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Author(s)	Chong, Keng Choy
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MENTORING FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

**CHONG KENG CHOY
LOW GUAT TIN**

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MENTORING FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
- PROJECT STRATEGIES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS
[NOTES FOR THE SEMINAR PRESENTATION]
by Dr Chong Keng Choy,
senior lecturer/policy and management studies
School of Education
NIE/NTU

Introduction

During this session of the School of Education Seminars, Dr Low Guat Tin and I will present highlights of what the project team on mentoring has been doing and what it has been planning to do. We hope that you will give us feedback and critique on what we have presented, so that the project team can do better research in the future. For this seminar I shall start off by telling you about the team's project strategies and future directions in research, while Dr Low will present research we have done and our findings.

First, the project membership. The project team comprises Dr Chong Keng Choy, Dr Low Guat Tin, Dr Allan Walker, and Mr Leong Wing Fatt. Dr Walker left NTU in January 1992, while Mr Leong Wing Fatt joined the team in the same month. Mr Leong brings into the team his expertise in the study of leadership. He has been constructing an instrument to aid research in leadership. How leadership is to be included into the study of mentoring will be discussed later in this seminar when I present our future directions.

Project Strategies

Now, for the subject of study. The project team studies the mentor-protege relationship structured within the Diploma in Educational Administration (DEA) programmes. The study is not an evaluation of the DEA programmes. It is not a study of mentoring in general. The project concentrates on mentoring as an aspect of human relationship peculiar to the mentoring episodes structured within the DEA programmes in Singapore. It may well be true that the findings of this project team is likely to be applicable to a very special type of mentoring. Nevertheless, a study of special types can contribute to a better understanding of a general concept of mentoring.

Why study mentoring? First, research in mentoring can help to facilitate the mentoring episodes of the DEA programmes. It has an immediate application. Second, we can obtain a better understanding of mentor-protege relationship. This can contribute to a better definition of the notion of mentoring as an aspect of human relationship - one that can help in developing human resources, especially in Singapore. (I leave the description of the notion of mentoring for Dr Low to present.) Third, as I have said earlier, a study of a special type of mentoring can contribute to a theory of mentoring. At this point in time, there is an increasing interest in the practice of using mentoring for developing human resources and careers in the

workplace, but there is hardly any attempt at building a theory of mentoring. Research can contribute to theory building. Fourth, the use of mentoring has policy implications. Mentoring tends to foster a spirit of collaboration among people involved in it. According to our study, mentors suggest that collaboration seems to be an important, if not the, outcome of mentoring. This may be viewed as an alternative to competition. Do policy makers want this as an organisation/national culture? If collaboration is desirable, then studies in mentoring can contribute to better policy instruments.

Although, Dr Low will be giving you a more detailed presentation of research and findings, I want to contrast the features of our current research against future research. Our current research focuses on the question: Is the mentoring episodes structured within the DEA programmes 'mentoring'? We are concerned to find out whether the mentoring we are looking at is an image of 'natural mentoring' that has been first highlighted in the literature. The phenomenon of people pairing off on their own accord into mentor-protege pairs in the workplace has been given some attention in the literature. They are not organised into pairs. This 'natural mentoring' has caught the imagination of early researchers in mentoring. Very quickly, career and human development specialists began to suggest the potential of using mentoring in the workplace. Such mentoring pairs are arranged and mostly facilitated; mentoring is organised by a third party. Such mentoring is assumed to be the same as 'natural mentoring' that was first observed in the literature. Our study indicates that there are many similarities between 'natural mentoring' and mentoring structured within the DEA programmes.

Future Directions

Given this orientation, we hope that our future research can give us a better image of mentoring. While we cannot manipulate 'natural mentoring' for studying effects, we should be able to do so with mentoring structured within the DEA programmes. This has potential for policy instrumentation. Before we can do any of these, we have to classify the various aspects of human relationship that constitute mentoring. We have to construct a survey instrument to obtain data for such classification. This is an important step towards theory building.

Following the tradition in the literature on leadership developed by Selznick, Burns, Tichy, Sergiovanni, and lately at NIE by Leong Wing Fatt, we see that certain aspects of transformational leadership merge with aspects of mentorship. These aspects found in leadership and mentorship are related to the notion of human learning in the workplace. Transformational leadership depends on, among other things, human learning to obtain desirable changes in people and organisations. Mentorship depends also on, among other things, human learning to bring about changes in people and organisations. Both transformational leadership and mentorship are based on the notions of collaboration and learning relationship. The question is probably: Under what conditions, is a mentor a leader or a leader a mentor? Is there meaning in a notion of a mentor-leader?

Where can we go from here? We want to hear from you in this seminar.

Publications related to the Project

Chong Keng Choy, Low Guat Tin, and Walker, Allan. (1990). Mentoring A Singapore Contribution. Singapore: Singapore Educational Administration Society.

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