Athena, in Mentor’s Build and Voice, to Telemachus: “But you, brave and adept from this day on...there’s every hope that you will reach your goal.”

(Homer, Book 2, p. 102)

The previously considered themes revealed important perspectives when approaching the discussion of secondary school teachers as mentors to students. Such perspectives indicate that, in varying degrees, teachers often perform in ways similar to classical notions of a mentor. They, at times, assume a role in place of the absent parent. Mentors need to actively engage the diversity of their students, addressing complexity rather than avoiding it, realizing that much more important to the success of the relationship is the competence of the mentor and the duration of the relationship. The necessity of mentoring suggests that it is not a practice only reserved for at-risk students. Regular-stream students demonstrate the need to be mentored by their teachers, and today’s school may be better able to respond to their needs more than any other societal institution or program. In light of such realities, students do not just need teachers who are academically sound. They need teachers who care in ways that respond to the complex needs of today’s students. This chapter discusses the results of such mentoring including mentoring and academic achievement, mentoring outcomes, the questioning of the at-risk student designation, teachers who mentor who may be placing themselves at-risk, and finally, the current landscape in which such mentoring takes place.

MENTORING AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

One of the issues confronting the ethic of care, and by extension, mentoring, is an accusation that such behaviour distracts both teachers and students from focusing on the goal of academic success. Dewey’s (1938) notion of a more student centered, constructivist approach “could never escape the charge of anti-intellectualism” (Noddings, 2005, p. 11). However, as Noddings (2007) suggests “relations of care and trust should improve achievement” (p. 83). The teachers used descriptions that called for temporarily delaying curricular goals because of a student’s need. For example, Anton suggested that for some students “you are almost not dealing with the curriculum,” and the more important issue is seeing that a student is healthy before any curricular requirements are addressed. He stated that with certain courses,
teachers need to “put curriculum aside for a day, an afternoon, a morning, an hour, sometimes for three of four days.” If students are not in the space to engage any new tasks or information, maybe forcing new tasks on them will simply lead to rage. Yet Anton reported that when he mentors, students often improve their marks. He said that such a relationship creates an academic environment that is “a little more relaxing, less intimidating.” He even found that the students often try harder for a mentor because then “they are not going to let you down.”

Annie also suggested that “if a Shakespeare lesson has failed” because of helping a student with a personal matter, then the personal at that point might be more “meaningful” than the academic. However, Annie was quick to add that she is “not saying that the mentoring aspect is more important than the curriculum.” If mentoring has shown anything in this research, as Annie explains, it “changes their behaviour. It changes their attitude.” Students who are previously disengaged, through mentoring, might not “mind being in the classroom. They feel encouraged.” Mentoring, though at times being a deviation from curricular pursuits, actually stimulates further engagement in classroom activities. In fact, one student emailed Annie to suggest that she was under such pressure and that teachers did not seem to be responding well to her stress. It was through constant encouragement of a mentoring relationship that this student was able to re-engage and possibly see her teachers in a positive light. Annie suggested that “progress and growth” through academic pursuits are evidence that mentoring works with her students.

Maggie’s mentoring practice often begins with curricular choices, and demonstrates that students who are being mentored through difficult circumstances might actually have more skill in interpreting texts like *Bang Bang You’re Dead* (Mastrosimone, 1998) or *Speak* (Anderson, 2011). As students came face-to-face with their own personal issues, perhaps their academic levels increased as they had first-hand experience, verses living vicariously through a fictional character.

In mentoring students who faced pressure from parents, Maggie also demonstrated that she helped students change streams and succeed academically, whether from a lower academic level to a higher level, or a higher academic level to a lower level. The mentoring might have begun with a caring occasion of a student discussing parental pressures and the obligation to attend university. However, the end result is often that when a student changed streams, the student’s attitude improved and became more successful academically.

Haley stated that through her mentoring, the “big thing” that she concentrated on is inevitably academic, that students are “not settling down for a fifty.” She claimed that with the stresses of today’s adolescent, some students are just hoping to pass. It is in mentoring students, helping them to sort through stress and difficulties, that she, in essence, made a clearer path for students to concentrate on their studies. She claimed that “I think the value of mentoring…especially if they’ve come from or are in any kind of dysfunctional relationship…they see for a period of time throughout the day…they can put that aside and concentrate.” This process makes students