

Mónica Leal

Modern languages teacher

Carlos Martínez

Spanish teacher

Paola Stockton

English as a Second Language teacher

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Transcription: Mentoring in practice

Interviewer: Firstly, can we think about ways in which you've been involved in mentoring, either as a mentor or a mentee?

Mónica Leal: Early in my career I was involved as a mentor of a colleague with the same experience. It was a very good teacher but she was mainly a teacher centre in the classroom, so the students didn't have an opportunity to do a lot of active learning.

So my advice to her was that all the students were very engaged and motivated but perhaps if she included more active learning the students will get even more engaged and their grades would improve.

She implemented that, she reflected and after that she was very happy and the engagement and the academic performance have improved in her classroom.

Interviewer: Great.

Carlos Martínez: I think I consider myself a young teacher so I've been much more times a mentee than a mentor. I remember when it was my first assignment in a school, so it was going to be my first experience as a teacher.

I remember I was very lucky because one of my father's friends, he's a teacher for over 30 years, he's very experienced, so I had the opportunity to have some conversations with him before starting my career.

We talked a lot about discipline, how to manage the classroom, and that helped me to avoid some mistakes.

Interviewer: That's great.

Paola Stockton: Well, I personally spent so many years of teaching firstly with just a yearly observation where you get somebody come in to your class you don't know. They sit in your class in a formal way and they give you the judgement, the grade, and they walk away, and you are left on your own to learn from that.

Then I came across to a more close relationship where your supervisors would come maybe twice, maybe they will chat to you through emails so it's a little bit friendly, it's a bit more frequent.

However, about maybe eight years ago, I came across the concept of mentoring and I had a proper mentor, somebody you just name, "This is my mentor."

It was one-to-one, face-to-face. I found it immensely valuable. Through that actually I was discovered to be dyslexic, and so it just allowed for personalised kind of experience, a personalised identification of your weaknesses and your strengths.

So for me since then, never looked back. It didn't last for a very long time, but the impact is up until today and I still remember it, look back with fondness, appreciation, I'm always secretly thankful to the person who actually acted as my mentor.

Carlos Martínez:

Me too. I think I have the feeling that if it wasn't for that mentor, I would make a lot more of mistakes, so I'm very thankful to him. He was helping me and it's very valuable. I think you learn a lot from that. It's a big push because you think when you finish your degree that you are ready for working, but you are not.

You are not ready for working and the real context is it is hard, it is difficult, and having someone to guide you and give you some tips, it saves you time.

Interviewer:

Those are fairly successful examples of mentoring then. Has anybody got any horror stories or times when mentoring hasn't worked, and can we pinpoint why it might not have been so successful in those situations?

Mónica Leal:

I think that in order to be successful, the relationship between a mentor and mentee has to be a relation that is honesty, that the mentor puts some time aside to help the mentee.

Also, the more the mentee practices are being reflected, the better the outcome will be.

Carlos Martínez:

Well, as a mentor, I remember when I had to move to England and becoming a teacher here. It was a long process, there were many involving there, education, volunteer positions and a lot of things you have to do before you become a teacher.

After that and having some years of experience, I decided to help some people to become a teacher. I was mentoring them, helping them to design a better curriculum, to find some education, some courses, some volunteer positions, I was giving many tips to them.

I think I was able to help many people but I don't think I did it in the right way. I think I was probably a bit too controlling, directive, not giving the opportunity to the other person to express himself or I wasn't questioning enough that person.

I was probably too, I don't know what to say ...

Paola Stockton:

Yes, I agree with you the fact that you gained enough experience in teaching does not make you automatically a mentor because one of the experiences I had is like, "Yes, go on, look at somebody's class, just go and observe them." Just like, "Of course you can, of course you're very confident that you can deliver that valuable advice," but in fact I think it requires some planning and some kind of strategies on how to help others because the fact that you have the knowledge is not automatically, how to deliver that knowledge is very, very important and vital to the experience.

For example, as you said, active listening, you've got to listen, and mostly listen –

Carlos Martínez: And question.

Paola Stockton: - and ask the right questions to extract the information –

Mónica Leal: Yes, and in some parts of the world it might be intimidating to have a mentor going to your classroom and questioning ways for you to improve, but the mentee has to be open, and the aim is really to improve her professional development as well as the students' performance, and it's also for the improve all the collaborative dialogue and communication in the school and for the wider community.

Paola Stockton: I agree, it's a two-way street kind of a process.

Carlos Martínez: I was going to say exactly that, that this is not a unidirectional conversation, it has to be a real two-way conversation.

Interviewer: How relaxed can that relationship be then, do you think? Is it as simple as two people getting together over a coffee or do there need to be more formal boundaries around that relationship?

Mónica Leal: From my experience I think that they have to be ... There has to be a friendship but there has to be a little bit of a line so that the mentee can really advice the advice from the mentor and be open to improve the guidance that the mentor has told her.

Carlos Martínez: I think it needs to be a little bit formal situation. I mean it's an informal thing but it's also a formal thing. You need to focus on what are you doing, you are not just talking to a friend, it's something more formal, it has to be planned.

Yes, it has to be delivered in a time with a goal.

Interviewer: Definitely.

Paola Stockton: Yes, it's got be kind of based on evidence, got to have a chain of outcomes whereby at the end you need to know that your mentor is going to take you through a journey and at the end of the journey you're going to achieve one or two things that are perhaps vaguely agreed on at the beginning, but it's got to be evidence based on outcomes because then you've got to report it back to your institution or your organisation.

Hopefully you have to highlight success to encourage the, you know ...

Mónica Leal: Yes, and it will not only help your professional development as a mentee but also your professional fulfilment.

Carlos Martínez: I was reading and one little sentence about it is how a mentor needs to be a support that encourages and motivates the person to his own or her own learning process.

So it's I'm helping you to learn, than to improve your skills.