Mentoring across oceans: Experiences, benefits and pitfalls

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Mentoring is a collaborative learning relationship that proceeds through purposeful stages over time and has the primary goal of helping mentees acquire the essential competencies needed for success in their chosen career.

But how do you do that when there are distances in time, space and culture?

Vignette: Remote mentoring

• A global organization asks for mentors to support emerging young women researchers in their first publication
• You are introduced by email and asked to provide support. The data are already collected
• You ask for a first draft and set up a call with a timezone of 9 hours
• You need to understand her background, experience writing, development goals
• Over time you recognize technical areas where support and mentoring is needed
• Over a year, she developed and publishes her paper (right before she has her baby-double delivery!)
• You continue mentoring to help her on her next steps in public health

Vignette: Institution, individual

• You work with an institution in Africa to develop capacity in patient centered outcome research including in developing faculty as mentors
• You recognize that there are great capacity in some areas of research, but that models of mentoring are more hierarchical. Also the pathway for academic success is challenging due to competing demands for junior faculty and senior faculty (administrative, teaching, clinic)
• You are also mentoring one of the new students
• And then COVID-19 pandemic happens…. (more later)

New approaches to mentorship

• The traditional mentor-mentee dyad is being replaced by mentorship teams with mentors playing different roles
• This expands the resources available to a mentee but also requires careful planning and communication
• Mentorship can also be shorter or life-long depending on the goals of the mentee and success (or challenge) of the mentoring relationship
• The focus also goes beyond research mentoring to include other areas

What does research mentoring require from the mentor?

• Aligning Expectations
• Addressing Equity and Inclusion
• Articulating Your Mentoring Philosophy and Plan
• Assessing Understanding
• Cultivating Ethical Behavior
• Enhancing Work-Life Integration
• Fostering Independence
• Maintaining Effective Communication
• Promoting Mentor Research Self-efficacy
• Promoting Professional Development

https://nrmnet.net/research-mentor-training/
5 Key Areas of Research Mentoring

1. Research:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas for effective mentoring relationships</th>
<th>Measurable learning objective: Mentors can</th>
<th>Measurable learning objective: Mentees can</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing disciplinary research skills</td>
<td>Teach mentees to design and carry out a research project; provide opportunities to observe techniques</td>
<td>Develop the skills to design and carry out a research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing technical skills</td>
<td>Provide instruction in core disciplinary research techniques</td>
<td>Commit to learning and gaining proficiency in disciplinary research techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurately assessing understanding of disciplinary knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Assess mentee learning of disciplinary knowledge and skills and provide feedback and guidance to address gaps</td>
<td>Self-assess learning of disciplinary knowledge and skills and respond to mentor feedback</td>
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2. Interpersonal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Mentors can</th>
<th>Mentees can</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aligning mentor and mentee expectations</td>
<td>Establish and communicate mutual expectations for the mentoring relationship</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening actively</td>
<td>Give their undivided attention and listen to both their mentee’s words and the emotion behind the words</td>
<td>Give their undivided attention and listen to their mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing feedback and support</td>
<td>Provide input and constructive feedback into mentee professional interactions and offer feedback on how the relationship is progressing</td>
<td>Provide opportunity for input, reflect and integrate feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building trusting and honest relationships</td>
<td>Offer honest and open feedback on how the relationship is progressing</td>
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3. Psychosocial and career:

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<tr>
<td>Providing motivation and facilitating coping efficacy</td>
<td>Scaffold research work in ways that yield periodic success; celebrate the successes and offer support after failures</td>
<td>Acknowledge that research frequently involves setbacks and develop strategies to deal with them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing mentee career self-efficacy</td>
<td>Foster and affirm mentee career aspirations, help define and achieve goals and milestones</td>
<td>Seek opportunities to explore and prepare for a Career, articulate goals and pathway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a sense of belonging</td>
<td>Create a welcoming and inclusive research environment, especially at transition points</td>
<td>Actively engage and establish relationships with research team members</td>
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4. Culturally responsive/diversity:

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advancing equity and inclusion</td>
<td>Employ strategies for recognizing and addressing issues of diversity, equity and inclusion</td>
<td>Identify strategies for recognizing and addressing issues of diversity, equity and inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being culturally responsive</td>
<td>Effectively negotiate dialogue across diverse dimensions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing the impact of bias</td>
<td>Consider your unconscious biases and regularly check that they are not negatively impacting their own or their research/learn behavior</td>
<td>Recognize your unconscious biases, regularly check that it is not negatively impacting their behavior, and address it when they observe it</td>
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5. Sponsorship:

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promoting independence</td>
<td>Enhance mentee development and design independent research projects to advance mentee’s independence</td>
<td>Push themselves to increased responsibility for and ownership of their research, while seeking for support and guidance as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting professional development</td>
<td>Identify opportunities for mentee professional development and support their engagement in them</td>
<td>Identify and engage in opportunities to develop the professional skills needed to become a successful scientist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establishing and fostering mentor–mentee professional networks</td>
<td>Introduce and facilitate relationship building between their network of colleagues and their mentees</td>
<td>Actively identify and seek ways to mentor and establish relationships with potential future colleagues in the discipline</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity advocacy</td>
<td>Promote mentor’s work, provide professional support</td>
<td>Report successful outcomes to mentor. Speak out and accept advocacy</td>
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Mentoring relationships are complex because we expect one or more different roles.

- Mentor: passing on advice, knowledge, experience,
- Supervisor: overseeing tasks, research progress, medium term and day to day goals
- Coach: supporting and enabling learning and development
- Sponsor: proactively advocating for success

This may be complicated in remote mentoring

- Virtual relationships
- Without initial face-to-face
- Disruption (COVID-19)
- Cultural and system differences
- Different incentives at organizations and pathways to independent researcher
- Different backgrounds and understandings of research, research goals
- Different stages of career in mentees
- Mentor team
  - Preferred but need to ensure communication
  - What else?

What about remote mentoring during COVID-19 and beyond

- Remote mentoring: developmental relationships at a distance that can be sustained using a combination of synchronous technology (ex. phone, videoconferencing) and asynchronous tools (ex. Email) to support and grow the mentoring relationship.

**Step 1: Reassess**
- Ask question, What was working well? Here are there changes needed (independent of the change to remote)

**Step 2: Realign**
- Collaboratively identify and define new goals for continuing areas of the mentoring relationship that are going well and ways to improve challenging areas.
- How can this be done in remote mentoring and current context?

**Step 3: Reimagine**
- Together develop a plan you agree on to achieve these goals in the remote work together.
- Include regular check-in meetings to revisit the plan and adapt as needed
- Goal is for this plan to beyond the current crisis and be resilient to new challenges
- Also remember what additional psychosocial support may be needed during this (and other) times of stress

What about cultural differences (a different ocean to cross?)

- Not easy (even when you are on the same side of the ocean)
- Need to bring in lessons emerging and best practices for mentoring across differences
- Gender, culture, race as examples
- Adding in language, nationality and identity
- Need to also address issues of implicit bias, differences in mentor expectations, communication styles and protocols
- Know this is needed and bring in needed expertise from both sides of the ocean

What about building and learning from institutions in lower resourced settings

- Need to ensure equity and equal voice in design of the program
- What are the system changes needed to incentivize and enable mentoring and mentored work
  - Understand processes, policies and regulations
  - Strong emphasis understand how to mentor across differences
  - Opportunities for bi-directional learning
  - What tools can be adapted and adopted
    - Individual development plans, mentor/mentee-agreements, training resources
  - Embed evaluation—what is going well, what needs to be adapted

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<th>Interpersonal</th>
<th>Psychosocial and Career planning</th>
<th>Culturally responsive</th>
<th>Sponsorship</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Mentor</td>
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<td>Supervisor</td>
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<td>Coach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sponsor/Advocate</td>
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Question to consider: can you identify an example of success for one box and challenge for one box in your roles in your mentoring practices and experience? How would this have differed in remote setting?
Many thanks