

Preparing Students for the Future by Cultivating Mentor-Seeking Attitude

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Abstract

In the digital age, students are aware of opportunities and possibilities available at their fingertips. Their ease with technology should be garnered by encouraging them to seek mentors. As early as high school level, students would benefit from being prepared to seek mentors from their field of interest. This early mentor seeking would train them to recognize their own requirements using critical thinking based on need-based analysis to prepare them for future jobs and handling job related issues by pinpointing mentors most helpful for them. The paper presents a Career Mentoring Model for Youth to bring to light the importance of mentor selection from an early age for well thought out individualized career or psychosocial support. The paper is based on an inductive study conducted in Germany using Grounded Theory. The data was collected in 25 semi-structured in-depth interviews with professors and postdoctoral researchers participating in mentoring programs across Germany. The study found mentees with mentor-seeking attitude had successful mentoring relationships as compared to mentees who adopted complacent attitude. Hence, mentees should be encouraged to adopt mentor-seeking attitude for effective and successful mentoring relationship. The paper aims to propose initiating a dialogue for supporting individualized self-selected mentoring programs at high school level for preparing students for the future.

Keywords: Mentoring, Grounded Theory, Critical thinking, Need-based analysis.

Introduction

In *Odyssey*, before his voyage King Odysseus made his friend and companion Mentor in charge of his son Telemachus to guide and train him. This was the first introduction to the concept of mentoring and mentor. Mentoring has developed manifold since then and numerous definitions of mentoring are available. Some researchers focus on mentoring as a contract, which garner strength from being reliable and open (Gardiner, 1998). Whereas, others describe mentoring as a partnership between mentors and mentees, where step-by-step guidance is provided to mentees till they are comfortable with the process (Strong & Baron, 2004). The mentoring partnership is further defined by Chaliès et al. (2004) as an activity in which mentors and mentees engage in “collective thinking, integrating and associating” their ideas and thoughts. Hence, the concept that first emerged as relying on mentors has evolved to an extent that both mentors and mentees are responsible for their role in mentoring relationship and both have to participate actively to make it successful.

To make mentoring relationships successful they need to be focused on the needs of mentors and mentees. The purpose of mentoring could be to provide support and assistance to mentees, to retain and groom them to be successful in their respective field (Gibson, 2005); to enhance mentees’ productivity and professional success (Gong, Chen, & Lee, 2011; Kemmis et al., 2014). Success in mentoring could be achieved by providing support such as Psychosocial Support and Career Support (Kram, 1985); Psychosocial Support, Instrumental Support and Networking Support (Tenenbaum, Crosby & Gliner, 2001); Emotional Support and Professional Support (Rippon & Martin, 2006); Instructional and Organizational Support (Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen & Bergen, 2010).

Successful mentoring relationships also require an understanding of mentees needs. The needs of work-place mentees are different from student mentees or youth mentees; the workplace mentees require guidance and support for dealing with challenges at work as well as coping with work-life balance. Similarly, student mentees require support for career counselling, managing grades and workload difficulties. And youth mentoring requires sustained support throughout puberty in shape of personal relationship in which a caring individual provides consistent companionship, support, and guidance aimed at developing the competence and character of a child or adolescent (MENTOR, 2003).

Youth mentoring, as compared to other forms of mentoring, leaves a lasting impression on mentees as evidenced in Lau, Zhou & Lai’s (2017) study where students with good mentoring quality performed better at future planning and career goal setting. Therefore, it is imperative to understand importance of youth mentoring and mentors especially natural mentors should be encouraged to provide youth mentoring in early years. Natural mentors are mentors who “you can go to for support and guidance if you need to make an important decision or who inspires you to do your best” (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002, p. 226). They focus on providing relational support to develop a trusting, emotionally close connection that makes the youth feel understood, valued, and respected (Rhodes, 2002); as well as instrumental support to engage the youth in challenging, goal-directed activities (Darling, Hamilton, & Niego, 1994).

Providing youth mentoring has multiple benefits for youth. Youth with mentoring support have been observed to avoid health risk activities and behaviors (DuBois &

Silverthorn, 2005). They also demonstrate healthy adjustment despite environmental adversity (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). As well as improvement in youth competencies and reductions in problem behaviors have been observed (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995). Weiss, Harder, Bratiotis, and Nguyen (2019) posit school mentoring as most beneficial for youth, however, despite the benefits associated with youth mentoring, it has not been widely adopted by schools as a coping and support mechanism for youth facing challenges to provide them support needed to excel in school and in life.

Education systems as well as individual schools around the world have evolved to provide opportunities to students. This growth and student welfare was based on the concept of providing best possible opportunities to students to prepare them for the future. Critical thinking was introduced in classrooms due to ineffectiveness of standard instruction methods to survive in the modern world. Critical thinking, that is creativity, problem solving, intuition, and insight (Garrison & Archer, 2000), is encouraged in students to be successful in the future. Similarly, schools around the world are focusing on student autonomy and making them equal partners in their learning via enabling them to conduct need based analysis and seeking focused guidance. Hence, education systems around the world are evolving to cater to the needs of students for a successful future. Yet, lack of interest in adopting youth mentoring within schools raises many questions and this study is focused on two interrelated questions.

1. Can mentor-seeking attitude help mentees in making mentoring relationship successful?
2. What would constitute mentor-seeking attitude?

Methodology

The study was conducted using Charmaz (2014) constructivist approach to acknowledge subjectivity and researcher's involvement in construction and interpretation of data. Charmaz (2014) constructivist Grounded Theory (GT) approach was complimented with Glaser's (1978) Grounded Theory approach. The Grounded theory research process was guided by sampling scaffold for theoretical sampling (Qureshi, 2018a). The data was collected through 25 semi-structured in-depth interviews. Using the nested sampling scheme (Qureshi, 2018b), participation invites were sent to mentoring programs via Forum Mentoring, directly to mentoring programs coordinators across Germany as well as using snowball sampling to contact participants. The interviews were conducted over a period of one year across Germany. Out of these, 22 interviews were conducted face-to-face, one was Skype interview, and two were phone interviews.

Fourteen female and one male mentee, and eight females and two male mentors participated in the study (Table 1). The participants of the study were contacted via their universities' mentoring programs in which they were enrolled. The fifteen mentees and ten mentors volunteered to be part of the mentoring programs and subsequently this research study. The participants were interviewed for one-hour to one-and-a-half-hour duration depending on their time availability and topics to be discussed as per interviewees' convenience.

Participants	No. of participants	Male	Female
Mentors	15	1	14
Mentees	10	2	8

Table 1: *Participants' Demographics*

The data collected in interviews was transcribed word-by-word and coded using Charmaz's Initial coding and Focused coding method in combination with Glaser's Theoretical coding method (Glaser, 1978). The Initial coding process was divided in two stages developing codes and developing initial concepts. Throughout the Initial coding phase, the data was coded and coding scheme was checked multiples times to ensure reliability of coding process. The next phase was Focused coding phase in which the data was further analysed in two stages strengthening concepts and developing categories. In this phase as well, the codes were reviewed and organised under coordinating concepts. During this process codes were reviewed numerous times to eliminate any ambiguity. Once categories emerged from the data then the categories were analysed to see the emerging themes, which later gave way to theory as seen in figure 1 below.

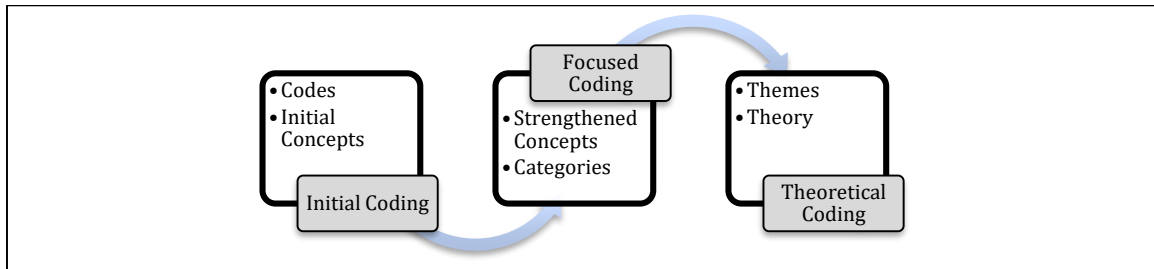


Figure 1: Data Analysis Scheme

The data was analysed using Glaser's 6C's as analytical tool which lead to emergence of four themes. One of these themes addressed in this paper is importance and impact of mentor selection.

Findings

The analysis revealed two main results:

1. Mentor-seeking attitude helps mentees in developing successful mentoring relationship, when they;
 - a. Exercise the right to choose
 - b. Show responsibility

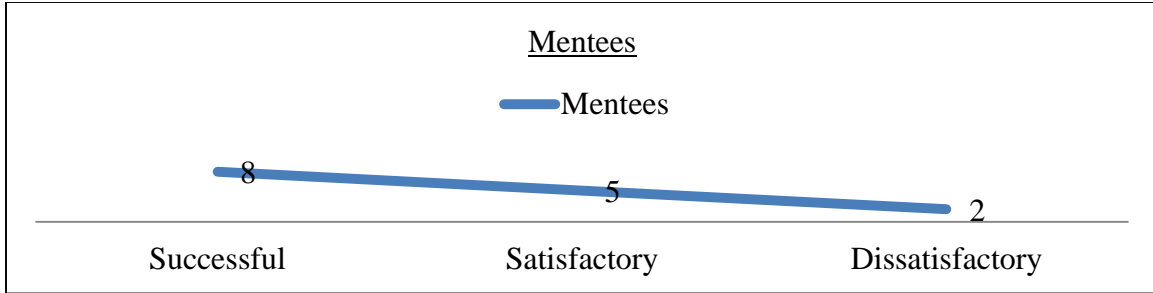


Figure 2: Mentor-Seeking Attitude

It was observed that out of fifteen mentees, eight mentees rated their relationship as successful based on their willingness to meet the mentor again due to beneficial nature of their relationship with their mentor (see figure 2 above). Whereas, five mentees stated that their relationship was satisfactory and they were not certain if they wanted to meet their mentors again. And two mentees claimed their relationship to be dissatisfactory due to non-beneficial advice they received from their mentors. It was observed that mentees who claimed success had chosen their mentors themselves and took initiatives to make the relationship beneficial for them. Whereas, satisfactory relationship was one in which mentees had selected their mentors, however, they did not take responsibility for making their relationship work. And mentees in dissatisfactory relationships stated that they were assigned mentors by mentoring programs and they did not take responsibility for the success of this relationship. Hence, mentees who choose their own mentors and then put in effort to make their relationships successful were most satisfied with their relationship and claimed it to be successful.

2. Mentor-seeking attitude comprise:
 - a. Proactive
 - b. Reflective
 - c. Goal-oriented

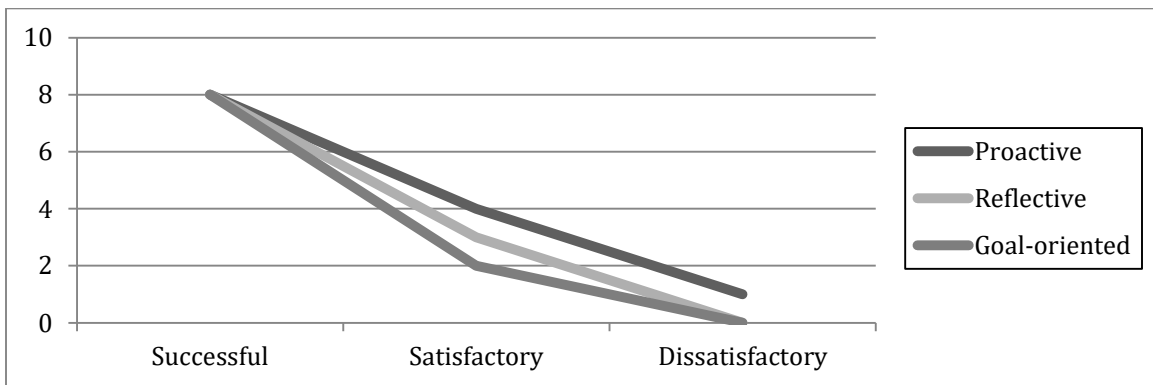


Figure 3: Mentor-Seeking Attitude Composition

An analysis of qualities of mentees claiming successful relationship revealed three common qualities: proactive, reflective and goal-oriented. These qualities were found in all eight mentees claiming successful relationships as compared to mentees in satisfactory relationship who showed a combination of any two qualities (see figure 3 above). However, mentees in dissatisfactory relationship did not show these qualities. Therefore, it was found that proactive, reflective and goal-oriented mentees were able to have successful relationships as compared to mentees not possessing these qualities.

Discussion

The paper presents a Career Mentoring Model for Youth (CMMY) based on the results of the study where mentees with mentor-seeking attitude found themselves in successful mentoring relationships as compared to complacent mentees who accepted mentors referred to them by their programs. The CMMY is developed keeping in mind that mentoring has already established itself as an effective medium for supporting youth in need of guidance; therefore, developing mentor-seeking attitude in youth would be a step towards empowering them.

Literature on mentoring suggests that success of mentoring relationships is effected by many factors such as shortages of mentors (Johnson & Kardos, 2005); over load of work on mentors which affects their performance and they may feel isolation due to their role as mentors (Bullough, 2005; Maynard, 2000); the mentoring environment; or lack of professional expertise (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004); the selection and pairing process (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009), but still it can be developed into a successful relationship despite all odds with mentor-seeking attitude as witnessed in the study. Encouraging youth to develop mentor-seeking attitude to find mentors, who understand their personality, issues facing them, can empathise with youth, and guide them towards better solutions, is the answer to many youth issues.

The Career Mentoring Model for Youth comprise four factors; critical thinking, need-based analysis, technology and mentor-seeking attitude. Only mentor-seeking attitude would not be enough, it has to work in combination with other assets available to our youth that is critical thinking, need-based analysis, and technology (see figure 4 below).

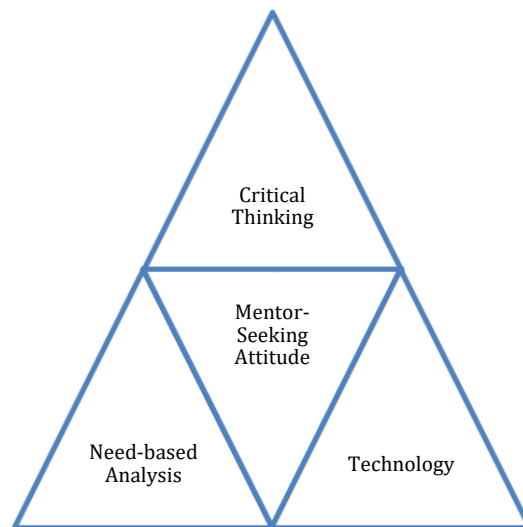


Figure 4: Career Mentoring Model for Youth

Hence, the four parts of Career Mentoring Model for Youth need to be present for comprehensive progress in youth mentoring process. For instance, encouraging critical thinking in students has changed our classrooms from standard learning procedures to critical inquiry of subject matter focusing and encouraging student autonomy. Students engaging in critical thinking analyse the topic, look for constraints, gather information, generate and test hypotheses to come to conclusions (Kurfiss, 1988). As found in the study, when mentees are encouraged to engage in critical thinking they are being equipped with the tools to be successful in all aspects of life.

Moreover, critical thinking combined with need-based analysis provides a strong base for further enhancement of youth. Issues raised by them that need to be addressed based on their analysis provide a platform for mentors to start mentoring youth with already identified issues. And since they would be highlighted by mentees, therefore, mentees' desire to work towards solving the issues would be high as observed in the study, which in turns makes mentors more responsive to work with mentees. In addition, use of technology in mentoring youth can also be a great asset. Our youth is well versed with technology and is using it in classrooms as well as daily life. Mentees, in this study, claimed that they took a proactive approach and searched for their mentors who had more common ground with mentees, hence, proving that using Career Mentoring Model for Youth with all four factors, critical thinking, need-based analysis, technology and mentor-seeking attitude is helpful in developing successful mentoring relationships.

Critical thinking, need-based analysis and use of technology in classrooms have been explored in the literature but Mentor-seeking attitude is a new concept and it needs further elaboration. Mentor-seeking attitude was commonly found in mentees reporting successful mentoring relationships and it was concluded in the study that mentees adopting mentor-seeking attitude were successful in their mentoring relationship. It was further investigated to explore what constitute mentor-seeking attitude to find three qualities to form basis of mentor-seeking attitude: proactive, reflective and goal-oriented.

These three qualities can be developed in youth as a necessity to develop Mentor-seeking attitude. Being proactive was found in the study to be most helpful quality for mentees. Proactive is "acting in anticipation of future problems, needs, or changes." The mentee participants' of the study who claimed to be successful in their mentoring relationship adopted proactive approach in their mentoring relationship. For instance, one mentee Violet stated that she did her research on her mentor before going to meet him, "ya...his work and his CV, and his all on the homepage of the university, and so I could um comment on these points I read there, then, and I was asking how did you do this things." Another mentee Donna also stated, "I was there, I had prepared, I questioned, I knew what I want to know, and I asked a lot, I think that's an important thing to ask, to ask, to ask, and to see what they do." Their proactive approach to selecting mentor who was best suited to guide them reflected that they took responsibility for the success of their mentoring relationship by investing their time and effort. This proactive attitude, in turn, has a positive impact on mentors who appreciate, value and expect prepared mentees.

Similarly, mentor-seeking attitude also requires mentees to be reflective. Being reflective is "to think carefully, especially about possibilities and opinions." Reflection is to question and critically analyse, it is essential for mentees (Holloway & Gouthro, 2011).

Kullman (1998) study elaborates concept of reflection using Dewey's (1933) description that to be reflective three attitudes are required namely:

'Open-mindedness', which implies an openness to new ideas and thoughts; 'whole-heartedness', which implies the capacity to fully engage with new ideas and actively seek them out; and 'responsibility', which implies being aware of the meaning and consequences of one's actions. (Quotation marks used as in Kullman, 1998, p.472).

The mentees who were satisfied with their mentoring relationship reflected on what they wanted from their mentors and what they could bring to this relationship. One of the mentee Patricia stated, "and to really to first of all make yourself reflect what do you really want? What would be the right way to go?" Another mentee Michelle reflected on her mentoring practice, "Ehmm, yea, but probably the questions are not as specific as they should, that's probably my part of the mentoring process." Hence, reflection is more than simply "recasting of events or episodes" (Freese, 1999, p. 896); it is a thought provoking process in which mentees need to analyse their own participation in the mentoring process.

Moreover, third quality that mentee require for developing mentor-seeking attitude is being goal-oriented. "A goal-oriented person or team works hard to achieve good results in the tasks that they have been given." It was found in the study that mentees with high goal-oriented attitude were more successful in developing successful mentoring relationships. For instance, one mentee Courteney while referring to her mentoring meeting reflected goal-oriented attitude by stating, "um this is a topic I am definitely want to talk about her." In comparison, a low goal-oriented mentee when asked about her agenda and expectations had little to add:

Interviewer- "What were you expecting from her?"

Joan- "Umm a little bit but not that much."

When mentees do not take goal-oriented attitude their mentoring relationships become less productive as mentors respond to prepared mentees as stated by one mentor Robert, "I would not receive you without you having prepared." Hence, being prepared for mentoring sessions reflecting goal-oriented attitude is the key to successful mentoring relationship. In short, eight mentees who reported successful mentoring relations reflected mentoring-seeking attitude (see figure 5 below) with three qualities proactive, reflective and goal-oriented

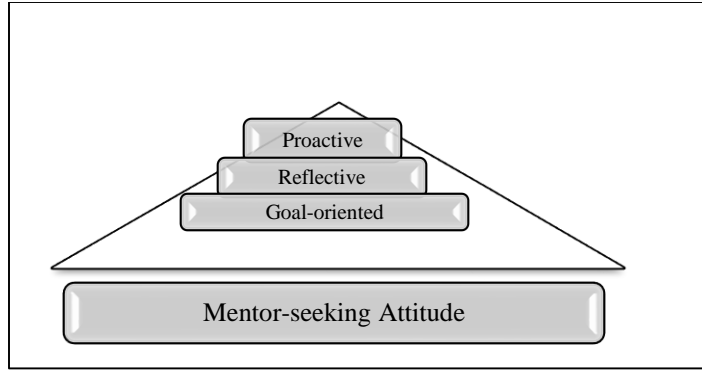


Figure 5: Mentor-seeking Attitude in Mentees

Hence, the three mentor-seeking qualities: proactive, reflective and goal-oriented combine to form Mentor-seeking attitude. And as mentor-seeking attitude alone cannot guarantee success of mentoring relationship; similarly, critical thinking, need-based analysis, and technology can also not reflect mentoring success. What is required is a combination of mentor-seeking attitude and mentoring assets (critical thinking, need-based analysis, and technology) to form the Career Mentoring Model for Youth for successful youth mentoring.

Conclusion

In short, mentoring youths is a necessary step, which can be made successful by using Career Mentoring Model for Youth. Mentors can use mentees' assets that are need-based analysis, critical thinking and technology in combination with developing a mentor-seeking attitude to enhance youth mentoring. It was found that mentor-seeking attitude helps mentees in developing successful mentoring relationship especially when they exercise the right to choose their mentors and show responsibility for their choice. And it was also established that mentor-seeking attitude comprise proactive, reflective and goal-oriented qualities, and it ensures a successful mentoring relationship when used as part of Career Mentoring Model for Youth. Hence, a dialogue is required to initiate youth mentoring programs in schools to prepare them for the future by encouraging them to use Career Mentoring Model for Youth to enhance their future prospects.

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