

## **MENTOR REFLECTION**

### **Navigating Advocacy and Ethics: Social Justice Educational Leaders' Perspectives**

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I have been fortunate to mentor new educators throughout my career and take great joy in helping others develop the knowledge and skills they seek. However, we might forget that those with experience can also benefit from mentoring, even if they are not the typical target. Mentoring the experienced can be more nuanced and imperceptible but no less valuable. This essay seeks to provide a reflective narrative of my experience serving as a mentor as part of the ICPEL/JEDI Social Justice Scholars Special Issue project.

#### **Mentoring Agreements**

Mentoring agreements are generally effective tools to maintain accountability throughout the mentoring process. Agreements can define products and establish timelines to promote completion. This guard railing encourages a successful mentoring process, though experienced mentees may not need the same guardrails as less experienced mentees. In some cases, a formal agreement may not be required, given the level of comfort and competence already possessed by the mentee.

In my initial communication with my mentee, it was evident that a formal, written mentoring agreement wasn't needed. My mentee clearly understood the project. Instead, an informal, less structured agreement emerged through our email exchanges, allowing the mentees to define what they needed from me: timely feedback to support publication. Guardrails were unnecessary because my mentee had already prepared for and organized the work. Instead of leading the process, the mentoring agreement placed me in a supporting role so as not to slow or confuse the mentee and their work.

#### **Relationships**

Mentoring the experienced can be more fluid and productive when a relationship is in place before the mentoring. Existing relationships can reduce reluctance or discomfort, as the mentor would be familiar with the mentee's knowledge before beginning the work. This prior knowledge allows the mentor to work from the current state, building knowledge and skills from what is already known and tailoring the mentoring experience.

I was fortunate to have a previous working relationship with my mentee, so I was already aware of their expertise related to this project. My mentee had an ongoing manuscript in mind for this project, which was shared with me at the onset. We scheduled a meeting via Zoom to discuss the manuscript and project, and it was evident that the mentee did not require my content expertise. Instead, I offered my editorial support to ensure the manuscript was ready for

publication. In deferring content expertise to my mentee, I would disarm any underlying concerns of my interest in assuming control, freeing up our relationship to collaborate.

### **Progress Tracking**

Working with experienced mentees provides the mentor with flexibility using check-in points and due dates, as the mentee likely already understands workflows and general expectations. Asking the mentee about their preferred workflow empowers them by showing the process is in their control rather than the mentor's. Even with this empowerment, mentors must still monitor progress to ensure that the work remains on track toward completion. With experienced mentees, transparent and regular communication ensures this progress.

My mentee and I did not set specific check-in points, as I was committed to providing the agreed-upon feedback promptly. We were both aware of the project's final due date, so I was not overly concerned about setting additional, periodic due dates. To promote regular communication, I sent emails to check on the progress of the following manuscript draft if communication had become sparse. I also emailed if my feedback was unexpectedly delayed so my mentee could continue working.

### **Conclusion**

Mentoring works best as an individualized experience. To be effective, mentors must be adept at recognizing the individual needs of their mentees and adjust plans accordingly. Arguably, this is one of the more challenging facets of mentoring, as every mentee will need something different. However, this begs the question of efficiency: How can mentors maximize their impact when facing time constraints? An established mentoring structure could aid efficiency, especially with onboarding training, to orient the mentor and mentee before the work begins. Any structure developed would need room for adaptation to the mentee's needs, as my experienced mentee may have been better prepared than others and would not have benefited from unnecessary guardrails.

Some mentors may feel they cannot contribute much to the experienced mentee, especially when the mentee already has the requisite clarity, direction, and expertise. For those coordinating mentoring programs, it is essential to assure mentors that their support of mentees could be wide-ranging. Sometimes, an experienced mentee only needs a sounding board, which is as valuable as providing direct, formative feedback to less-experienced mentees. Mentors should be empowered to do what is best for the mentee, even if the workload may feel less than previous mentoring experiences.

As mentors, our primary goal should be to help our mentees be better (in whatever way that would be defined) today than they were yesterday. I was comfortable with my mentee's control of the project and was proud of their commitment to finish, which only required my reviewer's eyes and encouraging, timely emails. I appreciate the experience and thank my mentee for entrusting me to support their work

## **“You Need People Who Support You”: Counterspaces for Women of Color Community College Faculty**

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### **Abstract**

Research demonstrates that Women of Color faculty experience multiple systems of oppression in the academy. However, much of the literature surrounding the topic of Women of Color faculty is situated within university environments. A paucity of research sheds light on the experiences of Women of Color faculty within the community college setting. In this investigation, I explored how Women of Color community college faculty members found and engaged in counterspaces to help them navigate academia. This research study illuminates the testimonios of 10 Women of Color community college faculty across the United States. The findings of this study offer implications for researchers and community college administrators to carefully consider the experiences of Women of Color faculty within these institutional types.

*Keywords:* community colleges, faculty, Women of color, counterspaces

## **Mentor Reflection**

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Mentorship is a long-standing practice used in many disciplines that offers benefits for the development of higher education faculty members. It is “essential for personal and professional development within higher education” (Rinfret et al., 2023, p. 400). With proper establishment of relationships, goal setting, progress monitoring of action, and self-reflection, this process can increase research productivity and scholarship (Fountain & Newcomer, 2016). In fact, effective mentoring can lead to great fulfillment during the tenure process (Ashley et al., 2023). The following essay includes a reflection of the JEDI Emerging Scholars Program, part of the International Council of Professors of Education Leadership JEDI Committee. While the purpose of this program is to mentor the authorship of an emerging scholar, this mentorship has extended into mentoring for the comprehensive workload of a tenure-track faculty member. The following includes a reflection of the expectations of the project, the mentoring agreements on communication, goals, and support, the relationship between the mentor and mentee, progress tracking, and recommendations for improving this program.

### **Expectations of this Project**

Part of the success of mentorship is knowing the project’s desired outcomes and the expectations to achieve those outcomes. In reflecting about this project, it was unclear to me, as the mentor, what the expectations were outside of mentoring the authorship of one article. On June 9, 2023, I received an email from Dr. Robert Martin inquiring about my lack of connection with my mentee Dr. Rebecca Cepeda. This communication was the first I had heard of who I would be mentoring. It was discovered that a misspelling of my name, very common throughout my life, led to me not receiving previous emails. To be honest, I remember volunteering to serve as a mentor, so I do not know how much time lapsed because of this miscommunication. Nevertheless, Rebecca and I connected for the first time on June 14, 2023, to introduce ourselves and establish some mentoring agreement. As of our meeting on January 12, 2024, it is still unclear if we have fulfilled all the expectations of this project. Although it is not clear whether we are supposed to continue our mentorship following this essay, we plan to do so in the spring semester and beyond. Ultimately, we are expanding the original expectation of mentoring the authorship of an article to mentoring the tenure-track process with attention to the faculty workload areas of teaching/advising, research/scholarship, and service.

### **Established Mentoring Agreements**

Part of the success of the mentorship with Dr. Cepeda includes the communication dynamic we established, the goals we set for publication of the article, and finally the support I provided during the process of writing, editing, and submitting the article for publication. As for communication, as stated above, Rebecca and I connected by phone for the first time on June 14, 2023. We introduced ourselves and established next steps for meeting the suggested

deadlines of the writing project. At that time, Rebecca was working on finishing an article related to her dissertation, “Your Need People Who Support Counterspaces for Women of Color Community College Faculty.” Future communications throughout the semester included emails and Zoom meetings. It was agreed upon that she would reach out when needed, and I followed up throughout the semester with emails to ensure the process was moving along.

In terms of goals, we established during the first meeting that the primary goal would be to meet the deadline and submit the manuscript draft for review. As the semester progressed, I helped mentor Rebecca to meet that goal by reviewing her manuscript and providing feedback for improvement before submitting, as well as asking the committee questions (such as clarifying page numbers). Goals moving ahead into spring 2024 are to 1) discuss the tenure process and 2) possibly collaborate on another publication. The overall support provided during this program was focused on meeting the primary goal of submitting the manuscript for the Special Issue.

### **Relationship**

I am a full believer in the influence of relationships on outcomes in any situation. Rebecca and I did not know each other before this program. We established the relationship on the phone by discussing our personal and professional lives. At the time of first developing the relationship, Rebecca was finishing up as a Graduate Research Assistant at The Ohio State University and moving to Texas A & M University, accepting a position as an Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership. We discussed our personal and professional lives to make connections with one another. It would be nice to have an opportunity to meet her in person to continue the relationship, but Zoom has made building the relationship easier.

### **Progress Tracking**

Progress tracking is important when working towards goals on a project. This project of mentoring Rebecca to successfully submit and publish a peer-reviewed journal article involved progress tracking, which we basically communicated through email during the fall semester. We followed the deadlines (guidelines) provided by Dr. Robert Martin for the project and reached out with questions when needed. Reminder emails that were sent from Dr. Robert Martin were helpful in reminding Rebecca about the goal and deadlines along the way. Flexibility was key, being that both Rebecca and I are tenure-track professors, and that Rebecca was a new faculty member starting in August. Communicating in various formats is one way we remained flexible and responded to needs of the project as they presented themselves.

### **Mentor Self-Reflection**

My role, as a mentor, in this process of mentoring Rebecca during the authorship of a peer-reviewed journal article was overall, minimal. Rebecca had an adequate draft of the article when we first met each other. I provided feedback one time before submitting. This is why we expanded the goals of this mentorship to include relationship and communication around teaching/advising, research/scholarship, and service in the tenure role. The next time this

project occurs, I would recommend quickly following up with mentors and mentees to ensure they have met one another at the beginning. One way to do this is hosting a meeting with breakout rooms and introducing the program and expectations. I felt behind on this work and unclear of expectations throughout the project because unfortunately, my name was being misspelled on emails, which caused a lack of response on my part. Another recommendation would be to have a tips and tricks sheet for successful mentorships based on the feedback and reflection of experiences you received from this cohort.

## **Conclusion**

This project is one of the most worthwhile service opportunities that I have engaged in. I am grateful for Dr. Martin's leadership and support of growth for emerging scholars. It is my hope that as Rebecca and I continue this journey of mentorship through the tenure-track process, we continue to build our relationship and meet our goals in scholarship around important topics in this Special Issue around justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Diversity is a fact. Equity is a choice. Inclusion is an action. Belonging is an outcome.

-Arthur Chan

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## Mentor Reflection

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

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In the 2022 article, *Creating an Inclusive Community for BIPOC Faculty: Women of Color in Academia* by P. Lin and L. Kennette, recommendations related to how to provide better support for women of color in faculty roles to combat the persistent prejudices prevalent in institutions of higher education (IHE) related to racial, ethnic, and gender biases. These persistent prejudices can look like undervalued accomplishments, feelings of isolation, lack of support, and being stereotyped as less capable/intelligent. In addition to the above-mentioned workplace tensions, faculty of color are also charged with increasing service work, specifically working in anti-racism initiatives, and invited to provide diverse perspectives (tokenism). Although the authors gave many policies and process oriented recommendations, one that resonated with me and aligned with the intent and purpose of this project is creating the opportunity for faculty of color to connect and network socially and to support each other's scholarly efforts.

They suggest informal networks are beneficial, but the intentional matching of mentor/mentee dyads led to more impactful and positive outcomes. They contend that these 'safe' spaces and opportunities do not negate the reality of navigating predominantly white spaces/cultures/professions, however it does help BIPOC scholars to feel appreciated and affirmed. This ICPEL/JEDI is to be commended for creating a safe space for the mentor and mentee. As a mentor, I was able to assert my expertise and ability as a scholar, and I hope I created a safe space for the mentee where their ideas and questions were valued and supported. Mentor and Mentee understood the expectations of this project. ~~Gina Wilson 2~~ At the beginning of the process, the mentee and I understood the general expectations of the project. However, the beginning of our journey had a bit of confusion. I was aware of the acceptance of the mentee into the project before they were contacted; this made for a somewhat confusing and awkward situation when I reached out to make our first connection; they were confused about why I was contacting them. I then worried that there had been a mistake and that maybe I contacted the wrong person. When the confusion was identified, I took responsibility for seeking clarity for the mentee. Looking back, I realize this choice to take this assertive action on my part was the beginning of the mentoring relationship for the project.

Once clarification was made and confirmed that I would serve as their mentor, we focused on calibrating our understanding of the project's expectations and our individual understandings of my role as mentor and the project's goals. Establishing Agreements and Norms Communication Because we live approximately 1,400 miles (about half the width of the United States) apart, our preliminary communication was via email, with many back-and-forth emails until we decided on the first meeting via Zoom. The mentee took the lead on using their Zoom account, which proved helpful and became an established practice as they would typically record our



sessions to create the ability for them to be present during our discussion yet still be able to reference the guidance shared during our meeting time at a later day. I sent the meeting invitation to mark on our calendar. During our meeting, communication was informal yet technical. I believe this was a style we were comfortable with, and often provided space for, personal (yet not private) information to be shared. The mentees established. This consistency proved beneficial to the mentee.

## **Goals**

As I am reflecting, I don't believe we ever explicitly set goals that would guide and ground our time together. Implicitly, we both understood our goal was to meet the communicated deadlines and produce a publishable manuscript. I sent a personal goal to provide the mentee with constructive feedback, provide resources for deeper understanding, make my thinking visible, and create an experience that built her efficacy as a scholar.

Support The support provided to the mentee was straightforward and specific. It focused on general manuscript format, writing the literature review, and writing the methodology section, including design, data, and analysis. Twice during the project timeline, I edited the document, suggesting grammatical changes and identifying narrative sections that needed more citations or clarity. I provided the suggestions in written form using the comments feature within the Word document. Then, we would discuss the comments and, at times, execute the change in our meetings.

## **Establishing a Relationship**

Relationship building is a foundation in my leadership style. As I reflect on what aided in establishing a relationship with the mentee, I believe the casual nature of our meetings helped to build rapport between us. Although I am not as experienced in publication, many of my manuscripts have been submitted to journals, and I await the next steps. I have extensive experience guiding future scholars through the dissertation process. This experience with pre-dissertation scholars gave me the skills to guide the mentees without overwhelming them. Many of the scholars I work with are first-generation scholars and all women. The casual nature of our meetings and the goal for those meetings were solely focused on the mentee and what they needed to create the opportunity to share snippets of their life, experiences, and the journey they are traveling to be a doctor. I also learned about the tensions in their life, like so many of us have, pulling us away from ~~our~~ ambitions and goals, peppering our professional selves with particles of practicality and obligation. I carefully created space for this type of sharing, where and when it occurred. Mentor Self-Reflection My role, as mentor, in this process As dissertation chair for my students, I am focused on ensuring my students' writing comprehensively addresses the research questions and ethical guidelines that will guide and support their study. I also provide close proofreading for clarity, completeness, and formatting. Additionally, I provide coaching related to mindset (fixed vs. growth), provide motivation through affirmations and visioning, and share productivity tips and hacks to ensure efficiency and consistent progress toward completion of the dissertation. This was my plan of what to provide for the mentee. I believe I offered a bit of each of these categories; however, most of

my mentoring was focused on the technical 'stuff' and came in the format of a journal manuscript and the methodology section. Conclusion My recommendation would be for there to be an additional step in the acceptance process or increased expectations of the initial submission to ensure the project is in a format as close as possible to the formatting of the final draft, specifically that they attend to the headings of a manuscript submitted to a journal and have clarity in how they are going to approach the final manuscript. Also, sharing the screening rubric used by the editorial team as part of the initial submission requirements would be helpful. All in all, this was a great experience. The intent and mission of demystifying the publication process for scholars is a responsibility that isn't available often. I can see this being an ongoing project for JEDI. The more complete the initial submissions for the project, the higher the quality of manuscripts for the final submission to the journals.

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## Mentor Reflection

Kym Acuña

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Dr. Robles and I have known each other for over ten years. We first met before she began her doctorate when we were both serving on a nonprofit board for an organization that has a vision of *a Hispanic community that flourishes* and provides educational, leadership, and cultural opportunities for growth. Over the years, I became her instructor in educational leadership doctoral courses and then served on her dissertation committee. Since she has become an assistant professor at our institution, we have also traveled to conferences together and written a book chapter together. So, we had an established professional relationship that already contained a mentoring component when she began the process of writing the article for this special issue.

We first met on this project to discuss what this process could look like as she shaped her article and as I supported her. It was also useful to explore how participating in this process would influence her growth as a social justice scholar. I shared with her my meandering journey of connecting my passion for student success and educational equity to my professional work.

Without a mentor to guide me and encourage me to focus on my academic work, it took a lot of scattered attempts at finding my path to professional focus regarding my scholarship. I encouraged her to think through how each presentation, each research project, and each article or book chapter written would fit into her overall direction for who she wants to be as a scholar and who she would like to impact.

Alongside the larger philosophical conversation, we also looked at the specifics of this project, such as the timelines and expectations for submission of the article. It was an interesting conversation to talk through the guidelines provided for the article, including the call for proposals and the established deadlines to ensure we had a similar understanding of what needed to be accomplished by when and how we would communicate. In our circumstance it worked out well to send progress via email to review and then meet in person to discuss.

After establishing the goals and logistics, we had to explore what she was interested in writing about for the issue. As is the case with many junior faculty, she hadn't yet used her dissertation research to craft an article. The first step was envisioning which piece(s) of her dissertation she was interested in turning into an article. Next came the process of establishing the purpose, audience, and structure of the article. I believe this is a key piece in supporting someone as they continue to develop as a scholar. As we examine those ideas it serves to focus the conversation and allows for a back-and-forth dialogue that can move the planning stages to development more concrete steps to visualizing an outline for the article. Particularly, in this case, where she already had all the research and had written extensively about it in dissertation format, finding a focus for the article was necessary. For someone who hasn't had this experience, conceptualizing the process of taking a "slice" of the overall research and crafting an article can be daunting. I believe this is the case for many junior faculty who begin their

academic careers, especially if they lack guidance or support from a colleague or mentor who has already been down this road.

Once the preliminary planning was done, she began the process of writing. We checked in regarding the deadlines and progress during the writing process. However, during this period, timing tended to be an issue. Much of this happened during the summer, which tends to be a packed time for us both, making our preferred method of communication, discussing in person, difficult. I teach study abroad in the summer and do other traveling throughout. She does a lot of community work linked to student success and college preparation and then travels at the end of the summer.

We did not foresee the issues we would have sticking to our communication plan during this time. While we were able to communicate via email, we didn't have any of those rich conversations in person or via Zoom during the summer writing period as time zones and other responsibilities took precedence. I believe this is the part of the process that I would adjust for a future iteration with her or anyone else that I was mentoring. I think that it would be important to realistically look ahead to the times when we know communication will be limited and plan accordingly with timelines and expectations.

As I reflect on the process, in this situation the frontloaded process of planning and establishing a purpose not only for writing the article but linking it to overall professional growth was the most important piece of the mentoring process. As Dr. Robles continues to grow not only as an advocate and community collaborator for social justice in education but also as a social justice scholar, the process of envisioning her work and place as a contributor to the larger academic community is key. This mentoring process for this article served to build that understanding by having directed, intentional conversations linked to the writing process.

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