



Building a mentoring network

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ABSTRACT

Background: Mentoring has long been regarded as one of the key components of research training and faculty development.

Purpose: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Nurse Faculty Scholars program purposely facilitated scholars' development of a mentoring network by providing each individual with three mentors: a school-of-nursing mentor (primary), a university-based non-nurse research mentor (research), and a nationally-recognized nurse leader at another university (national).

Method: The Mentorship Effectiveness Scale was used to assess the effectiveness of each type of mentor in the first five completed cohorts.

Discussion: The ratings of mentorship effectiveness for all three kinds of mentors were generally high. Scholars valued most their mentors' support and advocacy; the biggest weakness in dealing with all mentors was accessibility.

Conclusion: Even when one mentor proved a poor match, another mentor turned out to be an advocate and helpful, thus reaffirming the benefits of a mentoring network as opposed to only a single mentoring relationship. One lesson learned is the importance of preparing mentors for their role via written materials, in-person or phone orientations, and discussions at the annual meeting.

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Mentoring as a socializing mechanism for encouraging growth and advancement has been a key concept since the focus on adult development in the 1970s (Kram, 1985; Levinson, 1978; Sheehy, 1976). Editorials have extolled its benefits (Joel, 1997; Kelly, 1978; Schorr, 1978). Thought pieces have advocated for mentoring in the development of scholars and scientists (Cameron & Blackburn, 1981; Davidhizar, 1988; Fitzpatrick & Abraham, 1987; Meleis, Hall, & Stevens, 1994). Studies have tested its effect on career

development in academia and junior faculty productivity (Rawl & Peterson, 1992; Williams & Blackburn, 1988). Reviews have plumbed what we know and what we don't know about this subject (Vance & Olson, 1991). Over time, mentoring has become regarded as an essential component in the development of transformational nurse leaders (Ferguson, 2015).

The importance of mentoring to women, and by extension to nursing as a gendered profession, has been particularly recognized (Campbell-Heider, 1986)

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because mentoring involves networking. Women have historically either been excluded from many of the informal socialization experiences open to men or have themselves dismissed such activities as unimportant (Sonnert & Holton, 1996). Too often, the mentoring literature has failed to be sensitive to the importance that gender, race, and class play in who is mentored (DeMarco, 1993). The historically advantaged don't necessarily understand (or may not think of themselves as privileged) the specific experiences of those who are discounted because of marginalization, structural discrimination, and unconscious bias (Case, 2013). The traditional emphasis in mentoring on the like-minded working together has disadvantaged women and underrepresented ethnic/racial groups whose numbers are still not fully represented in senior circles (Manson, 2009; Mkandawire-Valhmu, Penninah, & Stevens, 2010; Wallen, Rivera-Goba, Hastings, Peragallo, & De Leon Siantz, 2005). Henry's *Leadership revelations III: How we achieve the gender tipping point* (2015) and Eagly and Carli's *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders* (2007) call for women to have multiple male and female mentors but do not speak to the complexities of leadership for women in a profession like nursing that is primarily female.

Mentoring matters in a hypercompetitive world because it is a way to develop one's personal best (DeLong, Gabarron, & Lees, 2008; Gawande, 2011). Mentoring as an interprofessional concept has grown in popularity as a means for achieving research productivity and academic success (Byrne & Keefe, 2002; Cole et al., 2015; Conn, Porter, McDaniel, Rantz, & Maas, 2005; Haddi, Lindquist, & Buckwalter, 2013; Kubiak, Guidot, Trimm, Kamen, & Roman, 2012; Mass et al., 2006; Morrison-Beedy, Aronowitz, Dyne, & Mkandawire, 2001; Schrubbe, 2004; Travis & Anthony, 2011; Yin et al., 2015). The National Advisory Committee (NAC) of the Nurse Faculty Scholars (NFS) program, which was charged with shaping this Robert Wood Johnson Foundation commitment to the development of junior nursing faculty, saw mentoring as a means of "increasing cultural capital" for sustainable academic success (Chanderbhan-Forde, Heppner, & Borman, 2012) and of decreasing levels of role conflict and role ambiguity (Specht, 2013) and looked to it as the key component in building the capacity of nursing science.

But mentoring, as a multifaceted process, must address many different activities—supporting, teaching, encouraging, challenging, counseling, affirming, coaching, advising, protecting, sponsoring, and providing feedback—that can often exceed the limits of a simple, dyadic relationship (Martina, Mutrie, Ward, & Lewis, 2014). Recognizing this, the NFS approach assumed that several different mentors, working in concert, are needed to fulfill such diverse needs and are critical to sustaining supportive networks beyond the period of initial award (DeCastro, Sambuco, Ubel, Stewart, & Jagsi, 2013).

Although mentoring has been traditionally seen as a single, sustained hierarchical relationship occurring during the school or early work years, professionals increasingly hope to have relationships of varying lengths that prove important to advancement over the course of an entire career. The emphasis is less on the importance of one nurturing individual and more on developing an evolving network of support (Chandler & Kram, 2007). Thus, the NFS program reflected the conceptual paradigm shifts that have transpired in recent years (see Table 1). The role any one mentor plays will vary depending on the expertise in need of development (McBride, 2011, p. 55). Mentoring wasn't seen as a nicety or a kindness reserved for those who remind one of his/her younger self but as a customary professional obligation and a skill that can be developed (Johnson, 2007). Moreover, some mentoring relationships can be peer to peer (Bryant et al., 2015; Moss, Teshima, & Leszcz, 2008) in which colleagues at roughly the same developmental stage provide each other with encouragement, help, and information, thus serving as additional resources.

Mentoring as Conceptualized in the NFS Program

Mentoring was one of the essentials of the NFS program and has been described as setting this program apart (Conn, 2013). The program reflected the belief that a new faculty member, fresh from doctoral studies or postdoctoral training, is most likely to reach her or his potential with support from those who have successfully negotiated senior academic challenges, including the development of a vibrant program of research. Accordingly, the NFS program emphasized four kinds of mentoring.

The School of Nursing Mentor (Also Known as Primary Mentor)

This senior School of Nursing colleague assumed primary responsibility for ensuring that the scholar learned how to synergize successfully the tripartite

Table 1 – Paradigm Shifts in Mentoring

Twentieth Century	Twenty-first Century
A nicety	A professional responsibility
One skill	Multiple skills
Prompted by mentor's generosity	Expectation of organizational culture
Instinctive kindness	Learned behavior
Top down ("disciple") approach	Reciprocal relationship
Mentor = like mentee	Mentor ≠ like mentee
Only one and one to one	Multiple mentors and many forms
Early in career	Throughout career

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