way to understanding coaching is from the end results and products. Flaherty (2010) classifies these products into three categories – long-term excellent performance, self-correction, and self-generation. Long-term excellent performance is when the apprentice or “client” as Flaherty (2010) labels them, meets the high objective standards of the discipline in which coaching is occurring. For example, hitting a homerun in baseball is an objective standard, as is an interpreter delivering a message that is dynamically equivalent in the target language. Self-correction is when apprentices or clients can observe when they are performing well and when they are not and will make any necessary adjustments independently of the coach (Flaherty, 2010). Lastly, self-generation is when we can always improve, and well-coached people know this and will continually find ways on their own to do so (Flaherty, 2010).

Cooks-Campbell (2022) defines peer coaching as “A relationship between two or more colleagues, none of whom have oversight or authority over the others. Within these dynamics, people share insights, feedback, challenges, and practices” (p. 1).

Differences and Similarities

Coaching and mentoring are tools for development within certain fields and organizations (Garvey, Strokes, & Megginson, 2010). Coaching is task focused, for a specified duration and has a set agenda to reinforce change skills and behaviors of individuals. Mentoring is relationship oriented, which provides both career and psychosocial functions. Garvey et al. (2010) view mentorship as a two-way mutually beneficial relationship where both parties (mentors and mentees) learn through the relationship. Coaching on the other hand, tends to be

professionally-oriented, in which the apprentice's desired outcomes are to achieve career related goals. Garvey et al. (2010) views on coaching and mentoring is true based on my experience.

Manseau (2022) believes that coaching is essential for upcoming interpreters, but it solely focuses on professional development, which does not give time for identity development, behavior, confidence, and self-assurance. Thankfully, those benefits can be found in a mentoring relationship when the mentee feels liberated to ask more questions, whether they are professional or personal and discover the mentor's wisdom (Jakubik et al., 2016). Mentoring provides a more holistic approach, as it provides both professional development and personal growth. Coaching on the contrary, is more of a short-term and task-oriented process, which does give room for a relationship-oriented bond. That bond can only be found in a close, experienced, and trusted guide, such as a mentor (Jakubik et al., 2016).

D'Abate et al. (2003) write that mentoring and coaching are critical to individual development and organizational success. Both mentoring and coaching have been proven to have one similar result and end product – development and success. The growth and progress can be in different aspects of our life, such as career development or personal gain. Mentorship and coaching both have the same outcome which is the benefit of achieving some type of growth.

Benefits

Parsloe and Leedham (2009) believe that coaches and mentors help support their apprentices and cause a form of development. They state, "The aim is to help and support people to manage their own learning in order that they may develop their skills, improve their performance, maximize their potential, and enable them to become the person they want to be" (p. 67). Both coaches and mentors have the same desired goals for their protégé's, which is improvement and allow them to become the individuals they want be.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Design

The methodology for this research was constructed in way that would depict my personal experiences with my mentor and coach. I describe how my interactions with my mentor and coach were formed and how it facilitated my data collections, through journal entries and note documentation. I also utilized *Mentorship Guideline* (see *Figure 1*) that was provided my undergraduate ITP, as a source to aid the mentorship. Lastly, the *Coaching Guideline* (see *Figure 2*) was displayed in my research to demonstrate the anatomy of a coaching session, which was arranged by a graduate professor. My mentorship and coaching were at different stages of my interpreting career, hence display different aspects of growth.

For this research, data was collected through note documentation in a personal journal that I utilized to track my growth. The first section of my journal contains data from February 2021 to August 2021, that is solely based on my mentorship experience. The second portion of my journal is centered on my coaching experience, which has data from December 2021 to May 2022. As previously mentioned, I was assigned a mentor in my undergraduate ITP and professors gave the students a guideline on how the mentorship should be (see *Figure 1 – Mentorship Guidelines*). My mentor and I, meet weekly through Zoom, I filmed work samples of ASL to English interpretations of around twenty to forty minutes, shared the videos with mentor before we met, analyzed the work samples separately, discussed our findings with each other and, lastly, I would document those findings in my journal.

I was assigned my coach in graduate school for courses INT 619, INT 620, and INT 621. My professor also gave the students a guide for our coaching sessions (see *Figure 2 – Coaching Guidelines*). I was assigned a coach to help me improve certain problem areas in my work and

my coaching had a similar format to my mentorship. Throughout the course of several Zoom sessions and meeting three to four times a month, my coach and I solely focused on improving weak areas in my work. It was decided in the first Zoom meeting that our coaching strategy would be similar to my mentorship – film work samples of ASL to English interpretations of around twenty minutes, send my coach the work sample before we met through the Zoom platform, analyze the work samples separately, discuss our findings with each other and lastly, I would document those findings in my journal.

Figure 1 – Mentor Guidelines

Name: Daniela Lopez

Date: February 26, 2021

Mentoring Plan Guided worksheet

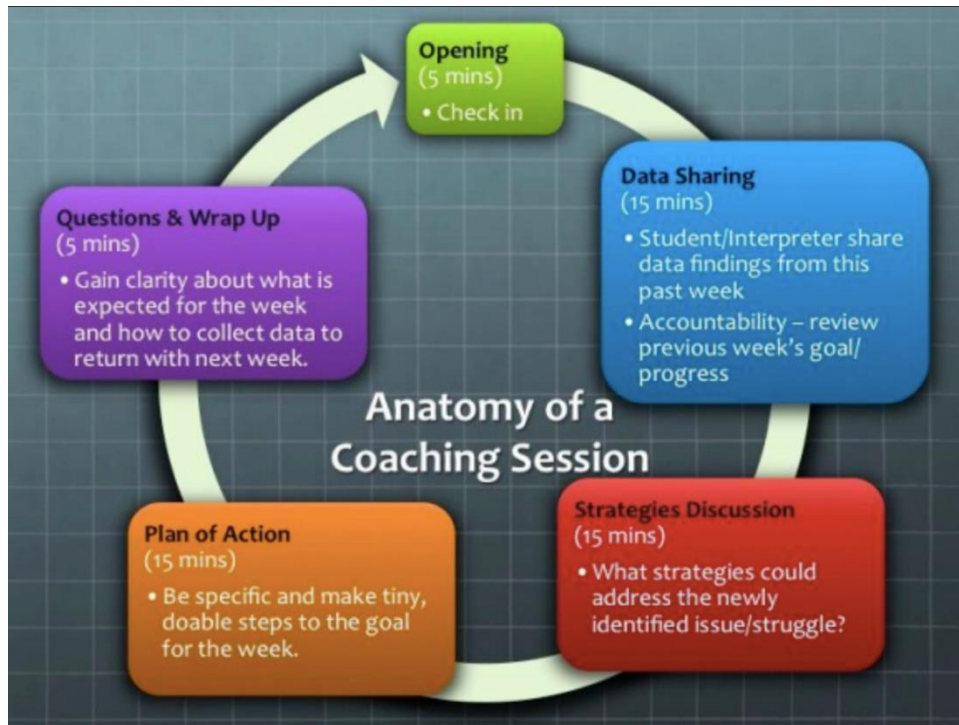
Mentee Strengths	Mentee areas of improvement



Skills to work on during this practicum

Examples of professional/interpreting skill areas:

- ASL or English grammar
- Sign production-English fluency
- Use of space
- Affect
- Pausing, pacing
- Managing flow of communication & visual aids
- Processing (lag time)
- Schema, visualization, meaning based interpretations
- Interpersonal interaction skills
- Composure
- Calming inner talk
- etc.

Figure 2 – Coaching Guidelines

Research Participant

There is only one participant in this study and that is me. I have collected data about myself. I am a 25-year-old woman of color. I recently graduated from an undergraduate ITP in May of 2021 and obtained my first job in August of 2021 in a post-secondary setting. I have been interpreting for over one year, so I consider myself a novice interpreter, as well as a student interpreter. I have been fortunate enough to work in various settings, such as K-12, post-secondary, job orientations, doctors' appointments, and religious settings, through the guidance and help of my coach and mentor.

Data Analysis Procedures

I analyzed my data into two sections – the first was feedback, advice, and progress with my mentor and the second was intake, guidance, and growth with my coach. The two sections

were formatted notes that were in my journal, in which the overall content was any feedback and advice my coach and mentor gave throughout our interactions and discussions (see *Figure 3 – Coach & Mentor Feedback*), as well as, tracking my progress and growth in my work and confidence level. Separating my data into two sections that differentiated the notes between myself and my mentor and coach, was essential because it allowed me to observe the impacts my coach and mentor had on me and to analyze the differences and similarities between the roles.

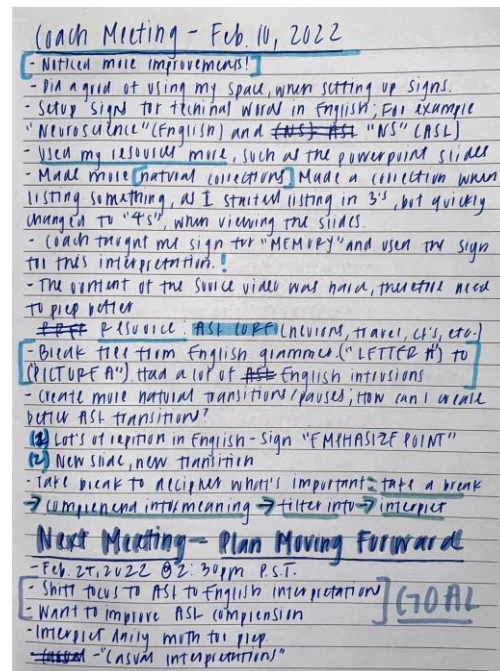
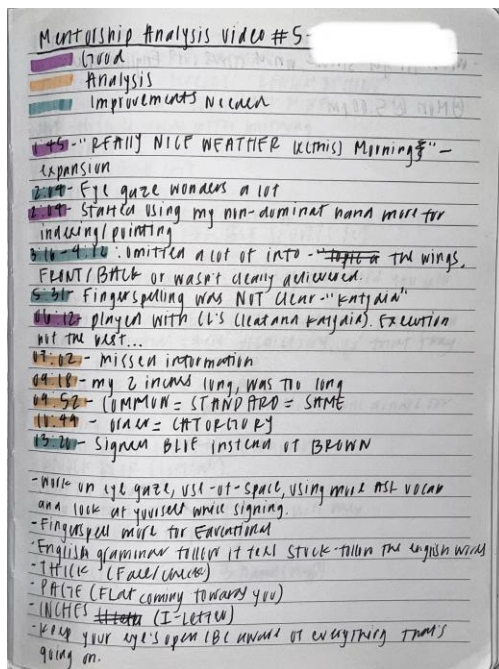


Figure 3 – Coach & Mentor Feedback

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

My research supports the literature revealing that there are differences and similarities between a mentorship and coaching. Through my mentorship I obtained career-related support and social support. Social support refers to the “social interaction aimed at inducing positive outcomes” (Bianco & Eklund, 2001, p. 85). According to Michaeli et al. (2018), career-related support can be recognized in actions such as giving specific employment advice, providing relevant information concerning job opportunities, and helping to connect persons to relevant organizations. My mentor helped me establish confidence in myself and interpreting skills and achieve work-readiness. The confidence that my mentor developed in me was related to social support, as the confidence was obtained through social interactions, which induced positive outcomes. Achieving work readiness was given through career related support by my mentor, because they helped me improve certain technical aspects of my work, gave me employment advice, and provided relevant information concerning job opportunities. Young and Perrewé (2004) hypothesized that when relevant career and social support behaviors are exhibited sufficiently to meet the expectations of the mentee, higher levels of relationship effectiveness, and trust for a mentor are realized. My mentorship experience also provided me with a trusted friend and guide.

My coach focused more on career-related support and I was treated more like an equal. The main objective for my coaching was to improve my practice as a professional, so it was expected that during the coaching sessions it was career focused and was full of career thoughts from my end. Career thoughts are defined as “outcomes of one’s thinking about assumptions,

attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, feelings, plans, and/or strategies related to career problem-solving and decision-making” (Sampson et al., 2009, p. 91). I was curious and longed for certain areas in my interpreting work to improve and grow. My coach was there to guide and assist throughout that process of growth in my profession, while allowing me to seek success on my own. My coach always encouraged a form of professional autonomy, which I appreciated because when I did achieve success it felt gratifying knowing that I could do it on my own. Lastly, my coach treated me more like an equal, as our coaching dynamic was not dependent on an authority over another, and we were both working professionals. Shaffer and Watson (2004) stated, “For the interpreting profession, mentoring has traditionally looked much like an apprenticeship: a master practitioner dispenses knowledge to a novice in order to mold them into an effective professional” (p. 1). In my mentorship I was an undergraduate student and not yet a working interpreter, so I saw my mentor as an authoritative figure and as master practitioner. That was not the same dynamic for coaching, as they treated me as a working professional and not a student.

The similarity that was discovered between my mentor and coach was they both greatly benefited me as a student interpreter and novice interpreter (see *Figure 4 – Mentor and Coach Comparative Analysis*). According to Cronin (2019), the benefits of mentoring go way beyond the mentee’s personal development, positively affecting the mentors themselves, as well as the organizations they work for. The benefits of my mentorship were vast! My mentor supported me through inclusion, by exposing me to new perspectives, producing confidence, providing me with social and career related support. The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL, 2020) believes that coaching has the capacity to improve professional performance, which can provide clarity in professional practice. Coaching provided me with strategies to improve my employee performance by giving me tactical guidance.

Figure 4 – Mentor and Coach Comparative Analysis

Similarities	Differences	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentor and coach both <u>greatly benefit</u> a student interpreter and novice interpreter Mentors and Coaches provide growth for the mentees and apprentice Coaches and mentors help support their apprentices and cause a form of development (Parsloe and Leedham, 2009) Both coaches and mentors have the same desired goals for their protégés, which is improvement and allow them to become the individuals they want be 	Coach	Mentor
	Coaching is task focused, for a specified duration and has set agenda to reinforce change skills and behaviors of individuals	Interpreting mentors provide more than just confidence, but also have been proven to help mentees achieve professional goals
	Coaching supplies apprentices with a more career-related support and are treated as an equal	Mentorship provides career-related support and social support
	The main objective for coaching is to improve professional practice	Mentor helped establish confidence in myself and interpreting skills and accomplish work-readiness
	Coaches encourage a form of professional autonomy	Mentorship provided me with trusted friend and guide

Discussion

My hope when conducting this research was to give insight to those within the field of interpreting on the differences and similarities between a mentor and coach, with student and novice interpreters from the mentee/apprentice perspective. Mentors and coaches are a pillar within the interpreting community, as they help upcoming interpreters tremendously, even though both contain different roles and responsibilities. The overall, goal from mentorship and coaching is growth and both roles provide tremendous benefits. There are extensive resources on the benefits of mentorships within the interpreting field. However, there is very little research on the benefits of coaching and how it can positively impact the interpreting community, by having coaches assist upcoming interpreters. Hopefully, this research can contribute knowledge on the benefits of coaching and mentoring within the interpreting field.

My mentorship experience supports Napier’s study; as I obtained professional growth, I also grew personally. Professional growth, as I received techniques and skills on how to improve my

work as a student interpreter. For example, when I was an undergraduate student, I would struggle with finding an equivalent American Sign Language (ASL) sign, to an English word or phrase. Therefore, my mentor helped me build my ASL sign vocabulary repertoire, by informing this was a way to sign the word or phrase. The mentorship also provided me with personal growth, as my confidence was at an all-time low.

I started my ITP in the Fall of 2019 and was already behind compared to my peers because I was not yet fluent in ASL. Hence, I felt insecure in my interpreting skills and signing capabilities and to make the matter worse the world shut down in the year 2020. The lockdown forced many students to transition to online learning, in which the learning environment took a toll. Fagell and Mihaly (2020) state, “While the video conferencing platform Zoom has made class possible during the COVID-19 pandemic, some students say they have struggled to make connections due to the lack of casual interactions common during in-person classes” (p. 1). I highly struggled to learn through the Zoom platform because I was not obtaining that in-person interaction, that was essential for me to obtain ASL fluency. I felt alone and lost in my journey of becoming interpreter. Fagell and Mihaly (2020) discovered that students worked to find strategies to ward off loneliness, but for me that was difficult to accomplish. When I met with my mentor in February of 2021, my confidence was to the ground and my mentor perceived that insecurity and lack of confidence. My mentor helped me achieve that confidence, by providing me with support, words of encouragement and always motivated me when had self-doubt. They also reprimanded when I negatively talked about myself and worked, so mentor provided me with social support.

My coach always made sure that center of our sessions was to achieve long-term excellent performance. I would present a problem area in my work that I wanted to improve, and my coach

would focus our meetings on how we can better this problem, but also ensure that this issue would longer linger in my work. That approach was successful, as that problem area was improved, and it no longer remains in my work. Therefore, one of the end products from my coaching was long-term excellent performance. Throughout coaching there were many instances when I knew I was performing well in my work and when I was not performing well. When I was lacking in my performance, I tried to work on the issue independently because I trusted that my coach gave the right tools and resources to conquer the problem by myself. My coach built self-competency and self-correction within myself and my professional practice. There is always room for improvement because no one will ever obtain perfection and I witnessed that same spirit in my coach, which caused me to achieve self-generation.

My coach never made it seem like there was an authoritative figure in our relationship, as they always treated me as an equal. Therefore, our coaching could possibly be defined as peer coaching because we shared insights, feedback, and practices with one another. I would not fully describe our coaching relationship as peers, because my coach was always assisting me to grow and flourish in my work.

My coaching was definitely task focused, as the overall goal was to improve a specific area in my professional work. My coach and I also worked in a specified duration because we had subgoals that we knew were going to help us obtain success. My mentorship was more relationship orientated which provided me both career and psychosocial support. My coaching was primarily centered on professional development as that goal was improve areas in my work, that I deemed as struggles and problems. My mentorship helped me grow professional and personally, as I received support in career related aspects and social facets. But above obtaining growth, I gained a confidential guide in whom I trusted my vulnerabilities with. My coach and

mentor ultimately wanted me to grow and be content in who I was becoming as a professional and individual. Even though the roles for my mentor and coach required different responsibilities and concerns, they both benefited me in their own unique ways.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Experienced interpreters have vast knowledge about the intricacies of the interpreting profession. Therefore, having seasoned interpreters share their experience and knowledge with upcoming interpreters is crucial, if not required. A great source for new interpreters to obtain that guidance and direction is through coaching and mentorship. Boeh (2016) views mentoring as the sharing of knowledge, skills, experiences and critical thinking between a seasoned interpreter and novice interpreter for refinement and development of skills, situational awareness, understanding of professionalism and preparation to work successfully in the field of interpreting. Young and Perrewé (2004) believe that coaching is all about a self-journey, while setting aside instruction and teaching. They stated, “The coachee does acquire facts and develops new skills and behaviors, not by being told or taught but by discovering from within, stimulated by coaching” (2004, p. 11). Mentors and coaches have distinct roles but assigning both to student and novice interpreters can help them flourish. From my experience, my mentor provided not only professional support and growth, but also social support that helped me develop confidence in myself and my skills as an interpreter. My coach also provided me with support, but that support was more career related and professionally centered. Hence, coaching and mentoring differ in their own unique ways, but they do have similar outcomes – growth, support, development, and guidance. As Whynot (2013) stated, “Wisdom comes from others who have gone before me, and I believe in actively seeking it together with peers” (p. 9-10).

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