Autoethnography as the vehicle to mentor development

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Abstract

This paper explores the issue of utilising autoethnography to enhance mentor development. Most studies focus on mentee development and the resulting organisational change but there is very little research into mentor development. A desire for self-development will require mentors to engage in individual transformation. Mentors can develop their mentoring abilities through the study of ‘self’. A self-study methodology, incorporating reflective journals, interaction with others and reflexive practice, was adopted with the view of developing mentor abilities. The findings indicate that the utilisation of autoethnography contributed effectively to mentor learning and development and improved mentoring ability. This paper offers important insight into the sparsely researched area of mentor development and concludes that autoethnography is a process that can be utilised to improve mentor abilities for educators in institutions of higher learning.

Introduction

The context of this study is situated in a Hospitality and Tourism training institution of higher learning. At the time of this study, I was employed as an educational administrator in charge of the Hospitality and Tourism Department. In this position, I experienced firsthand the challenges facing educators in my institution when a new curriculum was implemented. The expectations from the institution for the educators to shift from traditional modes of teaching to student centred learning was unprecedented. It was clear to me that educators implementing the new curriculum needed guidance and support in assimilating and internalising the new knowledge and skills required of them. I wondered how at my individual level, I could contribute in providing the assistance the educators needed. I identified that mentoring could be a viable option for educators in my institution to learn and develop professionally.
This was my motivation to embark on my PhD journey of exploring mentoring as an organisational development tool (Nyanjom, 2009).

In my study, I explored mentoring practice in collaboration with others by becoming a mentor to two of my colleagues at our training institution. Having decided on the developmental intervention, I wondered whether I possessed the necessary mentoring capacities to adequately support the educators. As an educator mentoring my colleagues, would I have the requisite mentoring skills to result in outcomes that could contribute effectively to their learning and development? My learning and development as a mentor became my focus. I desired to recognise my abilities as a mentor, and build my mentoring capacity for my benefit and the benefit of my mentees.

Mentoring is not a new concept to education. It has been used extensively in education to support and guide novice educators during their first year of teaching (Austin, 2002; Geber, 2003; Harrison et al., 2005). Despite its popularity as an effective means of transferring knowledge and skills from an experienced educator to a less experienced one (Fibkins, 2002; Nicholls, 2002) relatively little attention has been given to the process of how educators who desire to become mentors can develop the requisite skills for such an endeavour.

There is plenty of evidence that confirm the advantages of mentoring, and those of being a mentor (Allen and Eby, 2003; Hale, 2000; Hezlett, 2005; Hezlett and Gibson, 2005; Lankau and Scandura, 2002). It is very often assumed that mentor abilities are inherent in those with adequate knowledge and experience, who desire to share what they have with others. It is quite possible that many mentors have doubts of their ability to mentor others successfully, and would welcome a tool they could use to improve and develop their mentoring abilities. In this paper I explore the usefulness of autoethnography as the implicit tool that can be utilised by mentors to intentionally improve their mentoring skills.
Understanding the mentoring relationship

In general terms, mentoring has rich historical roots. Daloz (1999) observes that mentors have been around for a long time, acting as guides, leading us through the journey of life. In this light, mentors are seen as people willing to give their time to teach and nurture others. Mentoring is ‘a powerful individual development intervention’ (Cummings and Worley 2005:407) that is a means of assisting, supporting and guiding educators in their professional development (Megginson, Clutterbuck, Garvey, Stokes and Garret-Harrison, 2006).

The generic meaning of a mentor is that of an older, wiser and experienced person (mentor) who protects, sponsors, guides and instructs a younger individual (mentee) in many aspects of life (Ehrich and Hansford, 1999; Healy and Welchert, 1990). Mentoring is seen as one of the oldest forms of human development where one person invests time, energy and personal knowhow in assisting in the growth and skill of another person (Shea, 1992). It is important to note that the reference here is generally to the term ‘mentor’ rather than the mentoring process.

The theoretical definitions of mentoring generally converge in describing mentoring as an intense, professional relationship between a mentor and a mentee that is mainly used to develop the mentee (Chao, 1998; Raabe and Beehr, 2003).

In practical terms, a mentoring relationship will present itself in many different ways, and be influenced by differing perspectives, depending on the aim of the mentoring relationship. For example, the mentoring relationship may be influenced by the context of the environment, the personalities of the participants, and the histories of these participants. Mentoring may also be influenced by the point of view the organisation holds about the process.

Clutterbuck (2004) explores the origin of mentoring from the apprenticeship viewpoint and thus places mentoring firmly within an organisational development framework. This view establishes that the foundations of mentoring take into account not only the personal development of individuals, but their professional development as well. This view also takes us away from the focus on the mentee as the main beneficiary of such a relationship, to one that is more of a mutual relationship where
both the mentee and the mentor stand to gain from the relationship. Through the mentor adopting a critical reflective position in the mentoring relationship, the mentor becomes a learner too. This addition would highlight my view of mentoring as a relationship that result in the learning and development of both the mentee and the mentor.

**Autoethnography defined**

Autoethnography is a qualitative research approach (Chang, 2007; Denzin, 2006; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) that recognises subjectivity and the researcher’s influence on the research process and outcomes (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010).

It is a systematic and intentional approach that adopts reflexive practice as a means to exploring the self (Boyle & Parry, 2007). Through adopting the style of personal narrative and socio-cultural exploration, this methodology encourages the researcher to place the self within a social context, while connecting his/her personal living experiences to the cultural context in which the experience is taking place (Reed-Danahay, 1997). In a descriptive and systematic way (graphy), the researcher places different emphasis on exploring his or her personal experiences (auto), in order to understand the cultural experiences within his or her context (ethno) (Reed-Danahay, 1997).

There are authors who equate autoethnography to action research (eg Austin and Hickey, 2007; Bath, 2009), as it has the similar tendancy to encourage reflection upon reflection in a cyclical manner leading to self-discovery. Autoethnography’s ability to extract inner-most thoughts makes this research method a powerful and unique tool for individual learning and development (Ellis, 2009).

**Criticism of autoethnography as a research methodology**

The use of self as the only data source in qualitative studies has been questioned. Accordingly, autoethnographies have been criticised for being too self-indulgent and narcissistic, introspective and individualised (Coffey, 1999, Atkinson, 1997; Sparkes, 2000). These accounts have been viewed as too full of the subjective self, and not representative of rigour research. Manuscripts that display auto ethnographic styles
are often rejected by reviewers as unscientifically lacking rigour and validity (Sparkes 2000; Holt, 2003). Scholars appear to challenge what is presented as theory in an autoethnographic report as it challenges “what is normally accepted as knowledge in academic contexts” (Duncan 2004:11).

Although the blurred distinction between the researcher-participant relationship has become the source of criticism challenging the scientific credibility of the methodology (Anderson, 2006; Holt, 2003; Salzman, 2002; Sparkes, 2002), the major advantage from employing the autoethnography process is the opportunity for the educator to explore their own experiences in relation to others.

Despite these concerns, researchers and practitioners have found that autoethnography provides them with opportunities to dig deeply into their own experience and explore facets of themselves they would otherwise not have uncovered.

**Mentor development**

Mentors do not automatically have the requisite capacities to support and guide mentees in developing knowledge and skills (Barnett 1995). Barnett contends that mentors must develop their capacity to develop others effectively. This view is supported by Cox (2003) who emphasises that mentors must develop the skills they need to give mentees maximum support in attaining their learning and development goals. Geber (2003) illustrates that mentors need to continue building capacities to deal with the complex issues they may encounter in mentoring relationships. Mentors who desire to promote the learning and development of others must focus on developing their own capacities.

One way of providing requisite skills to mentors is through formal mentor training (Chandler and Kram, 2005; Cummings and Worley, 2005; Garvey and Alred, 2000). However, this kind of training may not be the most adequate for the challenging roles that mentors encounter. Cox (2003) concurs that mentor training is not adequate to prepare mentors to gain comprehensive mentoring skills. For a chance at conducting
a successful mentoring relationship, mentors have to fall back on their repertoire of life experiences, and both tacit (Polanyi 1958) and explicit knowledge to meet the challenges that each mentoring encounter brings.

Due to the uniqueness of every mentoring encounter, mentors will modify their existing knowledge throughout their practice (Cox, 2003). This in effect implies that mentors learn continuously, adding to their repertoire of knowledge and experience with each mentee with whom they interact. It also implies that each mentoring experience is unique and assisted by the contextual factors present within the mentoring relationship. These mentoring relationships offer the most appropriate training grounds for mentors to improve their mentoring skills. Being a mentor is in itself a provocation to learn and a reminder to oneself of the strategies and qualities of being a learner.

Senge (1999) states that the true reward of mentoring is intrinsic and by assisting in the development of another you are developing yourself and your own capacities. Megginson et al. (2006) agree that mentors should aim to improve their skills whilst experiencing the mentoring process. Self knowledge is also an important aspect of the knowledge a mentor should have (Clutterbuck, 2004; Smith and Alred, 1994). In order to assist others to achieve growth and development, mentors need high self awareness to recognise and manage their own behaviour. Such self knowledge contributes greatly to the way mentors communicate with their mentees as every mentoring relationship is unique. Taking advantage of the mentoring relationship to improve mentoring capacities can ensure the learning and development of the mentor from this perspective.

Mentors need to become aware and reflexive of the reciprocal learning that ideally takes place in mentoring relationships. This paper proposes that mentors can build their mentoring capacities while in a mentoring relationship, through the utilisation of autoethnography as a self development tool.

Can autoethnography be used to foster mentor development?
Autoethnography has potential in being utilised to encourage critical self-questioning and reflexive practice in educators. Austin and Hickey (2007) have found this method useful as a self development tool in teacher educators. There are characteristics inherent in autoethnography that make it suitable for mentor development.

First, autoethnography is self-focused (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). It uses personal experiences as primary data and therefore has the ability to dwell deep into the self and expose tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1958), and thus improve practice. It is without doubt that autoethnography exposes our values and our subjectivities (Bochner, 2000). The use of self as the source of data is a powerful aspect of emancipating the many layers involved in the study of a particular social context. This is one of the powerful aspects of autoethnography that could be useful in self development, and justify legitimising autoethnography as a method that can be used in mentor development. This process is similar to the reflexive practice that has been linked to effective mentoring practice as a way of transforming experience into learning (Cox 2005). Mentoring stimulates individuals to self-assess and reflect, to become more conscious learners, able to apply knowledge of their learning needs and styles to their own development (Hine 2008). Mentoring encourages systematic reflection and can greatly enhance the process of making tacit knowledge explicit (Nicholls 2002). Critical reflection and self-questioning promotes mentors’ increased self-awareness so they can make better use of experiences and learn more effectively.

Second, autoethnography is context-conscious (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This process interprets self as a cultural being in relation to others. It explores the relationships between self and others. Because people do not accumulate their experience in a social vacuum, autoethnography is not limited to just the study of one individual (Stanley, 1993). The autoethnography process takes into account the environment the mentoring is taking place and the individuals participating in the relationships.

Third, autoethnography is both a process and a product (Ellis et al, 2011). Autoethnography is a process that can be effectively utilised to explore the self within the context in which the mentoring experience is occurring. According to Ellis and
Bochner, “autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethno), and on self (auto)” such that “different exemplars of autoethnography fall at different places along the continuum of each of these three axes” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:740). Wherever one is on the continuum, it represents a mix of artistic representation, scientific inquiry, self-narration, and ethnography. The point at which one lies on that continuum would depend on the goal of the researcher or educator. For example, an autoethnography project designed majorly for mentor self development would lean more towards the auto and the ethno, and possibly less towards the graphy.

The three points above can lead us to understand the autoethnographic process from a mentor perspective. They justify the reasons why autoethnography can be an ideal tool for mentor development. The mentor would be learning about him or herself in relation to others and therefore finding avenues for self exploration and learning within the relevant context.

The findings from my research project

In my research project I adopted a self-study approach and utilised my personal mentoring experience as a major focus of my research. I explored mentoring practice in collaboration with others by becoming a mentor to two of my colleagues at my training institution. One main objective of my research project was to utilise self-study as a vehicle through which to build my mentoring capacities. Predominantly in literature, listening skills, questioning techniques and the ability to provide constructive feedback are highlighted as essential interpersonal attributes that form the basis of mentor skills (Cohen, 1995; Fibkins, 2002; Galbraith, 2003; Harrison et al., 2005; Ramaswani and Dreher, 2007). These behaviours have the potential to increase the probability of establishing and maintaining a successful mentoring relationship. I therefore constructed a personal development plan highlighting these attributes I desired to improve. Using my reflective journals, as well as the mentee’s reflective journals I present evidence below of my learning and development within the mentoring relationship.
My listening skills

The journal findings indicate that I perceived listening as my major challenge during the execution of the mentoring relationships. In a mentoring situation, the mentor can only effectively assist the mentees in their learning and development if they assess the mentees' developmental needs accurately. This assessment can only be carried out if the mentor has genuine concerns about the mentees, and shows this concern by listening empathetically to what the mentees have to say. During the earlier mentoring sessions, in the rapport building and direction setting stages, I would talk much more than I would listen. I highlight this issue in my reflective journal:

I have been grappling with the amount of talking I do during my mentoring meetings. I have worried that I talk too much and that perhaps I could reduce the amount of talking that I do. I have made a goal for myself to deliberately reduce the amount of talking I do. I need to listen more, and allow the mentee to do the talking.

As a mentor, my realisation was that good listening skills would enable us to build trust in the mentoring relationship. I needed to encourage the mentees to share their thoughts and experiences with me and to assist them to reflect on their experiences. This necessitated listening to what they had to say. Monopolising the conversation during the mentoring sessions would not lead me to this goal. I deliberately set off to improve my listening skills. But even with this dedicated effort to improve, the findings indicate that it was not easy for me. I often talked more than I listened and made excuses for not rapidly gaining ground on my desired goal. I reflect on this issue in my journal:

How do I share it if I do not talk about them? How does the mentee get to learn from me if they do not hear what good or bad experiences I have gone through? Today, I feel that the talking I did was fine.

It is apparent that I was driven by storytelling. I was too eager to share my experiences with the mentees. I understood that it was important for me to share real life stories with the mentees, as they could relate these stories to their actual current situations. However, these experiences needed to be relevant and appropriate to the
mentees’ varied situations. Listening to the mentees would make me more aware of the relevance of the stories to the mentees’ situation.

Gradually, my reflections after the mentoring sessions revealed that my listening skills were improving. I noticed that I was talking at what I deemed to be appropriate times. This indicated to me that I was listening more. More importantly for me, I was gaining confidence in my ability to assess when to speak and when to listen. I realised that the mentees would not automatically start contributing more to our discussions without encouragement from me. The mentees would only respond to cues from me on how they should behave during the mentoring conversations. I therefore set off to draw the mentees out by providing the appropriate cues. I reflect upon this improvement in my journal:

I feel that sharing my experiences with Wakwanza was good. I feel that letting him ask me questions was good. I got to throw some questions back at him, to see how he is synthesising what he is hearing. Today, I did not feel inadequate to talk to the mentee.

The opportunity of having two mentees also paid off in my development. I found after critical reflections of one mentoring session with one mentee, I would attempt to improve on my listening techniques with the other mentee, thus continuing to develop my capacities. In my journal, I reflect on my session with Wakwanza and how I used this session to improve on my listening technique during my next session with Mchana.

Even with the amount of information I got from Mchana today, I still felt I was talking too much and should have encouraged her to talk more…But I feel there was an improvement from the way my conversation with Wakwanza went in our last session. I was able to get more out of her than usual. To me, this is a step in the right direction for me.

Gradually, I reached a point where I felt confident that I had developed my required listening techniques. I had improved to the point that I could focus on what the mentees had to say and respond appropriately to their questions and provide the required guidance and encouragement. I reflect on this improvement in my journal:
This time I had reflected on our previous meeting much more critically than ever before. I had studied my points of how I wanted this meeting to go. I had wanted this time to feel that I gave Wakwanza enough time to talk, and I wanted to listen more. I was able to do this. I feel that I was a much better listener. Although I did some talking, I felt it was in places that were appropriate for me to do this…

This achievement on my listening technique is confirmed by Wakwanza in his data where he reflects about his perception of the amount of talking he does during our sessions. It is surprising and a confirmation of my improvement, when he observes that he does most of the talking during our sessions. He writes:

As I talk to her I seem to talk too much and perhaps give too much information than I need to…but she listens attentively to me, and this encourages me to share more of my plans with her…

Reading this reflection from my mentee reminded me of how my listening skills were at the beginning of the mentoring relationship. It was however, a confirmation to me that I had reasonably improved in my listening technique to the benefit of the mentee and the mentoring process as a whole.

**My questioning skills**

My questioning technique was another area that I intended to strengthen as a mentor. At the beginning of the mentoring relationships, my mentees were passive. During the rapport building and direction setting stages, the mentees expected to be told what to do and how to do it. It took me time to realise that it was up to me to change this situation. Often, I took the easy way out by filling the gaps during mentoring conversations with my voice, so that there would be no awkward moments. However, mentoring is a relationship where the mentor acts as facilitator. The mentor is expected to engage the mentee in dialogue that brings out pertinent information from the mentee that would encourage individual learning. Effective mentors ask questions that encourage critical thinking. By posing thought provoking and probing questions, the mentor challenges their mentee to consider different perspectives and implications. The realisation of this aspect of mentoring practice prompted me to focus on my questioning techniques to achieve this end. I
deliberately set out to draw the mentees out, and put the onus on them to contribute to their personal and professional development. My technique was to ask questions and wait for the mentee to respond, rather than attempting to fill the silence. The findings reveal that this process was not easy for me. It was a challenge for me to give the mentees adequate room to realise that the answers must come from them.

In my journal, I reflect on a session where I was trying out this technique:

*In this session, I realised that I was still not totally comfortable with the silence. The silence after I have asked a question, and he is thinking it over, before providing a contribution. Although it was not an uncomfortable silence, I still felt that there was a void that needed to be filled. But I had already seen that in myself in earlier sessions, and set myself a target that I would attempt by all means to draw out the mentee more, for him to hear less of my voice."

I wanted the mentees to own their learning. By this I mean they should be in a position to identify their concerns about where they wanted to develop and improve, and become more proactive in searching for their own solutions with support and guidance from me as the mentor (Clutterbuck, 2004). Such a position would put me in the role of a facilitator, which is what a mentor is. I practiced asking carefully phrased questions that required extended answers. I also became more comfortable in giving the mentee ample time to respond to questions without feeling an aura of discomfort. I managed to do this by asking follow up questions, or clarifying my question further.

Over time, the findings indicate that I started to see some improvement in my attempts to draw the mentees out, and get them to be participants in their own individual learning. I also started to become more comfortable with this role. It is clear that the developmental aspect of acquiring this value was apparent in both myself as the mentor, and to the mentees. I reflect on this issue thus:

*I felt that this meeting went well, better than the previous one. I was more conscious of concentrating on Wakwanza. I tried very much to hold back a lot of my own opinions, and tried to get him to give me his viewpoint. I could see*
that this was not easy for him...he was expecting me to provide the answers.
But I was able to draw him out and listen to what he had to say...

The findings show that I developed this aspect of mentoring practice as I held more sessions with the mentees. I continued to develop my questioning technique, and involved the mentee in the developmental process more fully. I developed a technique where I would throw back the mentee’s requests for assistance if I felt that they should contribute to the solution, or offer an opinion. Gradually I observed the mentees’ view of themselves changing, and they started to look at themselves as generators of knowledge rather than merely receivers of it (Megginson et al. 2006). I recorded this in my journal:

I feel that I am improving in involving the mentees in the conversations. I am asking ‘what do you think you should do?’ more often, rather than offering a solution immediately. I am encouraging the mentee to think for him or herself about the options that are open. I can see that Mchana is getting it...our conversations are becoming richer and deeper. I think this is because she is contributing more of her thoughts to the conversation.

The findings indicate that my development in this area was not linear and straight forward. There were times when I was quite convinced of my improvement, but upon reflecting on a mentoring session, I would realise that I acted contrary to my expectations. I reflect upon this situation in my journal after a mentoring session with Mchana:

Although I felt I was greatly improving on my questioning technique, to draw her out, I thought that maybe I had made a little too many suggestions that could have come from her? This is something I still want to work on, so that I am clear in my mind when to make suggestions, and when to tease them out of the mentee.

I attempted to justify my reason for talking to my mentees:

If it is sharing of experiences, giving advice, telling stories that have happened to me that the mentee can learn from, I need to tell them, I need to talk. And the mentee needs to listen. It is of course important for the mentee to be heard, so
that for me as the mentor, I can deduce whether the relationship is going, and what kind of learning is taking place.

My reflections indicate that my questioning technique is one area in which I struggled to become more comfortable. However, as indicated by one of my mentees during the first focus group interview, it was clear that I had made some improvements on encouraging the mentees to be active participants in the mentoring relationship. The mentee states:

At the beginning [of the mentoring relationship] I must say also, I was a bit vague in my expectations but I thought it would be more of the mentor driven type of relationship, and to me I was looking for her to do a lot of things… like call me, tell me what to do… Then I realised…it’s me to talk to her to tell her what it is that I want from the relationship, and that sort of shook me up a bit. I have to do all the work…say what it is that I want from the relationship.

I reached a point where my questioning technique improved to the extent that I drew out the mentees, and they became active participants in their own personal and professional development.

**Providing feedback**

The findings indicate that at the beginning of the mentoring relationships, I had issues with providing constructive feedback to the mentees. My approach to providing feedback was hampered by what I perceived as my authoritative approach. I felt that such an approach was not conducive to a good mentoring relationship, and at times contradicted my values. I wanted to come across to the mentees as being supportive, encouraging and nonjudgmental, yet I saw myself as controlling and wanting issues to proceed in a specific way. Megginson et al. (2006:18) mention that mentors tend to adopt this ‘managerial, directive style’ in the mentoring relationship where basic mentoring skills are lacking. This style tends to reduce benefits to the mentee and also inhibit the learning of the mentor. I can also attribute this approach to my role of being an educator administrator. It is probable that I went through a transition period where my approach to mentoring was influenced by my administrative approach.
Early in the mentoring process, I reflect on this issue in my journal:

During my conversation with Mchana, I was impatient at what I saw as her shortcoming. I was forthright and directive…I am beginning to wonder whether these are indications that I am too autocratic, and do not give people a chance to work out their ideas…or that I want them to think like me, or do it the way I want it to be done…rather than encouraging them to come up with their own solutions. As a mentor, I need to give Mchana more encouragement to come up with her own solutions. I would like to try this next time she comes to me for advice.

This type of approach influenced the way I gave feedback to the mentees. Rather than having a two way learning dialogue in the session, I observed that my approach was a one way directive. I continued to monitor this type of approach in my style, and continued to make it an issue requiring development in order for me to improve my mentoring practices. My data shows that this process was not quick. I continued to reflect on my mentoring style before I started to feel comfortable. I recorded the following in my journal:

I feel that they have been doing this quite well [in participating in the conversations]...but I think it is an area where I am not totally comfortable that I have done my best, and I do need to get better at this...

As the mentoring relationship progressed, the findings indicate that I became less ‘autocratic’ and more ‘participative’ in letting the mentees drive the mentoring relationship, rather than being the driver myself. The mentees participated more frequently in the options they were coming up with to further their development. With this change in my style, feedback to the mentees became more of a learning exchange. It became easier for the mentees to view the feedback positively, appreciate it, and learn from it. Although not overly confident that I had found a mentoring style that I was comfortable with, I felt that I had made some improvement. I recorded this in my reflective journal:

I am encouraging the mentees to think for themselves, and participate more actively in the conversations. When Mchana wanted to do the same old lecture method for her class, I gave her my opinion about the issue. I requested her to
consider a more interactive teaching method. We explored different options together for her Relaxing class… I encouraged her to reflect on our conversation and decide which way she would like to go. She suggested she would think about it, then draft a lesson plan for our discussion during our next meeting...

My data shows that I became more comfortable with my mentoring style indicating that I started to view the mentoring relationship as a partnership, where we were working together to achieve desired goals. This participative style was appreciated by the mentees as feedback to them became interactive discussions. I reflected thus in my journal:

*We focused on the PDP item we were working on. By the end of the meeting we had reached a clear consensus on the status of this PDP. It was clear both to me and to the mentee that we were moving forward. … the mentee was confident of her improvement, and I was happy with her contribution to this outcome...*

These findings indicate that ultimately I became more participative in my mentoring approach. I worked on the issue of encouraging the mentees to be more proactive and less passive. As a mentor, it became very important for me that my approach to mentoring should fulfil the needs of the mentees. While at the beginning of the mentoring relationship I came across as directive and controlling, I worked on the relationship becoming more participative and mentee driven. I had to bring into play a range of capabilities that were desired in different situations depending on the needs of the mentees. I found that I had to diagnose issues and find solutions, empathise, be ready to offer feedback and confront the mentees where necessary. This required that I draw from my experiences of dealing with similar issues before in my practice. Reflective practice resulted in my ability to change my mentoring practice. I began to recognise the process of enhancing my mentee’s thinking. Consequently, I became more facilitative. Unlike at the beginning of the mentoring relationships, it now became apparent that rather than creating conflict, my administrative role complimented my mentoring role.
Giving constructive feedback became easier and second nature. I enjoyed the turn around as the mentees became owners of the outcomes resulting from the mentoring relationships.

**Discussion**

Focusing on mentor development can benefit any higher educational institution and can contribute to the creation of a mentoring culture within the organisation. Awareness of the benefits of mentoring will encourage willingness in other educators to form a pool of mentors with valuable mentoring skills. Mentor development ensures that mentors have the capacity to engage in good quality mentoring relationships, and successfully support and guide mentees in their own learning and development. It is strongly suggested that educators need to be proactive and pursue their own professional development by making use of mentoring as an avenue to individual learning and personal and professional development. Autoethnography can be a useful tool in this regard. Mentor development was enhanced by the mentor’s acute awareness of her own personal developmental objectives. Yet mentors are not often trained adequately for the mentoring role (Geber 2003) and are frequently left to use their initiative and rely on their values and intuition to guide mentees (Cox 2003). Healy and Welchert (1990) suggest that ‘mentors, in the very act of guiding and promoting others, act to effect their own transformation’. Mentors with their own clear developmental goals can incrementally improve their mentoring practice. Mentors should be encouraged to have clearly articulated personal development plans outlining their goals while executing their role in the career development and psychosocial support of others.

The autoethnography process avails the opportunity for reflective practice where a focus on the self in relation to others is utilised for improving mentor practice. Singh et al. (2002) assert that tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1958) held by professionals in the organisation can be made explicit in the mentoring process. Autoethnography is one way that mentors can make their tacit knowledge explicit to both themselves and to others. Mentors can interrogate their practice, reflect and then reappraise values and behaviours. Reflection enables mentors to turn experiences encountered in the
mentoring process into learning episodes. The process of reflecting on experiences and challenging beliefs and values proved to be vital to learning and improved mentoring practice.

Conclusion

This paper provides a practical example in mentor development in higher education. It provides a concrete strategy on how mentors can apply autoethnography to develop their mentoring abilities. Autoethnography can play a vital role in creating the self-awareness that mentors need to contextualise mentoring practice to suit the organisational culture as well as improve their practice. A focus on the ‘self’ is essential and enlightening to learning and development and thus a critical component of this process if it is to lead to individual development. It is important for mentors to continuously develop their capacities to be congruent to their environment. This article has significant implications for educational institutions in general, and educators who desire to build mentoring capacities in particular.
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