

*Exemplifying, Modelling, Mentoring and
Generally Helping the Next Generation of
Students.*

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One of the puzzles in the educational world, especially at the university graduate level, is what can the present generation of scholars do that is actually helpful for the generation coming up. More than one of the articles in this issue tries to talk about this problem, and as you will see, most of the rest of the articles actually manage to at least skirt this issue at least as they take on their research topic.

Let us imagine an incoming graduate student, perhaps fresh from the undergraduate program or perhaps fresh from a work experience that has either inspired the student to study some more or perhaps driven them back to the academy. Perhaps the student has been a reader of her or his main area of interest for many years. The two obvious articles in this issue, that of Harvey Graff and Daniela Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, tend to make something like this assumption about the students involved in the new graduate research study and research venture. Such a student already has some idea of the area in which they wish to concentrate and have some idea about what kind of help they might need. In Harvey Graff's article the main figure he is thinking about is himself, a person who has been interested in history for a long time and who is looking for someone with a deep, original historical interest and approach to follow wherever it may lead. In Daniela Fontenelle-Tereshchuk's article the main character is someone with whom she worked with for two graduate degrees but whose central interest was not necessarily hers. These are two obvious contrasting situations in which any graduate student might find her or himself.

The approach described by Graff is important. He was slotted into a research program led by a vibrant and creative scholar who was interested in using quantitative methods to approach in a "scientific" manner a number of possible historical problems that could only be attacked by looking large bodies of routinely collected data and by analyzing it as the large body of data on a large number of human individuals making the history which they did make. In the approach described by Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, she was

interested in gaining insight into the thoughts and actions of a small number of people studying and living in the context of their own individuality. For Graff, the work was one of handling large bodies of individual data collected routinely in order to answer questions about the historical situation at a particular time and place.

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For Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, the problem is one of finding out by conversation with a small number of individuals what from their point of view they faced relative to a question or questions in their lives that they might sometimes answer differently and sometimes answer in a similar or overlapping manner.

In the case of Graff, it was possible, in the seminars and in his personal relations with the man who led him towards his research and in part directed it, Graff was strongly influenced by the work of his living example and leader. In the case of Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, she was in no way influenced by the previous experience of the person she worked with as her supervisor on the topic of her interest. Instead, she and her “mentor” discussed problems in the work she had done and tried together to clarify what was missing, understated, overstated or not yet understood that needed further thought.

It seems to me that these two processes are central to the problem of modelling, exemplifying or mentoring the students of the next generation. I commend both of these to you. I think each has hit a nail directly on the head when it comes to understanding better what an exemplar, leader or mentor might be to a graduate student who needs support from the prior generation.

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