

Book Reviews

Mullen, C.A., Cox, M D., Boettcher, C.K., & Adoue, D.S. (Eds.). (1997). *Breaking the circle of one: Redefining mentorship in the lives and writings of educators*. New York: Peter Lang, 222 pp. (Softcover).

Once upon a time, in Texas, a group of graduate students and professors "gathered primarily to provide and receive support from one another within our traditional university setting" (p. xv). Although they initially came together for self-study and writing, the group soon realized that they also served as co-mentors for each other. This book is a collection of their stories.

In these days of ever limited resources, of high numbers of new teachers leaving the profession within a few years, and of the difficulty in attracting new administrators from the classroom, mentoring is becoming more and more of a "buzz-word" in educational circles. Among the professional literature one finds a number of "how-to" articles and texts available for would-be mentors. There are, however, few (if any) first person narrative accounts of the mentoring process. For that alone this book is valuable.

A number of themes thread their way through these stories. It is evident that, to be effective, mentoring must be reciprocal in nature. It is mutualistic and transactional, and has an important effect on both mentor and protégé. In mentoring, we overcome the traditional isolation of the classroom and challenge the reluctance of educators to work together. There must be a recognition that the process does not just happen at a certain time, but recurs over the length of one's career. Mentoring leads to what Mullen calls "a relationship of nurturance" (p. 159). There is trust, a sharing of hopes and fears, a challenging of long-held beliefs, the holding of mirrors to our practice by the supportive hands of a caring friend or colleague. These themes are not new. They are widely located within the research literature. Of interest here, however, is the personal approach, the narrative accounts of both positive and negative experiences.

Those who are searching for a menu of effective mentoring strategies will not find it here. The closest thing to a "what to do on Monday" list is the description Kealy provides of six qualities mentors must both embody in their own actions and foster among their protégés. These are interpersonal skills, versatility, resourcefulness, integrity, knowledge, and humility (pp. 185-186). Kealy also makes the interesting connection that, insofar that both empower others, "leadership and mentorship are one and the same" (p. 183). Generally, however, the strength of the book lies not in tips for aspiring mentors but rather is contained in the nuggets of individual experiential wisdom and the flags raised as to why mentoring relationships may not achieve their espoused goals.

Among the nuggets, one might identify Cox's point that the mentor can be "either personal confidante or professional consultant, or both" (p. 74). This is important, as there are some who feel that mentoring should be restricted solely to professional issues. It is however difficult to separate these two strands of our existence and Cox is to be commended for correcting the record.

In another nugget, Hughey observes that "we live in a mobile society where we are often strangers in new communities" (p. 102). Such a reality limits the number of people whom we might previously know, people on whom we might expect to draw for what Wiseman calls "professional, personal, and pedagogical nurturing and support" (p. 193). As Cox explains, all beginners need a safe place "to express their emotional responses to the daily challenges" (p. 72) of their work.

As far as flags are concerned, Zellner points out that successful mentoring requires an awful amount of time (p. 44), time that must be provided for both mentor and protégé if they are to have the spaces within which to meet, talk, and reflect. Boettcher questions whether some "experienced teachers are intimidated by the enthusiasm and beautiful ideas that young teachers bring to the classroom" (p. 56). Stansall comments on the "frat house" mentality prevalent in certain staff rooms (p. 126) and warns that this might lead to inappropriate lessons being learned. Similarly, Mullen cautions that "unhelpful pedagogical styles" (p. 158) might lead to the protégé learning bad habits and becoming acculturated to a world-view of teaching that might not

be positive. Finally, Adoue observes that mentoring is both difficult and different for each participant, and will work on different levels for different people (p. 87). She notes that there is no "one great mentor" (p. 98) for each person, someone who if we only looked hard enough might somehow be found and brought into the mentoring process.

The book takes as an overarching theme the notion of the Circle of One, and elaborates efforts to break that circle. The Circle of One is of course the self, working in isolation and trying valiantly to be and to become a "good" teacher, in both the pragmatic and moral sense. The authors argue that co-mentoring processes might break this circle, providing each individual with a circle of people to whom she or he might turn.

These notions are certainly part of the rhetoric of education, supposedly one of the caring professions. We all need those who can see beyond the fences we erect around ourselves. In Platonic terms, these are the people who turn us from the wall of shadows and lead us out past the puppet holders and the fire to the bright new world outside. Mentoring is not just something that is required by new teachers as they enter the profession. Pre-service teachers taking their first job do need to be mentored as they navigate the shoals of practice, but so do teachers who become administrators, or those who leave the K-12 system and enter the university milieu, or graduate students who wish to enter the academy as professors. This book explores the stories of all such educators as they make the transition from one role to another.

There is the danger, of course, that those who metaphorically hold up their hands and say "pick me, pick me!" are not the best mentors we might wish to recruit. Mentoring is neither self-evident nor consistent in its practice, but it must also not be serendipitous. Rather, mentoring programs should be meticulously planned and properly resourced – with training, funding, release time, and professional recognition attached to each program. This requires a commitment by all levels of the hierarchy, not just those who would mentor or be mentored.

The authors predict that most of their readers "will be teachers in one capacity or another" (p. xiii). In a sense, that opens the text to all readers, as all of us are teachers in one way or another, whether by act or by omission. One might question

McLaren's comments that the book makes mentorship into a "revolutionary action" that "is instructive, emancipatory, and theoretical" (back cover). Notwithstanding such hyperbole, this is an interesting and informative book that is recommended reading for all educators who see mentoring as part of their role. And, if the hopes of the authors are realized, then that would include all educators. The group whose narratives are recorded here might not live happily ever after, but we should be pleased that they came together and shared their stories with us. Through this we are invited to join the larger circle and meet the challenge "to improve mentoring conditions for the professional development of educators and students" (p. xxiii). A worthy goal indeed.

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Kilbourn, B. (1998). *For the love of teaching*. London, ON: The Althouse Press, 207 pp.

This book on the nature of teaching is a radical departure from the how-to type of treatise one is accustomed to encountering. Here, the reader is faced immediately with the complexity of the issue and invited to approach it both as a problem for abstract analysis and from the perspective of people actually engaged in the task. The book begins with an essay about Dr. Kilbourn's personal experience in helping his ten-year-old daughter with a homework assignment in science. It traces the twists and turns of the process as it occurs over several days and then attempts an after-the-fact analysis of what had actually happened (and failed to happen) in terms of the presumed initial objectives of the exercise and from the perspectives of both parent and child. The second section comprises a novella featuring two young teachers. Because one (a female) has had considerable successful classroom teaching experience and the other (a male) is relatively new to