

**El Viaje de Éxito: Building a Strong Foundation Through Equitable Coaching and Mentoring
at a College of Education in a Hispanic Serving Institute**

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Abstract

This narrative inquiry focuses on the coaching and mentoring experiences of a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) within an informal mentoring program in a College of Education at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). The study examines the impact of mentoring and coaching on the GRA's professional development utilizing Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Theory and Gelso's Research Training Environment as frameworks to understand that impact. The findings reveal overwhelmingly positive outcomes from the coaching and mentoring relationship. The study contributes to the existing knowledge on coaching and mentoring in academic settings. It underscores the importance of recognizing and leveraging the community cultural wealth of historically marginalized individuals in research and academia.

Keywords: coaching, mentoring, teaching and learning

Introduction

Mentoring and coaching are essential in teaching and learning, especially for those seeking a doctoral degree. The literature supports this by indicating positive results for undergraduates, career transitions, and graduate students:

Within the academic profession, mentorship most often occurs in the informal but special sponsorship that a graduate student receives from a senior professor during Graduate School. The mentor provides a role model, academic advice, and eventually assistance in gaining access to the profession. (Blackburn et al., 1981).

Mentoring is very important for educational leaders as it aids in developing effective leadership and continued learning opportunities (London, 2002). This study seeks to add to the literature on mentoring and coaching by exploring the experiences of one Latina doctoral student as she engages two faculty members, one who serves in the role of mentor and the other in the role of coach. The study explores the benefits of a mentor/coach relationship where mutual interests and goals lead to a better understanding of effective mentoring and coaching in the hopes of assisting others in overcoming inequities in educational opportunities, as are sometimes found in higher education. By supporting the success of diverse students, mentors contribute to a more inclusive academic environment. The findings of this study can be particularly enlightening for the field of educational leadership, as leaders have an important role in supporting mentorship and coaching.

As the researcher/participant, I, the lead author (henceforth “author”), will use my current work as a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), as well as my understanding of the sociocultural, political, and historical forces that have impacted me in Brownsville, Texas, an urban community on the U.S. Mexico border. The focus point is my career story of a woman who is an experienced educator but is transitioning into higher education. This narrative inquiry attempts to understand how the informal mentoring and coaching I received as an educator and a graduate student influenced me, in hopes of informing higher education faculty on how to support a smooth transition from K-12 teaching to higher education faculty. I chose narrative inquiry, as it is a unique methodological manner of getting inside the practitioner’s world through the analysis of their stories (Riley & Hawe, 2005). I will tell my story as a narrative inquiry. I am comfortable with storytelling as a form of communication and reflection, which I experienced frequently in my upbringing as a Latina woman.

The author focused on her experiences in an informal mentorship program and an informal coaching program in the first two years of her doctoral studies in an attempt to better understand how mentoring and coaching helped her transition from K-12 public education to higher education. The author used the following research questions to guide her study:

Research Question 1: In what ways did the mentor and coach guide and support me in ways that helped me transition from public education to higher education?

Research Question 2: What specific aspects of mentoring and coaching had the greatest impact on me as I transitioned to higher education?

Problem Statement

Latina students in institutions of higher education have typically not received equitable support and access in relation to their white counterparts (Abelson et al., 2022). This is seen in lower graduation rates of Latina students (Bensimon et al., 2012). One method that has helped Latina students become successful is using a formal or informal mentoring program (Jasman, 2024). When students are treated equitably and are shown care, love, and emotional support in mentoring relationships, this leads to higher outcomes (Aguilar, 2020a). This type and quality of mentoring and coaching are essential to marginalized groups; however, this is not often the norm, especially for students of color.

Literature Review

A review of the literature on mentoring and coaching focused on three interconnected concepts that have gained significant attention in the field of education: equity, transformational coaching, and college mentoring. The review focuses on mentorship and coaching as it impacts student success.

Equity

Educational equity means that every student receives the support and opportunities needed to develop their full academic and social potential and thrive every day (Aguilar, 2020a). To interrupt educational inequities, educators must adopt a pedagogy of caring and help to create schools in which every student is treated equitably and is provided the same privileges and opportunities. In higher education, faculty members must open themselves to meaningful and purposeful conversations, ones that are effective with wisdom, honesty, and trust. According to Aguilar (2020a, p.29), “It is possible to create classrooms and schools that provide equitable and rigorous learning experiences for children, and that result in equitable outcomes for students.” Regardless of background—whether children come from low-income homes, are raised in foster care, or come to school lacking the literacy and numeracy skills typically expected of new students—every child can learn and, in turn, self-actualize (Aguilar, 2020a).

Building equitable and strong foundational schools must not fall only on teachers but must also reflect good leadership (Clayton et al., 2020). Leaders must help to sharpen the tools their teachers possess, such as commitment, resourcefulness, and their love for the profession. Establishing strong relationships with students benefits them in various ways, from employment opportunities (Bova, 2000) to professional growth (Harris & Brewer, 1986). Eby et al. (2007) found that mentoring is associated with a wide variety of favorable attitudinal, behavioral, motivational, and career outcomes.

Transformational Coaching

The term coach has been loosely applied to the field of education (Aguilar, 2020a). For the purposes of this study, coaching refers to assistance by a competent and experienced educator in mastering specific skills targeted for professional growth. Teachers typically receive coaches for one of two reasons: first, as a new teacher to a school, and second, as a teacher requiring intervention for low performance. Coaching effectiveness can vary greatly. For example, some new teachers may be assigned a coach with whom they rarely meet, leading to poor outcomes, while others may meet regularly and have meaningful discussions and opportunities for reflection that help the new teacher develop specific skills necessary for new teacher success. Effective coaching of new teachers can be especially helpful with mandated curricular initiatives, where coaches can help ensure fidelity across classrooms (Aguilar, 2020a).

Some states use coaching as part of their evaluation process to support underperforming teachers. These teachers will receive better assistance from a transformational coach. A transformational coach offers professional development to those teachers in need of intervention. Coaches take the time to meet with their mentees, act as guides, and have meaningful conversations about pedagogy, curriculum, and classroom management that lead to mentee reflection and improved teaching practice (Aguilar, 2020a).

Transformational coaching, as espoused by Aguilar (2020a, p. 34), includes three interconnected components:

The Coach: A Transformational Coach must attend to their own beliefs, behaviors, and ways of being.

The Client: Transformational Coaching addresses a client's behaviors, beliefs, and ways of being.

The System: The Transformational Coach identifies and understands the larger system in which we live and work and takes action to transform it.

A Transformational Coach takes the entire system into account and knows that impacting only the individual will not sufficiently allow for equitable change. One must explore the system and transform the entire organization's way of thinking to begin to make an impact (Aguilar, 2020a).

College Mentoring

Marginalized women in higher education typically have limited access to formal mentorship, which substantiates the need for mentorship programs that engage mentees and mentors alike (Núñez et al., 2015). Research on faculty-graduate student mentoring relationships has provided valuable insights into effective practices that foster the success of graduate students (Lechuga, 2011). Mentoring is a particular process in which an experienced person (the

mentor) guides another person (the mentee) in the development of their ideas, learning, and personal and professional competence (Tareef, 2013).

The practice of mentoring is a common strategy for institutions of higher education to address the developmental needs of students and can positively impact academic outcomes through a variety of programs ranging from first-year transition programs to undergraduate research initiatives (Crisp et al., 2017). Jacobi (1991) discussed the complexity of mutually beneficial mentoring relationships and defined the role of the mentor as intentionally providing emotional and psychological support, career advice, and role modeling. The notion of mentoring can be understood as a one-to-one relationship between a mentor and a protégé (Alcocer & Martinez, 2018). Garcia et al. (2019) posited, “To become truly transformative spaces of serving, Hispanic Serving Institutions must consider the experiences of all people within the organization, particularly as faculty, staff, and administrators at HSIs can ultimately influence the experiences and outcomes of students” (p. 28).

Some benefits of mentoring programs assisting the leaders of tomorrow include better organizational communication, retaining the correct staff, and helping to bridge the gap between training and real-world experience (Dymock, 1999). Lester et al. (2011) suggest that informal mentorship programs that occur organically may be more effective than formal mentoring programs.

Methods

The Method section addresses research design, theoretical framework, important contextual factors that influence the research, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

Research Design

This article reflects a strong stance that the author takes in narrative inquiry as a form of her writing.

Narrative Inquiry is an approach to making sense of and analyzing data that recognizes the value of stories to frame our lives, provide lenses and metaphors for understanding larger concepts, and to serve as tools for sharing with the broader public for sophisticated analysis and knowledge creation. (Henderson, 2010)

The author uses a variety of strategies for framing her inquiry, collecting pertinent data, and reflecting on the importance of the data.

In this narrative inquiry, I am focusing on mentors and coaches in higher education. Narrative inquiry serves as a portal through which I entered the world of higher education and interpreted my experiences with a coach and mentor to help build a strong foundation for my future endeavors in academia. The participant for this study is the lead author, a full-time graduate student working on a doctoral degree with a concentration in higher education

leadership. She attends her classes in the afternoon and evening. During the day, she works as a GRA, where her research project has her at public K-12 schools.

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks were used to guide this study, Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Theory and C. J. Gelso's (2006) Research Training Environment Theory. Both theoretical frameworks helped me to understand the lived experience of a mentee learning from the experiences with her faculty mentor and her faculty coach. Community Cultural Wealth theory provides a framework to better understand the lived experiences of a mentee in an informal mentorship program. It provides a model to better understand how to influence a student's mindset toward research in a positive manner. Yosso (2005) describes six forms of Community Cultural Wealth: aspirational, linguistic, social, familial, navigational, and resistant (Vela et al., 2023). Aspirational, linguistic, social, and navigational capital will be the focus for this study. Aspirational capital refers to the ability to remain positive about the future even during challenges. Linguistic capital refers to intellectual and social abilities that are cultivated with diverse languages (Vela et al., 2023). This would be especially pertinent for students who know multiple languages (for me, English and Spanish) and can communicate successfully with their mentors and coaches in those languages. These students draw on their linguistic strengths. Social capital refers to networks of people and community resources. For example, drawing on social contacts and community resources may help a student identify and attain a college scholarship. These networks may help a student in preparing the scholarship application itself, while also reassuring the student emotionally that she/he is not alone in the process of pursuing higher education. Navigational capital refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions.

Gelso's (2006) Research Training Environment theory was designed to develop a positive attitude toward research in graduate students. Three main components of the theory are research interest/attitude, research self-efficacy, and research productivity (C. J. Gelso et al., 2013). Two specific dimensions of this theory are especially aligned with the focus of this study: the Positive Regard dimension and the Structure and Clarity dimension. Positive Regard focuses on fostering a supportive and encouraging environment, which is crucial for student motivation and scientific development. Structure and Clarity focuses on offering clear feedback and validation of scientific efforts through positive reinforcement, promoting confidence and growth. According to C. J. Gelso (2006), faculty mentors need to be involved in their mentees' research. They need to show excitement and positive involvement in the research. Faculty also need to positively reinforce the students' scientific activities. When graduate students become involved in research, they need to feel like their work is important, valued, and recognized (Gelso, 2006). In this study, Yosso's and Geslo's theories are used as a lens to understand the mentees' lived experiences with a faculty mentor and a faculty coach at an HSI.

Important Contextual Factors that Influence the Research Study

A variety of experiences helped to shape my perspectives about education and led me to enter a doctoral program in Educational Leadership. The following reflections about those experiences, along with an introduction to my coach and mentor, offer important context for understanding this study.

Education from Home

The most important learning opportunities I experienced came from my early childhood days when my father was a High School automotive instructor and my mother taught kindergarten at a local Elementary. I woke up every morning to the smell of my “moomsie” making breakfast and my parents discussing the occurrences of yesterday and what could be expected for today. My parents were the epitome of a *matrimonio*, husband and wife. They communicated through inquiry and sharing stories, listening to each other intently, and in the process, being perfect role models for me and others in the neighborhood. They demonstrated the importance of religion in our lives. The neighbors from two doors down, who were church choir members, and my parents would gather at our house to discuss the upcoming Sunday readings. They called it a Bible study, but they studied the Bible for 45 minutes and ate for the next two hours. Gathering around the table for *arroz, frijoles charros, y enchiladas* with family and friends always played an essential role in our lives. Through these family traditions and storytelling and inquiry, we established strong relationships with our neighbors and the church family, and this method of learning, teaching, and intense listening impacted my life.

I learned from my great-grandmother the stories of the past from the plentiful stories she told me as a child. I asked her about our family traditions and our values. She believed that everything was given to us through God and that we deserved what was given to us because God gave it to us. My great-grandmother’s words resounded in my head as my colleagues in education and I spoke. It was the right time to begin my terminal degree, delve into more research about family traditions, and learn more about our Hispanic culture through storytelling. It was the right time to begin a cultural, epistemological, and ontological journey through what might open my eyes to a world of opportunities.

The Road Map to Higher Education

I, the participant, am a real person, but I am also a metaphor for hundreds of thousands of Hispanic women who have given up and/or have chosen to “settle” for what they have and not advance. This article depicts how one individual's hard work and perseverance, believing in oneself, and seeking and accepting support from mentors and coaches can turn dreams into reality.

As an educator in the public school system, I often felt that teachers had little autonomy and they could not be creative in their teaching. I was told in the community college system, “Teach and do your job. You won’t see much of me (my supervisor) as long as you are

teaching and minding your own business.” It was a great experience. I had my own office, I held office hours, and I taught the classes assigned to me. Some of the instructors had doctorates. At times, we met in the hallway and discussed issues with students, how to solve them, and our teaching agenda for the week. I discovered through this storytelling and sharing that there is much more to education than just testing and structure. I felt that I was listened to and heard by my colleagues and that what I had to say was valued, which validated what I always knew: I had something to contribute. This sharing helped motivate me to take the leap and apply for a doctorate.

During the time of the Covid pandemic, I was assigned more responsibilities that allowed the high school dual enrollment teachers to report to me and ask me questions regarding the online Music Appreciation course I developed. I was also instructed to train the teachers and act as a “middle person” between the community college and dual enrollment teachers. Many teachers were not prepared for the changes and were resistant. They all wanted to stick to what was working according to them. The community college was seeking change, and the Dean wanted the Music Appreciation course structured in a certain way. I complied with his request. This experience helped prepare me for the road ahead.

The decision to apply for a doctoral program was difficult—my mother had been diagnosed with an illness, and there were other obstacles; it was also a decision I felt like I should have made years ago. Since the tender age of six, I wanted to seek out this terminal degree, not for any other reason but “self-satisfaction.” The impression left on me when I was six and remembering that I told my mother I wanted to one day wear that “funny looking hat” –I went for it. It was a decision that would change my life.

Coach and Mentor

My experience with my mentor and my coach took place during the first two years of my doctoral program. I served each for one-year GRA appointments. I refer to Dr. Smith as my mentor because I worked with her first, and she has served to guide and support me in a wide variety of ways across the two-year period as I have transitioned toward a career in higher education. I refer to Dr. Miller as my coach because the federal research grant on which we worked in my second year involved me learning about and taking the role of coach with 4th-grade teachers who were participants in our grant. Dr. Miller modeled the skills of an effective coach and helped me develop my skills in coaching.

Dr. Miller has an extensive set of abilities ranging from basic coaching skills to knowledge of instructional strategies and various pedagogy. Dr. Miller got to know me as an individual and learned about my strengths and weaknesses, my beliefs, and my way of being. He was able to form a trusting relationship with me and saw my commitment to the cause. We were always able to reflect on the good and the bad that took place on that day or week. I noticed that Dr. Miller was regularly engaged in his teaching and his learning. He once expressed to me, “Just because I have a terminal degree doesn’t mean that learning stops.”

Dr. Smith, my college mentor, is an exceptional female professor who possesses a vast array of abilities and extensive knowledge of both me personally and the higher education landscape. With a deep understanding of my strengths, weaknesses, and goals, Dr. Smith has provided tailored guidance and support. Her personalized approach ensures that she can address my specific needs and challenges, helping me navigate the complexities of higher education more effectively. Her expertise and experience make her an invaluable resource for my academic and personal growth during my doctoral journey. Both Dr. Smith and Dr. Miller identify their cultural background as European American.

Data Collection: Narrative Self-Interview

Employing a narrative inquiry approach, this study utilized a self-interview technique to elicit a detailed account of my academic journey. Following established narrative inquiry protocols, I constructed a semi-structured interview guide that explored key aspects of my experience as a graduate student, including academic pursuits, personal challenges encountered, research involvement, and experiences as a Graduate Research Assistant. This interview guide served as a springboard, prompting rich narratives that delved beyond surface-level responses.

The self-interview process itself was a rigorous exercise in self-reflection. I assumed the role of both interviewer and participant, actively prompting myself to elaborate on significant experiences and turning points. This introspective dialogue yielded a comprehensive narrative that captured the nuances and complexities of my graduate school trajectory. A semi-structured interview protocol was used (Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018). Examples of questions include, “Reflect on your experiences as a Graduate Research Assistant,” “Explain how your experiences have benefitted you as you prepare to enter academia?” “Do you believe you had intellectual independence when carrying out your GRA assignments?” and “How will being a Graduate Research Assistant help you achieve your long-term goals?”

Responses were documented on the computer. Although there was a focal interview that lasted approximately 90 minutes, this was an iterative process. I had extensively reflected on my experiences with my mentor and coach prior to this interview time and continued to reflect on and articulate my experiences as I analyzed the data and wrote this article.

Other data sources included various notes taken from GRA meetings, coaching notes related to the federal grant, and time logs. I also wrote reflection journals on past conversations with my coach and mentor. In addition, I met and had new discussions with my coach or mentor. Although the conversations between myself and my coach or mentor were more of an informal nature, they allowed me to understand the importance of weekly reflections and meetings. Voice memos and typed notes were used as documentation.

A common feature of my Latinx heritage is the use of storytelling as a means of teaching and listening through inquiry. This was described in detail in the previous section. In my experience, educators are used to learning from each other by telling stories and discussing the past. Storytelling is an essential component of narrative research design.

Data Analysis: Narrative Coding and Thematic Development

Following the self-interview, a thematic analysis was conducted on the transcribed narrative. Utilizing an inductive approach, I meticulously coded the data, identifying recurring themes and patterns within my experiences. This process involved a close examination of the narrative, paying particular attention to pivotal moments, challenges overcome, and lessons learned. Through this iterative process, several central themes emerged that resonated deeply with Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Theory and Gelso's Research Training Environment. These frameworks provided a robust theoretical foundation for interpreting the narrative and drawing meaningful connections between my personal experiences and established scholarly concepts.

Trustworthiness

The author addressed trustworthiness of the research process using a variety of techniques. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) schema of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability was used as a guide throughout the study. A peer debriefing was conducted with the participant's mentor and coach to address credibility. An in-depth description of the findings through multiple data collection methods supports the transferability of results. An external audit of data collection and analysis procedures was conducted by a peer with experience in qualitative research in order to address the trustworthiness of data analysis. To address confirmability, the author kept an audit trail of coding and thematizing and reflected on personal biases that might have influenced data analysis.

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of a doctoral student utilizing both a mentor and a coach at a Hispanic Serving Institute (HSI) in an informal program as she transitioned from K-12 public education to higher education. As the sole participant in the study, the data reflects my self-study and reflections on the interactions I had with my mentor and coach and my beliefs about how those interactions benefited me in making the transition to higher education. Several themes emerged from the data analysis and will be discussed in relation to the research questions.

Research Question 1: In what ways did the mentor and coach guide and support me in ways that helped me transition from public education to higher education?

Data analysis revealed several ways in which my mentor and coach guided and supported me through our interactions.

High Expectations as a Colleague

Both mentor and coach treated me as a colleague and had high expectations for my work. For example, Dr. Smith made me a member of her research team from Day 1, including me in discussions with other researchers and valuing my input. In addition, as Dr. Miller and I

developed a plan for recruiting schools for the federal research grant, he gave me increased autonomy as we were successful with our plan.

Provision of Multiple Opportunities

Another means of support was by providing me with multiple opportunities to grow as a professional. Both mentor and coach approached being awarded a GRA as a reciprocally beneficial exchange. My work as a GRA benefited their projects but they expected me to benefit from them by helping me develop my professional skills as I prepared to move into academia. I was provided with numerous opportunities to develop these skills in a variety of research contexts and in other scholarly pursuits. Dr. Miller and Dr. Smith both understood the importance of multiple opportunities to practice skills followed by reflection and discussion. In addition, Dr. Smith provided me with opportunities to grow my professional networks at conferences. I saw this as especially beneficial because I made connections with scholars from all over the world.

Modeling

Both my mentor and coach modeled a variety of professional behaviors. Dr. Smith continuously modeled her positive approach to research and her passion for her work. She also engaged me in discussions about the different roles of faculty and how to prepare for subsequent next steps in my progress toward my degree. Dr. Miller modeled coaching skills as he taught the GRAs what was expected when coaching teachers. Both modeled a pedagogy of care.

Apprenticeship

Another way my coach and mentor guided and supported me as I transitioned to higher education was through apprenticeship. Whether it was working on Dr. Smith's research project or on the federal research grant with Dr. Miller, I received ongoing support and guidance as I learned the skills and demands of research. Both provided instruction and models, asked me to practice skills, encouraged me to reflect on experiences, and then engaged me in deep discussions about those experiences. This led to revision and improvement in my work. Because my work as a GRA was ongoing and authentic, I was able to practice my skills over a continuous period of time and engage in a meaningful process of continuous improvement with their guidance and support.

Engagement in Deep Discussions about Scholarship and Leadership

I was also engaged in ongoing and in-depth discussions about scholarship and leadership throughout my experiences with Dr. Smith and Mr. Miller. Meetings were held weekly with both projects but involved multiple communications through text or phone call each week, as needed. Both were attentive in answering questions and engaging in attempts to ensure I understood what was expected from faculty when engaging in scholarship/research.

Research Question 2: What specific aspects of mentoring and coaching had the greatest impact on me as I transitioned to higher education?

Some specific components of mentoring and coaching stood out as especially beneficial in helping me transition to higher education.

Caring About Me, the Person

One characteristic shared by Dr. Smith and Dr. Miller that was especially important to me is that they both cared about me in ways that extended beyond our work together. During my first years in the doctoral program, my mother was diagnosed with an illness, and I became a primary caregiver for her. Dr. Smith always supported me during this time and encouraged me to be persistent. The following was a recorded reflection on these interactions:

Dr. Smith always asks how my mother is doing, and consistently serves as a reminder of how my mother would not want me to quit but how she wants to see me teaching at a university or becoming a vice president at a university. She has shown me job postings and has reminded me that in due time I will be applying.

Dr. Miller also expressed concern and was able to meet with my mother on multiple occasions. Since she had been a campus principal and teacher for many years, the three of us had much to discuss. Because family is so important to me, this pedagogy of caring helped me integrate my doctoral studies and personal life, and I was able to persist through this challenge.

Encouragement to Utilize My Cultural and Linguistic Strengths

Dr. Smith and Dr. Miller see bilingualism and biculturalism as assets in growing social networks and encouraged me to use my cultural and linguistic capital in my work and in developing my leadership skills. I was able to use Spanish in my GRA work. In one instance, I used my translation skills to share an article written in Spanish with my classmates. With the grant, I have been able to use my Spanish language skills to make stronger connections with teachers and administrators where appropriate. We can connect on a deeper level because of our shared understanding of culture and language. As an educational leader, this taught me how to value multilanguage learners and home on others' abilities and strengths.

Opportunities to Grow Professional Networks

My faculty mentor and coach have always expressed the importance of expanding one's social network at various levels. The single most important experience I have had is meeting other professionals at other universities through professional conferences. Being part of Dr. Smith's research team from the beginning made me feel much more comfortable and gave me a sense of belonging. She played music for me at the start of the first meeting. She knew how nervous I was to meet the entire team. Even though I was the only person attending the meeting who did not hold a doctoral degree, my opinion was validated. Dr. Smith also helped

me engage in social networking by attending professional conferences. She allowed me to present at the conference and become involved in other research circles.

Dr. Miller has also noted that introducing him to my mother has enhanced the dynamics of our coaching relationship. The three of us have discussed culture, our values, life lessons, and professional expectations. Dr. Miller has learned that my mother is a former school principal and that I know many educators in the district where she worked. This has led to a better understanding of already existing social networks, which has led to an expansion of our network with schools for our research project.

Learning About and Practicing Effective Communication and Collaboration

My professional growth has benefited from coaching on developing strong partnerships and has led to several professional goals. I've grown professionally by engaging in partnerships with other educators through effective collaboration and communication, and by listening and trying to understand the perspectives of others. I've learned to build on the collaborative strengths of one another and work together for improvement.

Provision of a Research Training Environment

With both GRA positions, I was encouraged to develop positive attitudes about conducting research. Dr. Smith involved me in all aspects of research and scholarship, including contributions to literature review, data collection and analysis, publishing, and conference presentations. She has positively reinforced my work in scholarship/research. One approach in particular has helped me to practice my skills—the understanding that educational research can get messy and that it is okay when things don't work out perfectly. Dr. Smith has frequently talked about how to persist through research challenges.

With Dr. Miller, I have been engaged in developing protocols for coaching and documentation for fidelity, then provided opportunities to practice using those protocols as I have coached teachers. Team discussions have followed that resulted in adjusting protocols as on-site practices necessitated. In our work on the grant, we have faced challenges like school and student attrition, have learned to go around obstacles, and to keep moving forward.

Modeling Professional Behaviors and Passion for Field

Dr. Smith constantly shares ideas for future research with me and shows her excitement about these projects. Her professional mannerisms and way of being with her students and with those she advises show the knowledge and love of the profession she possesses. Her guidance in all facets has truly helped to ensure success in my future endeavors.

Developing a Professional Protocol

Dr. Miller has observed that coaching is a reciprocal process—we learn together. He and I have developed a working protocol through our interactions and shared expertise. As Dr. Miller has recognized some of my strengths, he has allowed me to take the initiative in a

variety of work-related tasks; we discuss goals and outcomes throughout. This is a process that has allowed me autonomy and provided me opportunities to practice my skills and learn through reflection and discussion of results. This has been a very affirming process for me.

Discussion

Research shifts us from a world of deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural disadvantages and instead focuses on the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups (Yosso, 2006). This study provides insights into the experiences with mentoring and coaching of one Latina doctoral student making the transition from K-12 public education to higher education at a Hispanic Serving Institution. The experiences were unique in that the student developed a strong relationship with one faculty member from the beginning of her studies, and the student viewed this as a mentoring relationship. In addition, the student became a GRA for a research grant where her position centered around coaching teachers. As the model for coaching was developed, she coached herself on how to deliver those services. This brought about many thoughts about how her experiences with these two faculty members, who played different roles, created an environment that helped her successfully transition from K-12 public education to higher education. These insights can be used to support models of mentoring and coaching for doctoral students making a similar transition and preparing to enter academia. The findings of this study may be especially important for educational leaders who are charged with supporting mentoring and coaching programs in higher education and K-12 schools.

In reviewing the results of the study, several findings stand out as important when considering effective mentoring and coaching practices.

- Central to the work with both faculty members was a *focus on training in research*. Both were committed to teaching me the skills necessary to conduct educational research. For each, there was a focus on guiding me through authentic practice toward independence in conducting research studies.
- There was an important *affective element* in my experiences with both faculty. They demonstrated a pedagogy of caring with their concern for my mother's health and my well-being. I also felt valued as a contributing member of both professor's teams. I was encouraged to keep moving forward in my studies and was positively reinforced for my contributions.
- Both sets of experiences were highly focused on *skill-based outcomes*. It became apparent early on that I was expected to learn a variety of skills during my time with both faculty and that these skills revolved around research/scholarship. One thing I discovered is that the important skills did not pertain only to research design, data collection, and data analysis, but on a broader set of skills like interpersonal, communication, and collaboration skills. Working with central office administrators and campus principals requires a unique set of pragmatic communication skills; building partnerships requires an ongoing commitment to growing relationships. All of these

skills needed to be practiced in order to develop them as part of my transition to higher education faculty.

- There is a *time and persistence variable* for faculty and students. Developing necessary skills, especially for complex tasks such as educational research, takes time, persistence, and patience on the part of faculty and students. Such opportunities in an apprenticed environment are essential for students to take that next step toward higher education faculty.

The findings of my study align well with the theoretic framework for this study—important elements from Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth Theory and Gelso’s Research Training Environment Theory. In regard to *aspirational capital*, Gándara (1995) states that those of Latinx descent experience the lowest educational outcomes in comparison to other ethnic groups in the United States. She also posits that those of Latinx descent set their goals high and aspire to achieve them, with *familia* (family) support or mentor and coach support. As described in the results, both the mentor and coach provided support during my mother’s illness. Their mere presence in my mother’s life reminded me of the goal I set for myself to become a doctor. They demonstrated the importance of leading others to success regardless of personal or organizational adversity.

Understanding effective professional practices of faculty when mentoring or coaching a graduate student helps practicing or potential mentors and coaches hone those practices in ways that encourage their students. Certain practices may be especially challenging when mentors and coaches come from a different cultural background than their students. It is hoped the results from this study can help shed light on specific practices of which they may not be readily aware. These faculty can then foster hopes and dreams within a potentially discouraging environment for students of color.

Likewise, understanding of *linguistic capital* may not be well understood by many monolingual faculty who serve as mentors or coaches. In my cultural community, children most often have been engaged participants in a storytelling tradition that may include listening to and recounting oral histories, parables, *cuentos* (stories), and *dichos* (proverbs) (Yosso, 2005). My second language is Spanish, and being bilingual while living on the border is very important. In addition, I am also a musician by profession with a bachelor’s degree in Music Education. I communicate through music. I can use my knowledge of the Spanish language to communicate more freely with those who feel more comfortable with that language. This can lead to building stronger relationships and partnerships that are important in conducting research in educational settings.

My linguistic capital has led to greater *social capital* as I have developed new partnerships. My faculty mentor and coach have always expressed the importance of expanding one’s social networks at various levels. As noted, Dr. Smith created multiple opportunities to increase my social capital. The existing social networks I brought to the federal grant GRA position due to my mother’s background in education as a teacher and administrator led to enhanced opportunities for recruiting schools. I was also able to hone my communication and

collaboration skills as I learned about and developed coaching skills; I've learned to build on the collaborative strengths of one another and work together for improvement.

In terms of *navigational capital*, Drs. Smith and Miller helped me navigate academic and personal challenges as well as persist and overcome challenges, encouraged me to network with others with similar research interests at professional conferences, and guided me to pursue my academic and professional goals. Working on the research grant with Dr. Miller has allowed me to focus on several professional goals around developing effective communication and collaboration skills. Understanding those coaching and mentor behaviors that lead graduate students to grow their navigational capital is important so those behaviors can be replicated. For example, understanding research methodologies equips me to navigate the unfamiliar terrain of academia. Likewise, teaching strategies for approaching schools and principals, effectively utilizing research funds, or navigating the complex world of academic publishing are skills that empower me to move forward within a system that may not have initially felt welcoming.

In regard to Gelso's Research Training Environment Theory, my coach and mentor modeled positive and appropriate scientific attitudes and behaviors. According to Gelso (2006), the scientific behavior and attitudes of faculty are probably the most fundamentally important research-enhancing (or retarding, if negative) ingredient in the RTE framework. Faculty mentors and coaches need to be involved in the research of their mentees and model appropriate attitudes and behavior for all aspects of the research process.

Dr. Smith constantly shared ideas for future research with me and showed her excitement about these projects. The results of this study note how Dr. Smith modeled professional behaviors and a passion for conducting research and engaging in her profession, a passion she passed along to me. My work with Dr. Miller has led to my development of professional goals around communication and collaboration. Developing these skills, which Dr. Miller has modeled, is important when engaging others in research.

Another important aspect of providing a research training environment is that faculty positively reinforce their mentees. This reinforcement might consist of encouraging research, providing more research opportunities, and promoting conference presentations. According to Gelso (2006), the most important reinforcers are faculty responses to student research accomplishments. Dr. Smith provided me with multiple opportunities to publish and to present at conferences. Her positive reinforcement has encouraged me to continue and pursue the higher education route. Dr. Miller has noted that coaching is a reciprocal process. Our discussions about the coaching process have led to the positive reinforcement of my work and the valuing of my perspectives.

While my experience suggests coaching proved beneficial, Yosso's framework helps us understand why both mentoring and coaching might hold value. Mentoring, for instance, can tap into my aspirational capital by providing a role model and fostering a deeper connection between student and mentor. A Latina faculty member, for example, could offer both academic guidance and personal support, fostering a sense of belonging within the

institution. Ultimately, the best method may depend on individual needs. Coaching offers a more targeted approach, focusing on specific skills development. Mentoring, on the other hand, provides a broader support system, addressing not just academic needs but also the emotional and social challenges of navigating a new environment.

Learning from the experiences of others in a way that contributes to current models of mentoring and coaching helps others (current and potential mentors, coaches, and mentees) better understand the attributes and skills necessary to create learning environments that lead to effective transitioning into higher education. Understanding the student perspective in these processes is essential in mediating what students consider important in the guidance and support of faculty. Especially important is that faculty understand their students' backgrounds, including cultural and linguistic backgrounds. My background as a bilingual Latina student at a Hispanic-serving institution is important to understand if faculty are to create an experience that prepares me to step into the role of faculty in the academy. If faculty understand the historical challenges of Latinas in academia, they can intentionally provide support and encouragement to foster hopes and dreams within a potentially discouraging environment for students of color. Mentoring practices that prioritize equity inform broader institutional efforts to create a more welcoming and supportive environment for all students.

Scholars have demonstrated that one of the most important factors that graduate students point to when describing the quality of their educational experience is their relationship with faculty (Lechuga, 2011). Research provides us with an understanding of what aids in fostering a successful graduate educational experience. Recognizing, from the perspective of the student, those practices of mentoring and coaching that have the greatest impact adds to the research base on mentoring and coaching. Focusing on high-impact practices helps to prioritize practices and build strengths within models. The single participant in this study offers much insight into her experiences during her doctoral studies with a mentor and a coach. This insight can help to foster positive interaction between mentors and coaches and their mentees.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study adds to the literature on mentoring and coaching students, there are limitations. It was conducted at one HSI with only one participant. A limited source of data was used—self-perception and observational data from the sole participant. Studying additional participants would provide a broader perspective to effective mentoring and coaching. In addition, exploring the perspectives of effective mentors and coaches would likely add to existing models of effectiveness.

Future Implications for Research

The integration of coaching and mentoring with Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Theory and Gelso's Research Training Environment opens additional avenues for future research. Interviewing white faculty mentors at HSIs could lead to a deeper understanding of their

motivations and approaches to coaching Latina students. Exploring the experiences of Latina students who receive mentoring from both white and Latina faculty members could also allow for a nuanced understanding of how Yosso's Cultural Wealth framework plays out in different mentoring relationships.

In addition, examining the intersectionality of coaching and mentoring, what components are common, and how both can be beneficial in helping students transition to higher education could yield important insights for faculty mentors/coaches. Investigating how coaches and mentors can address the unique needs and challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities, including consideration of ethnicity, gender, and class, and how coaches/mentors can integrate intersectionality into their support strategies would also be an interesting area of study. Finally, conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of coaching and mentoring programs on students' academic and career trajectories would help to better understand how these programs contribute to students' research productivity, career advancement, and overall well-being over time.

Conclusion

The study's goal was to explore the lived experience of a doctoral student using a mentor and coach at an HSI. Mentors step outside of the boundaries of their primary roles to develop a unique and sustained relationship with individuals (Kraft et al., 2023). The study adds to the literature on how to support and provide positive reinforcement to graduate students seeking a smooth transition into academia after graduation. Mentoring and coaching provide essential guidance, support, positive reinforcement, and aid in helping those transitioning into higher education succeed.

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