ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY


VALUING PERSPECTIVES:  A GROUNDED THEORY OF
MENTORING IN A DISTANCE EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

BY

Sharon Lynn Bochke


A thesis submitted to the

Athabasca University Governing Council in partial fulfilment

Of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF DISTANCE EDUCATION


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## ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

The undersigned certify that they have read and recommend to the Athabasca University Governing Council for acceptance a thesis VALUING PERSPECTIVES: A GROUNDED THEORY OF MENTORING IN A DISTANCE EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT submitted by SHARON BOCHKE in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF DISTANCE EDUCATION.

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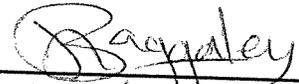
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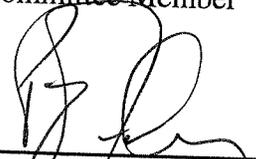
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Date: March, 2001

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DEDICATION

For inspiring in me the virtues of sincerity, perseverance and hard work, I dedicate this thesis

to the memory of my late father, Edward Ivan Bochke.

I would also like to honor the following people who have inspired and supported me

throughout my graduate education, without whom, this journey would have been difficult:

-my husband Gary, and son Adam, who were always there for me providing unconditional

love, much comfort and ongoing encouragement;

-my mother Josephine, who was always positive and very supportive, and who helped out in

so many ways; and who also, from a young age instilled in me the notion that 'a job worth

doing, is worth doing well';

-my sisters--who provided support in ways unique unto them;

-and my dearest friend Lucille, whose kindness and wisdom provided me with a sense of

calm, when I began to lose my faith in my ability to continue.

# ABSTRACT

The majority of research on mentoring that has been conducted in academic, business, and health care settings involves examining supportive relationships that have been cultivated in a face-to-face environment. This thesis explores mentoring in a distance education environment, where learners are physically separated, in time and space, from their professors, peers and university. By exploring the perceptions of adult learners in this non face-to-face learning environment, the nature of the phenomenon is discovered.

A qualitative research design known as Grounded Theory was employed. Twenty-two participants, who were either recent graduates from a distance education graduate level program or who were currently enrolled in the same program, were interviewed regarding their perceptions of mentoring in a distance education environment.

Six categories were identified. The first category explains how a mentoring relationship at a distance may begin. The second category discusses the premise of constancy in a mentoring relationship, where it was perceived that mentors were 'always there' for the learners. The third category explains the notion of transformation, whereby learners experience growth within the relationship. The forth category describes transcendence in a distance mentoring relationship, in that the separation in time and space between participants in a mentoring relationship was perceived to be easily traversed. The fifth category explains that a mentoring relationship supports the whole person and learning experience. The sixth category explains that a mentoring relationship in a distance education environment is discovered to be non-formal and therefore is more casual in nature. The core variable, which is at the heart of the theory, is discovered to be 'Valuing Perspectives'.

A definition of mentoring as well as a model of the relationship between the categories and

the core variable is proposed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my program advisor and thesis supervisor, Dr. M. Ally, who is not only the

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unfailing support of my many endeavours.  I also wish to thank my other two committee

members Dr.'s Fahy and Baggaley who provided me with as many thought provoking

questions as deep insights during my thesis defense.

I would also like to express my sincerest gratitude to all of the participants of this study,

without whom, this research would not have come to fruition.  Thank you, all of you, for

your wisdom, insights and inspiration, which deeply shaped this thesis research.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

"These points are very important because mentorship is very important in people's lives. The most successful people have had mentors in their lives. You don't learn how to be a man from eating a box of Wheaties. You learn it from another man." (excerpt from interview #12)

Adults pursuing graduate studies through distance education face unique challenges in terms of time, resources or learner support, and interaction. For several years, educational researchers have been investigating the needs of distance learners and factors that contribute to student success and satisfaction in distance education courses. The results of this research shows that a critical predictor affecting student satisfaction and perceived success in distance education courses is the interaction that occurs between the teacher and students (DeBourgh, l999; Fulford & Zhang, l993; Furst-Bowie, l997; Hillensheim, l998; Zirkin & Sumler, l995). It is the interaction that occurs between students and faculty members that may result in a mentor relationship, in a distance education environment, that is the focus of this thesis research.

Background

The importance of mentorship is underscored by its ubiquity both in functional and historical terms (Kealy & Mullen, l996). The word 'mentor' is defined in Webster's (l993) Dictionary of the English Language as "wise and trusted advisor" and has roots in Greek mythology. In reading Homer, we learn that when Odysseus sets off for the Trojan War, he entrusts the guardianship of his son, Telemachus, to his servant/advisor, Mentor. Mentor serves as model, counsellor, and teacher to Telemachus, who was his apprentice, disciple and

student.  As such, the relationship of Telemachus and Mentor has become the prototype for the contemporary mentor-protégé relationships, and it is suggested that the origin of the mentoring experience predates the modern systems of higher education (Carden, l990; Lyons, Scroggins, & Bonham-Rule, l990). The term 'protégé' is derived from the past participle of the French verb 'proteger' to protect.  And although the majority of the literature uses the actual term 'protégé' when referring a person who is assisted by the mentor, others terms that have been used synonymously are, 'mentee', 'learner', and 'novice' (Murphy, l995).

From the research conducted in traditional educational settings, one thing is clear; an important way in which men and women appear to learn the rules and succeed in their graduate education is by having a mentor (Gaffney, l995; Healy & Welchert, l990; Kartje, l996; Leubs, Fredrickson, Hyon & Samraj, l998; Lyons et al., l990; Osborn, Waeckerle & Perina, 1999; Waldeck, Orrego, Plax & Kearney, l997).  Lester and Johnson (l981) point out that mentoring is a basic form of education for human development because it provides a holistic, yet individualized approach to learning.  Moreover, mentoring is a good example of experiential learning, that is, learning resulting from or associated with experience (Bova & Phillips, l984). And since graduate education more than any other source, serves to shape professional attitudes and values (Boyer, l990), mentoring is viewed as a way adult learners may be assisted in meeting the challenges of their academic and professional lives.

In traditional universities, formal mentoring programs have been developed to improve the graduate experience for student and faculty (Boyle & Boyce, l998; Cougland, l980; Gaffney, l995; Mullen, Van Ast & Grant, l999, Wunsch, l994).   Additionally, informal mentoring relationships, formed mutually between a student and professor, is the subject of

both popular and empirical research, in terms of assessing satisfactory outcomes for both parties (Beans, l999; Busch, l985; Hunt, l986; Kartje, l996; Lyons et al., l990; Mullen et al., l999; Waldeck et al., l997).

In distance education, the importance of and need for two way communication and meaningful interaction between learners, their peers and professors have been very well documented.  There is, however, a noticeable gap in this literature regarding supportive kinds of relationships, principally if and to what extent these communications and interactions result in mentoring relationships among adult learner and professors, and as well how mentoring is understood and functions in a distance education environment.

From a personal standpoint as an adult learner in a graduate distance education program, the elusiveness of this phenomenon came to the fore during the time I was involved in a non-credit graduate level thesis workshop, which focused on aiding participants in developing research proposals. This workshop was self-paced with a computer mediated conference (CMC) component, so participants had the opportunity to interact via a bulletin board conference system. Given that the subject matter of the workshop involved learning the steps toward conducting a thesis or a project, the anxiety attending these prospects was palpable. Contributors to the CMC would express their desire or need to have someone there for them to assist with such a large undertaking; a kind of 'hands-on' collaboration whereby another provides guidance or direction and aids in learning through discovery, yet be in a very 'personal' manor. After 'listening' to my classmates, it occurred to me that what students seemed to have been talking about were the kinds of activities that mentors might engage in, while in a mentoring relationship: and that this phenomenon was noticeably absent, or at least so among these CMC contributors. Given that mentoring is largely viewed

as a support mechanism and that non face-to-face learners have many and different requirements in the way of support, I was inspired to find out more about this social process as it might occur and function in a distance education environment. So, that in turn, the knowledge gleaned from this study could be used not only to better conceptualise mentoring in a distance education environment and to contribute further to the existing theory on mentoring, but to add one more piece to the puzzle regarding the distance learner's experiences and needs, which would be useful in the area of student support.

Historically, the mentor research that has been conducted in academic settings involves examining the relationship(s) that have been cultivated through a one on one arrangement between mentor and protégé, in a face-to-face environment. In fact, all of the research that has been conducted—whether it is in business, education, psychology, and the health sciences—is based on this premise. That the concept 'mentor' is grounded in close-knit relationships bourne of a face-to-face environment is a foregone conclusion.

But in functional terms, the last 25 years has seen a redefinition of graduate education where it no longer exists only in traditional universities; other models exist, and distance education is one of them. In order to fulfil personal goals, professional and industry demands, adults are returning to university to complete graduate education. And because most adults are unable to forsake their jobs and commit to studying in a traditional school, distance education is viewed as a viable alternative.

Frequently, however, this mode of study does not afford the face-to-face environment in which mentor relationships traditionally are initiated and nurtured. Learning at a distance usually means the student and professor are physically separated from each other in time and space. And although telecommunications technology incorporated in many distance

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education programs act to bridge this separation between the learner and their university, peers, professors and course materials, invariably these relationships are modified or altered (Brittian, Chambers & Marriott, l996; Henri, l992).

Given that a mentoring relationship could be an important relationship in a graduate student's life, but that this age-old practice is influenced by new forms of technology and learning: what then is the understanding of this concept to a student learning in a distance education environment and what's more, what is the nature of this phenomenon?

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to add to the small body of literature that is specifically focused on investigating the nature of the phenomenon ' mentoring', as it exists, from the perspective of graduate students studying in a distance education environment. Further, the intent is to examine the perceptions of graduate students in an attempt to elucidate the phenomenon within a grounded theory approach. Given that concepts are considered to be the framework for theory development and considering that this phenomenon has not yet been investigated from this perspective, this research may help lay the groundwork toward knowledge and theory development, and subsequently used in the area of student support.

Significance of the Study

Learners often seek out guidance and support from professors, when they are faced with personal or professional issues in and outside their academic programs. Professors, who are experienced professionals, act as guides who provide ongoing emotional and moral encouragement, and assist learners to discover solutions to their own problems. Yet this

kind of relationship is distinct from advising, because it becomes a personal relationship, which goes beyond fulfilling other important functions for their protégés (Cusanovich & Gilliand, l991; Waldeck et al., l997).  Hence, professors are well positioned to assist students through an advanced degree program by mentoring.  Despite the obvious benefits of mentoring, based on a review of the literature, little is known about learners' perceptions of mentoring and how it functions in a distance education environment.

In addition, researchers have conducted numerous investigations on various aspects of the mentoring process, most notably to determine if the presence of a mentor is necessary for professional success.  However, little systematic investigation has been done on the concept of mentor, and as a result, the concept has neither been defined nor has it been operationalized according to the researcher's perspectives/context (Cole, l988).  This has lead to a lack of consensus about what mentor and mentoring means (Carden, l990; Carmin, l988; Cole, l988; Jacobi, l991; Merriam, l983; Stewart & Krueger, l996; Wrightsman, l981; Yoder, l990), thus inhibiting knowledge development. Moreover, because mentoring is generally understood to be a relationship conceived in a face-to-face environment, it may not be readily translated into the context of a distance education environment.  In other words, definitions, characteristics/attributes, the nature of the phenomenon and subsequent relationships as it is known and described in traditional educational settings, may not be relevant in a learning environment that is suspended in time and space, mediated by telecommunication technology.  Hence, as previously suggested, it is the intent of this study to discover mentoring, as it exists in a distance education environment, and thus move toward knowledge and theory development.

Another consideration is the potential for this research to provide not only a clearer understanding of mentoring and its functions but to raise awareness for the need for either a formal or more informal mentoring program within a distance education environment.

And last, the grounded theory approach used in this study is naturalistic in its nature. Thus it is congruent with qualitative research methods used in the field of educational research, since it is akin to practitioners who immerse themselves in the everyday business of interacting with learners so as to discover what interventions would best help them learn. Hence, the successful use of this method in this study may act as an impetus to those researchers who want to investigate other social processes within the field of education.

Assumptions

The following assumptions are fundamental to the purpose and design of this study:

1) Participants in this research would be willing and able to relate their experiences and perceptions of mentoring in a distance education environment.

2) Encounters with the participants will provide breakthroughs for the researcher to new ways of thinking about prior assumptions held regarding mentoring.

3) Given that little research has been conducted in this area and the purpose here is to generate descriptive theory, the use of the grounded theory method is appropriate.

4) That the practice of mentoring is valued, and therefore the information gleaned from this research will be useful for learners, practitioners and administrators, alike.

Research Questions

The research questions to be addressed in this study are:

1) What are the categories inherent to the phenomenon 'mentoring' within the discipline of distance education, as perceived by graduate distance education students?

2) What are the attributes/properties related to the phenomenon 'mentoring' within the discipline of distance education, as perceived by graduate distance education students?

Limitations

This study may be limited in a few ways; therefore, this research must be viewed in light of these:

1) First, it is acknowledged that methods that involve verbal reports, such as interviews, share a problem with accuracy in that the researcher is dependant on the participant's ability to articulate and to recall events related to the research.

2) Second, this research is dependant on the ability of the researcher to provide theoretical sensitivity to the data.

3) Third, this research focuses on the generation of theory, not in the testing of previously generated theories or hypotheses regarding mentoring.

4) Last, all participants were either graduate students currently enrolled in a graduate distance education program, or had recently graduated from the same program, in the province of Alberta. Thus, this sample was one of convenience.

# CHAPTER TWO

## A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"The library is like many voices talking to you.  All you have to do is listen" (A. Strauss).

A review of the literature was carried out to inform the methodology and establish the state of mentor research.  Although no studies were found that specifically addressed identifying the concept of mentor in a distance education environment, numerous other studies have been conducted in different areas, and will be summarized here.  First, the identity of mentor will be discussed.  Second, the literature on the concept of mentoring including definitions, characteristics, roles and functions of mentor, is examined.  Third, the literature on the stages of the mentor relationship, disadvantages of a mentoring relationship, and informal and formal mentor relationships, is presented.  Last, adult education and development, and distance education are reviewed.

### Identity of Mentor

In the past two decades the subject of mentoring has been a focus of attention in the popular and scholarly press.  Yet despite the wealth of published material, there is minimal agreement on many aspects of the mentor phenomenon.  Most notably is the lack of consensus on the definition (Carden, l990, Carmin, l988, Cole, l988, Merriam, l983, Wrightsman, l981) and application of the term mentor as well as the process of mentoring (Frey & Noller, l983).  Cole (l988) suggests that this has occurred, partly due to the fact that researchers who claim to be investigators of the mentor phenomena have purposely omitted the word mentor from their research, lest it should confuse research subjects about individual definitions of mentor. Moreover, some have left it undefined or neglect to specify how these

terms were used in the context of their studies. Others have adopted the concept of mentor arising out of popular consensus, rather than from formal or operational definitions and subsequent, empirical verification (Carden, l990; Carmin, l988; Wrightsman, l981). Researchers are not alone in this respect as authors of some informational articles also fail to define mentor. As such, investigations that fail to clearly define what mentoring is within the context of their studies confound knowledge development and highlight the need for explication of the term mentor (Cole, l988; Yoder, l990).

The Concept of Mentor and Mentoring

As previously mentioned, the term mentor has sprung from ancient Greece when Ulysses entrusted the care, education, and training of his son Telemachus to his loyal, wise and old friend, Mentor (Fitzgerald, l961). In a relationship characterised by trust and affection, Mentor became a counselor, guide, teacher, coach, sponsor, confident, advisor, father figure, and protector to Telemachus (Fitzgerald, l961; Henderson, l985; Yoder, l990). As such, the classical notion of a mentor is one of an older, wiser, experienced, and trusted person who actively guides a younger person in many aspects of life (Bowen, l985; Carden, l990; Cole, l988; Merriam, l983).

In l962, H. Levinson advocated the use of psychological principles in executive development programs. Specifically, he proposed that young executives benefit from personal relationships with superiors since those relationships facilitate the process of identification. In recognizing the benefits these relationships could have on young executives, prompted the development of formal coaching programs aimed at enhancing career development (Cole, l988).

D. Levinson (l978) a developmental psychologist, while investigating adult male developmental stages, found that relationships which support the process of identification are important to psychological growth. Hence, the developmental importance of these relationships is emphasized, and termed "mentor relationship" (Levinson, l978, p.97). As a result of this seminal research, Levinson (l978) is credited with popularizing the concept "mentor" (Cole, l988). Data from Valliant's (l977) study support Levinson's conclusions, while Rawles (l980) found that those who reporting having had or been a mentor obtained higher scores on a objective measure of self-actualization (Carden, l990). Kram's (l983, l985) proposed 'psychosocial' mentor function in industry coincides with Levinson's developmental perspective, as does DeCoster & Brown's (l982) 'facilitative' function in higher education, and Olian, Giannantonio & Carroll's (l986) 'intrinsic' function in business.

In contrast to Levinson's (l978) perspective, organizational sociologist Kanter's (l977) 'sponsorship relationship' stressed the instrumental nature of alliance (Carden, l990). In reviewing data from her extensive study of power relationships in a large corporation, Kanter (l977) cited three functions of sponsors, "to fight for, to provide opportunities for, and to serve as a source of reflected power" (pp.180-181). Further, Kanter (l977) maintained that patronage based or sponsored mobility more often than merit based or contest mobility determined corporate based promotional decision making in the United States. This contention is supported by Hennig and Jardim (l977), and Phillips (l978), and has sparked a wide ranging and enduring affirmative action movement (Carden, l990; Clark, Corcoran & Lewis, l986; Van Collie, l998) by encouraging the formation of sponsorship and mentorship relationships in a variety of professional and academic areas (Boyle-Single, l999; Brainard & Ailes-Sengers, l994; Collins, Barrett & Citrin, l985; Grey l986; Phillip-Jones, l983; Muller,

l997; Sands, Parson &  Duane, l991; Zey, l988).  In addition, Kram's (1983, l985) 'career'

function coincides with Kanter's perspectives, as does DeCoster's et al. (l982) 'prescriptive'

function in higher education, and Olian, Carroll, Giannantonio and Feren's (l988)

'instrumental' function in business.

As noted earlier, no agreement exists on the precise definition of mentor. It has,

however, been conceptualized in a variety of ways, and will be presented from both

traditional (face to face) and non-traditional (distance education) perspectives.

<u>Definitions</u>

<u>From Psychology:</u>

Burton (l978):  (from a psychoanalysis perspective):  "a mentor is not a teacher or

guide but a person who stands in a special archetypal relationship to another and who

also offers peership, friendship, and the opportunity to creatively perform together.  A

mentor is a person with a phenomenological presence; his mentoring influence is

never merely the sum of his biology and psychology.  But it is clear that the mentor is

older, more experienced, more powerful, more creatively productive, more

intuitive…"(p. 117).

Levinson (l978): " a transitional figure who invites and welcomes a young man into

the adult world.  He serves as a teacher, guide, or sponsor.  He represents skill,

knowledge, virtue and accomplishment—the superior qualities a young man hopes to

someday acquire.  The mentor relationship is one of the most complex, and

developmentally important, a man can have in early adulthood " (pp. 333-334).

Speizer (l981):  "the terms mentor and sponsor are often used interchangeably to indicate older people in an organization or profession who take younger colleagues under their wings and encourage and support their career progress until they reach mid-life" (p. 708).

From Higher Education:

Blackwell (l989):  "mentoring…is a process by which persons of superior rank, special achievements and prestige instruct, counsel, guide, and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as proteges" (p. 9).

Cusanovich et al. (1991): "…it becomes a personal relationship.  It involves professors acting as close, trusted and experienced colleagues and guides…it recognizes that part of what is learned in schools is not cognitive; it is socialization to the values, norms, practices and attitudes of a discipline and university; it transforms the student into a colleague.  It produces growth and opportunity for both the mentor and the student" (p. 1)

Lester et al. (l981):  "mentoring as a function of educational institutions can be defined as a one-to-one learning relationship between an older person and a younger person that is based on modeling behavior and extended dialogue between them" (p. 119).

Kartje (l996): "mentoring is a process in which the protégé develops confidence, knowledge, and abilities and the mentor receives a return on his or her investment. Clearly…they are truly value-added events" (p. 121).

Moore & Amey (l988): "by our definition, mentoring is a form of professional socialization whereby a more experienced (usually older) individual acts as a guide, role model, teacher and patron to a less experienced (often younger) protégé" (p. 45).

Moses (l989): "ideally, a professor takes an undergraduate or graduate student under his or her wing, helps the student set goals and develop skills, and facilitates the student's successful entry into academic and professional circles" (p. 9).

Schmidt & Wolfe (l980): "mentors are colleagues and supervisors who actively provide guidance, support, and opportunities for the protégé. The functions of a mentor consist of acting as a role model, a consultant/advisor, and a sponsor" (p. 45).

Shandley (l989): "mentoring is an intentional process of interaction between two people, that is nurturing and fosters growth and development of the protégé…it is an insightful process…supportive and protective…an essential component is also role modeling" (p. 60).

From Adult Education:

Cohen (l995):  "mentoring is a one-to-one interactive process of guided

developmental learning based on the premise that the participants will have

reasonably frequent contact and sufficient interactive time together.  Mentors

contribute to their knowledge, proficiency and experience to assist mentees who are

working toward achieving their own objectives" (p. 5).

Daloz (l998):  "in an atmosphere of care and support, the teacher-mentor

challenges… supports…provides vision for students to examine their conceptions of

self and the world and to formulate new, more developed perspectives.  Thus,

mentors are interpreters of the environment, since they help students to understand

how higher education works and what it expects of them" (pp. 355-357).

From Distance Education:

Mandell & Herman (l996):  "the mentor, as a particular kind of teacher, helps

students create courses and curricula from their curiosity.  In this view, the mentor is

a scholar who enhances our understanding of the faculty role by directing wonder and

the art of 'not knowing' upon the meanings of leaning itself" (pp. 16-17).

From Management/Organizational Behavior:

Bova et al. (l984):  "mentors are those who practice most of the following principles:

try to understand, shape and encourage the dreams of their protégés, often give

blessings to the dreams and goals of their protégés, provide opportunities for their

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protégés to observe and participate in their work by inviting their protégés to work

with them, and teach their protégés the politics of getting ahead in the organization.

A mentor is usually a person of high status…takes an active interest in career

development of another" (p. 18).

Fagenson (l989): "someone in a position of power who looks out for you, or gives

you advice, or brings your accomplishments to the attention of other people who have

power in the company" (p. 312).

Bowen (l985): "mentoring occurs when a senior person in terms of age and

experience undertakes to provide information, advice, and emotional support for a

junior person in a relationship lasting over an extended period of time and marked by

substantial emotional commitment by both parties. If the opportunity presents itself,

the mentor also uses both formal and informal forms of influence to further the career

of the protégé" (p. 31).

Kanter (l988): "it is important to conceptualize a major innovation as coalition

building, a broader notion that ties in more of the organization, rather than as seeking

sponsorship, a narrower concept" (p.185).

Kram (l985): "derived from Greek mythology, the name implies a relationship

between a young adult and an older, more experienced adult that helps the younger

individual learn to navigate in the adult world and world of work. A mentor supports,

guides, and counsels the young adult as he or she accomplishes this important task"

(p. 2).

Olian et al. (l988): "a senior member of the profession or organization who shares

values, provides emotional support, career counselling, information and advice,

professional and organizational sponsorship, and facilitates access to key

organizational and professional networks" (p.16).

For those who do not choose to develop a definition of mentor for their research, they

may instead borrow from others.  For example, renditions of Levinson's definition is used by

Bolton (l980), Evans (l984), Hardy (l984) and Watson (1999), or embellished upon by

Gunderson (l987), Healy et al. (l990), Lyons et al. (l990), and Walsh et al. (l999).  Stewart et

al. (l996) and Yoder (l990) borrow Bowen's (l985) definition, while Allen and Poteet (l999);

Dreher and Cox (l996); Noe (l988); Ragins and Scandura (l994); Waldeck et al. (l997),

Whitely, Dougherty & Dreher  (l992), slightly revised Kram's (l985) definition.  Further,

Tentoni, McCrea, Thomas and Shulik (l992) borrow from Zey (l984), while Mullen et al.

(l999) did the same from Bova et al. (l984).

The term mentor has been used in conjunction or synonymously with other terms,

which serves to further confuse use of the concept.  For example, Ervin (l993) posits

"assuming the position of 'master' is a problematic synonym for mentor" (p.2).  Further,

Speizer (l981) recognizes the terms sponsor, helper, and mentor are used interchangeably,

while Borman and Colson (l984) suggest that mentor has come to mean guardian, guide or

teacher.  Watson (l999) states that a mentor can mean "buddy, friend, or trusted counsellor"

(p.255), whereas Lyons et al. (1990) observes that while other labels such as role model, sponsor, enabler, master teacher and tutor have been applied in synonymous ways, "none have the meaning of mentor" (p.277). Moreover, Osborn et al. (1999) points out that mentor is often mistakenly interchanged with role model, preceptor, or advisor and although these may be part of the spectrum, they are "evolutionary phases on the continuum towards the highest honor of mentor" (p.285). Both Kartje (1996) and Wunsch (1994) suggest that "myths furnish the metaphors used to describe mentor" (p.115), which results in individuals such as parents, religious figures, teachers, etc., described as mentors. And last, Levinson (1978) concludes that "counselor or guru" (p.24), suggest the more subtle meaning, but they have other connotations that would be misleading; as well, mentor is used in a "much narrower sense, to mean teacher, advisor, or sponsor" (Ibid, 1978).

A dictionary or thesaurus was used as a source or partial source for definition by Borman et al. (1984); Lawrence (1985); and Shannon (1995); although Yoder (1990) asserts that dictionary definitions are too simplistic and provide little information as to the true meaning of mentor.

In the distance education literature, the concept mentor remains elusive or based on the research grounded in face-to-face relationships and traditional learning and working environments. For example, Hillensheim (1998) states that "assuring quality in a nontraditonal, distance model was highly dependent on…the mentoring relationship established between the faculty member and graduate students", but neglects to define or operationalize mentor or mentoring. The same is observed in Bernt and Bugbee (1993); Bludnicki (1998); Brittian et al. (1996); Hakes and Cochenour (1993); Krueger-Wilson, (1998); Purnell, Cuskelly and Danaher (1996); Sherry (1995); Taylor (1998), and Zhu (1998).

Electronic mentoring (e-mentoring) programs have become popular in K-12 education (Cobb, l997), teacher/tutor and pre-service education (Crossland, l997; Eisenman & Thorton, l999; Hakes et al., l993; Harris et al., l996; Kendall, l992; Luebeck, l998), industry (Armour, l999), academia and professional (Boyle-Single et al. 1999; Owens et al. l998), and appear to be based on the principles derived from formal, face to face, mentoring relationships in industry and Kram's (l983, l985) research. Boyle-Single's et al. (l999) description of e-mentoring resembles Kram's (l985) definition of mentoring, while Crossland (l997) refers to the "developmental process" (p.50), which is similar to Levinson's (l977) conceptualization.

Fritsch and Strohlein (l988) use the words "mentor support" (p.27) in the title of their article, but the article does not define mentor or mentoring and only suggests that mentors provide tuition and advice. This is an important point, because frequently the term 'mentor' is stated, but then, only found to be used synonymously with other terms such as "interactive guide" (Brittian et al. l996, p.5), "on-line facilitators" (Krueger et al. l998, p.206), "tutor/mentor" (Sumner, l998, p.19), or "on-line experts" (Taylor, l998, p.109). Moreover, Bailey (l987) asserts that the "changed role of the teacher/tutor/trainer is displaced as main subject authority towards the guidance role of counselling, encouragement, coaching in learning skills, or advocacy…the tutor-counsellor reflects the integration of roles, as do titles of industrial counsellor, mentor and facilitator" (p.240). This notion rests on the melting of the role boundaries in open learning, and as such, also melts the distinguishable boundaries of how the language is used and thus how these terms are conceptualized and operationalized by authors and researchers. In support of this, Davies, Neary and Phillips (l994) argue that language is a major force shaping the interpretation of our reality and our perceptions of phenomena.

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In summary of this section, it is apparent that no uniform definition of mentor or mentoring exists. The spectrum of definitions available in the literature supports Merrian (l983) observation that "the phenomenon of mentoring is not clearly conceptualized, leading to confusion as to just what is being measured" (p.169). Although it is interesting to note that the vast majority of the informational and research literature credit the origins of 'mentor' from Greek mythology.

Mentor Characteristics, Roles and Functions

Mentoring relationships are often described in terms of their components, which are: characteristics, roles, functions and stages, and whether they are formal or informal.

The characteristics of a mentor have been described many ways. Allen et al. (l999) outline an extensive list of ideal mentor characteristics: listening and communication skills, objectivity, of influence, patience, honesty/trustworthy, self-confidence, people oriented, common sense, openness, leadership qualities, vision, understanding and caring. To this list, Levinson (l978); Osborn et al. (l999) and Owens et al. (l998) add nurturing, common interests, mutual affirmation, virtue and generativity.

Regarding gender as a characteristic, there is some debate in the literature about who gets mentored more often. In industry, Dreher et al. (l990); Ragins et al. (l994); and Whitely et al. (1992) found no gender differences between the career mentoring experience, intentions to mentor, amount of incidents, or the costs associated with mentoring; which contradict the findings of Keyton and Kalbfleisch (l993) and Reich (l985) who found there were differences. In academia, Berg and Ferber (l983) found that as patterns of interaction between the genders were different, students sought out mentors of the same gender.

However, because there is frequently a smaller pool of women faculty available, the author's suggested that this placed women at a disadvantage in finding mentors. As well, in a study of doctoral programs, Hite (l985) found that more men than women experienced role congruence and perceived that they were receiving support from faculty members, leading the author to surmise that women need more support from faculty when compared to men. This premise coincides with Ellis (l999), who suggested in her doctoral study on multiple mentors that there continues to be pervasive obstacles that persist and create a "glass ceiling" (p.3) for women in a variety of professions.

For race as a characteristic, Dreher et al. (l996) reported that African-American and Hispanic men were less likely to form mentoring relationships with White men, but those who did reported a significant annual salary compensation over those who did not.

In respect to age as a characteristic, based on a review of the literature, from the legacy of famous mentoring relationships comes the sense that mentors are typically older than their protégé counterparts. Although in a distance education environment this may not always prove to be the case considering that the age range of adult learners enrolled in the two distance education programs used for this study, for the admission year 2000, were 26-61 years and 26-63 years, respectively (Personal Communication, Administrative Assistant, Graduate Distance Education Programs, Dec., 5, 2000).

Mentors can assume a variety of roles in their protégés' lives. In industry, Philips-Jones (l982) suggests that there are "traditional or classic mentors, supportive bosses, organizational sponsors, professional career mentors, patrons and invisible godparents" (pp.22-24), while Burlew (l991) and Essic (l999) propose multiple-mentor models. Shapiro, Haseltime and Rowe (l978) offer a continuum of roles—peer pal, guide, sponsor, patron, and

mentor--which brings some clarity to the meaning of mentor in an organizational setting. From a health care perspective, Owens et al. (1998) found that mentors may serve an "advisor, communicator, counsellor, experienced role model, friend, nurturer, protector, resource person, supporter, and teacher (p.79). In academia, DeCoster et al. (1982), suggests that mentors must be prepared to provide for, and appreciate, all aspects of a student's growth and development. And although Levinson (1978) discusses roles in mentoring, he focuses less on this aspect and more on the "character of the relationship and the function it serves" (p.24), since the developmental aspect of mentoring is of principal importance to growth and for relationships.

Many researchers—Blackwell (1989); Burke (1984); Kanter (1977); Kram (1985); Levinson (1978); Noe (1988); Olian et al. (1988); Philip-Jones (1982); and Zey (1984)--have described mentoring in terms of the functions provided by a mentor, which appears to overlap with the roles played by a mentor in relation to a protégé.


Stages of Mentoring

One corollary is that mentor relationships pass through distinct periods--or periods that are distinguishable from one another. This is consistent with the findings of Kram (1985) and Phillips (1977), and general agreement is found in the literature. Although each researcher's terminology is different, both portray a similar sequence: an initiation, a period of productivity, a separation and a metamorphosis. Their work supports the inference that both parties involved must experience the relationship as a mutual venture and invest sufficient energy into it to initiate, promote growth, separate and move on. For Levinson (1978) the mentor serves as a transitional figure, and thus the developmental perspective is crucial "to

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support and facilitate the realization of the dream, which is the kind of life they (protégés) want to live" (p.24).

Formal and Informal Mentoring Relationships

There are differences between formal and informal mentoring relationships that may impact the mentor's functions in career and academic settings. These differences involve the way the relationship is initiated, the structure of the relationship, and the processes involved in the relationship (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). In career and academic settings, informal mentoring appears to develop on the basis of shared interests and admiration, or mutual identification. From the perspective of the mentor, this relationship provides the mentor with a sense of generativity, or contribution to future generations (Erickson, 1963), as generativity allow mentors to avoid stagnation and allows them to pass into the next life stage (Levinson, 1978). As for the protégé, he benefits from the wisdom of the older and more experienced person--who guides, nurtures, and cultivates their intellect--which in turn assists the protégé to advance in their career or field of study. Hence, the benefits to both mentor and protégé are viewed as relatively mutual. From this standpoint, it appears that the most important mentoring functions in this informal arrangement align with Kram's (1983) psychosocial functions, where comfort, stability, mutuality, and nurturing forms the basis of the relationship.

Formal mentoring are planned interventions or programs designed to construct mentor relationships; based company policy (e.g. to increase integration of women and minorities), or students enrolling in a program. Unlike the behavorial or psychosocial aspect, which forms the basis for initiation of informal relationships, formal arrangements are based on the

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assumption that 'learning the ropes' facilitates career advancement of the protégé, or enculturation to the role of student. From this perspective in an academic context, a mentor would then be viewed as the equivalent of instructor or advisor and typically "would not exert the more intense, persuasive influence characteristic of classic mentoring" (Merriam, l983, p.167). In a distance education environment, Sherry (l995) makes reference to this advisory arrangement--in the context of student support.

Disadvantages of a Mentoring Relationship

Given that mentoring is a relationship involving people, it is subject to the same kinds of foibles as are other human relationships. Regardless of the context, a significant portion of the literature reports the downside that can occur within mentoring relationships. Busen and Engebretson (l999) refer to this aspect of a mentor relationship as "toxic" (p.6). Murphy (l995) discusses what he calls the 'shadow side' of mentoring, characterized by, "the pain of fractured trust, the pain of letting go, and the pain of disappointment" (p.119). Other themes that figure prominently in the literature are: protégé dependence, emotional stress experienced by both the mentor and protégé, reputation consequences for the mentor due to protégé problems, failure of protégé development, mixed gender concerns, costs associated with mentoring (time and effort), and peer/superior resentment and backlash (Murphy, l995).

In summary of this section, reviewing the individual attributes of mentor and mentoring was conducted in order to contribute to understanding the total concept of mentoring, as it exists. And although there is some general agreement about mentor roles and functions, and that the object of the relationship is to provide help and support: in specific, the literature indicates much diversity regarding definitions or how mentoring is

conceptualized and consequently operationalized. Hence, this research supports the need for the discovery of mentoring within the context of distance education.

Adult Education and Development

Graduate education generally involves the education of adults. It has therefore drawn on a range of approaches taken from general adult education: from the experienced based learning of Dewey (1938), to self-directed learning from Knowles (1970), to learner centered approaches from Rogers (1983), to reflective learning from Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985), to problem based learning also from Boud et al. (1985), to competency based approaches from Jessup (1991), and finally, to Friere (1970) and Mezirow (1985) whose work is grounded in the social action movement (Chambers, 1992). And although these theorists offer a variety of ways to approach the study of adult education, most educators have come to accept some basic assumptions and principles outlined by Knowles (1970, 1983) and Brookfield (1986); and are, in brief:

Knowles (1983)

In describing the differences between child and adult learners, Knowles (1983) makes the following assumptions: that self-concept moves from one of dependence toward more of a self-directed human being, that one amasses a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning, that learner readiness becomes more orientated to the developmental tasks of one's social roles, and that as a person's time perspective changes from postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, one's orientation towards learning also shifts from subject-centeredness to problem centeredness.

Brookfield (l986) outlines the following principles underlying adult learning: that participation in learning is voluntary, that effective practice is characterized by a respect for the learner's self-worth, that learning should be a cooperative and collaborative journey between learner and facilitator, that practice is at the center of effective facilitation, that one aim of facilitation is to support a spirit of critical reflection on professional, personal and political life, and that another aim of facilitation is the nurturing of self-directed, empowered adults, in work and in society.

In reviewing these principles, the congruence between the mentor and protégé relationship and the adult learner and facilitator relationship, becomes apparent. For example, regarding the psychosocial (Kram, l985) or developmental (Levinson, l978) functions, learner support, nurturing, collaboration, holistic perspective and mutual respect are present. Regarding the other functions, which tend to be situated in other facets of life and work the relationship is observed in context of adults who bring past success and experience to the learning environment.

On another front, Erikson (l982) was one of the first theorists to recognize that adults grapple with different developmental issues as they mature. A good deal of the research on mentoring is guided by Erikson's theory which proposes eight stages of human development, with the seventh stage, 'generativity versus stagnation', significant in this context. According to Erikson (l982), "generativity encompasses procreativity, productivity and creativity and thus the generation of new beings as well as of new products and new ideas including a kind of self-generation concerned with further identity development…a sense of stagnation, in

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turn, can totally overwhelm those who find themselves inactivated in generative matters"
(p.67). In other words, the major task of adulthood is to resolve the psychosocial conflict of
generativity versus stagnation; and one way this may be achieved is through activities such as
mentoring (Sands et al., l991). A mentor in an academic environment may take on this
responsibility by caring for adult learners, fostering growth and development. In this respect,
mentoring is the means by which adults (learners and teachers alike) may realize the
significance of their lives and professional contributions, thereby increasing the probability
of a positive outcome in Erikson's last stage of development, 'integrity versus despair' (Bova
et al., l984). With his work on the benefits of mentoring from the mentor's perspective,
Murphy (l995) corroborates this notion.  As for the recipient, the object of mentoring is the
achievement of an "identity transformation, a movement from the status of understudy to that
of a self-directing colleague" (Healy et al., l990).  Sands et al. (l991) support this view in
regard to higher education.

Hence, since it is accepted that the aims of adult education and effective mentoring are
to promote growth and development of the learner, when viewing mentoring within the larger
context of adult learning and human development, it appears to be very relevant in the
context of this study.


Distance Education

Like the concept mentor, the terms 'distance education and distance learning' have
been applied interchangeably by different researchers and authors to a variety of programs,
providers, audiences, and media.  However, Keegan (l990) may be credited with giving a
comprehensive description of distance education, characteristics which include: a semi-

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permanent separation of the teacher and learner, is influenced by the educational organization in both the preparation of the teaching materials and the support of the students, it uses technical media, is a two way process, and has a semi-permanent absence of a learning group. As a result of this time and space separation of learner and teacher, the learning experience is no longer immediate and face-to-face, but mediated and secondary: hence distance education, by definition, symbolizes the process of space-time distanciation (Jarvis, l993). Moreover, this distanciation (ibid., l993) offers flexibility and independence, and as such embodies the principles of adult learning. But the noncontiguous communication (Holmberg, l983) between learner and professor in turn creates new challenges, which does not come without the corresponding need for meaningful interaction between these two groups.

Regardless of the fact that learners and instructors are separated, different types of relationships are formed in a distance education environment. For example, there is a student-advisor relationship. Incoming students are assigned to professors at the beginning of their programs. Called academic advisors, the roles they may assume are varied, but generally revolve around student representation, dispensing of advice with course selection, and acting as an ombudsman or trouble-shooter. Next, there is the student-thesis/project supervisor relationship. The role of the supervisor is to guide and help shape the exit project and to serve on the committee for the same. There are also student-instructors/tutors/facilitators relationships. Tutors are present to help provide direction within each course and to help learners navigate the transition of information into knowledge. Each of these relationships--learner-advising, learner-supervisor and learner-tutor--are different and very important, and it is possible that a mentor relationship could develop with any of

these individuals who perform these roles; but in and of themselves they are not necessarily, and are distinct from, mentoring relationships. Within higher education, there is a tendency to confuse a mentor with a program advisor. But according to Lyons et al. (l990), an advisor plays an important although prosaic role in a graduate student's life, whereas the mentor plays almost a spiritual role. The notion that mentoring is not the same as advising, supervising and tutoring because of its nurturing and personal dimensions is supported in the literature (Daloz, l986; Friedman, l987; Gaffney, l995; Lyons et al. l990; Waldeck et al, l997).

Summary

Previous research and informational articles were reviewed for its contribution to the understanding of the concept mentor and mentoring in face-to-face contexts. And although there is apparent agreement in the literature about many of the roles and functions provided by the mentor, there is not only minimal agreement on a uniform definition of mentoring but this term is used in conjunction or synonymously with other terms which further serves to confuse the concept, resulting in the difficulty of how mentoring is conceptualised and subsequently operationalized.

Mentoring has also been described in the adult education and development literature from the viewpoint of adult career and psychological development. Brookfield (l986) and Knowles (l983) perspectives on the relationship between the adult learner and the facilitator are congruent with that of the mentor and protégé relationship, while Erikson's (l982) discusses mentoring as a means for adults to help resolve the psychological conflict of the developmental stage, generativity versus stagnation.

# CHAPTER THREE

## THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY – GROUNDED THEORY

"Correction does much, but encouragement does more" (Goethe).

<u>Definitions</u>

When we speak about perceptions, we refer mostly to the observations we make about "intentions, attitudes, emotions, ideas, abilities, purposes and traits—events that are, so to speak, inside the person" (Tagiuri & Petrullo, l958, p.5). This statement connotes the complex and rich nature of perceptions, given the understanding that these events provide structure to an observed phenomenon. But, what of a phenomenon? What do we mean when we say 'phenomenon'? For the purposes of this research I will rely on the definition provided by Polit and Hunglar (l997): "a phenomenon is an abstract entity or concept under investigation in a study, most often used by qualitative researchers in lieu of the term variable" (p.464). That said, the question remains, how can one adequately capture and subsequently explain this phenomenon (or from a sociologist's terminology-- a 'social process') mentoring? The answers we may find come from the underlying assumptions of the approach chosen for this research and the original questions, which drive this research.

Grounded theory (GT) has become a strong research tradition that began more as a systematic method of qualitative research than as a philosophy. GT was developed in the 1960's by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss, while establishing a doctoral program in nursing at the University of California at San Francisco. These sociologists combined their theoretical roots—symbolic interactionism—with the "loose theory generating style of the Chicago school of sociology" (Baker, Wuest, and Stern, l992, p.1356) in order to create a robust methodology that would be useful in studying the experiences of

dying patients. So, from a historical standpoint, this methodology emerged as an alternative approach to the more traditional approaches to scientific inquiry popular in social sciences at the time, which relied heavily on logico-deductive methods or verification of existing theory (Glaser & Strauss, l967). Thus, GT's main thrust is in the generation of open theory that may stand alone, or contribute to update an already existing theory. Hence, in consideration of these theoretical underpinnings and the fact that little investigation has been conducted regarding mentoring in a distance education environment and is therefore a need to generate rather than test theory in this area, use of the GT approach is justified.

In reference to the research questions driving this research—what are adult learner perceptions of mentoring and what is the nature of the phenomenon—Glaser (l978) argues that GT allows us to answer such questions through discovering, "what is going on and telling it like it is" (p.14). As such, the GT approach is used to guide our discovery of, as well as to explain the social phenomenon—mentoring—by identifying the core and subsidiary processes operating in it. As these processes are the guiding principles underlying what is occurring in the situation, they are used as the foundations of theory development. And given that theory drives our practice, understanding the benefits and importance of mentoring, as well as what mentoring means to learners in a distance education environment, can contribute to improving our practice and service within the discipline of distance education.

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

By way of providing some structure to this section, I will begin by discussing the general characteristics of qualitative research in order to aid in the understanding of the GT

approach discussion, which will follow. According to Bogdan and Bilken (l998), there are typically five features of qualitative research, albeit not all studies exhibit all the traits to an equal degree. In general, these characteristics are:

1) *Naturalistic*: from the ecological approaches in biology, researchers enter a particular setting because they are concerned with context. As such, these actual settings or contexts are direct sources of data and the researcher is the key instrument. Hence, participants or historical records produce the data with which qualitative researchers are concerned.

2) *Descriptive Data*: the data collected take the form of words or pictures rather than numbers and can include transcripts, fieldnotes, photographs, videotapes, and personal documents. In order to capture the richness of the data and substantiate the analysis, the results are written to include excerpts or direct quotations from the data. Details are considered of the utmost importance.

3) *Concern with Process*: rather than focusing on outcomes or products, qualitative researchers are concerned with the processes that occur within the studied situation; for example, processes such as the negotiation of meaning or interpretation of concepts and how they are applied.

4) *Inductive*: it has often been said that qualitative researchers construct a picture that takes shape as parts are collected and individually examined; as opposed to putting together a puzzle whose picture is already known. Hence, data are not searched out to prove or disprove a hypothesis held before entering the study; rather, abstractions are built in as the particulars are

gathered and grouped together--their interconnections identified. This way, the theory emerges, from the bottom up.

5) *Meaning*: as qualitative researchers are interested in how different participants make sense of their lives, participant perspectives are central to this approach. "People act…as interpreters, definers, signallers and symbol and signal readers whose behavior can only be understood by having the researcher enter into the defining process through such methods as participant observation" (Ibid, p.25). Hence, it is through discovery of how people interpret their experiences and how people structure the social world in which they live, that we may uncover 'meaning', thereby helping to find solutions and approaches to problems in social situations, or in this case to help build knowledge which could be used to improve practice in disciplines such as distance education.

## The Tenets of Grounded Theory

The GT guidelines used in this research flow from Glaser and Strauss' original work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (l967), and from Glaser's subsequent research and methodological refinement, *Theoretical Sensitivity* (l978).

As previously mentioned, GT is rooted in the symbolic interactionist school of sociology and the work of a number of key players, chief among them, G.H. Mead (l936, l964).  In brief, symbolic interactionism is both a theory about human behavior and an approach to inquiring about human conduct and group behavior.  It tackles the individual in society, and the relationships between individual perceptions, collective action and society

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(Annells, l996). Further, GT focuses on the meaning of events to people and the symbols

they use to convey meaning (which include words), meanings that are developed through

experience or interaction and are shared through common language and socialization, and

which constantly change in social interactions (Baker et al. l992). In describing how

principles of symbolic interactionism guide GT research, Chenitz and Swanson (l989, cited

in Baker et al., l992) assert, "the researcher needs to understand social processes as the

participants understand it, learn about their world…and share their definitions" (p.1357). And

it is through this sharing of definitions that we may then begin to understand behavior given

that human experience is mediated by interpretation (Blumer, l969).

Ensuring rigor within a GT study requires one to follow certain guidelines, and these are

as follows:

1) *Sampling*:  as representativeness in qualitative research concerns the data and

not the sampling units (theoretical versus statistical sampling), GT use non-

probability sampling procedures.  In keeping with its aim of illuminating the

richness of individual experience, the sample size is kept relatively small

(Baker et al., l992).

2) *Data collection and analysis*: data may be collected from interviews,

documents, and observations of behaviors in natural settings or from a

combination of all these sources.  Data collection and analysis are combined

since the researcher works concurrently within a matrix of processes, rather

than a series of discrete linear steps. Central to this combined process is the

'constant comparison method' (Glaser & Strauss, l968) which is analogous to

factor analysis, where every piece of data is compared with every other piece

of data in order to create a well integrated theory. More closely detailed, the 'constant comparison method' (ibid., l968) requires one to:

- ?? break text down into separate lines of data, so that each line may be compared to another line for similarities and differences.

- ?? look for key issues, recurrent events or activities that become 'categories' of focus and attribute 'codes' to these words that describe the same.

- ?? cluster like 'codes' together and create 'categories and their respective properties', constantly comparing them to ensure that they fit together and cover a variety relationships and social processes.

- ?? write a series of observations about your data that can form the beginning of your research report.

- ?? seek emerging concepts that determine what information will be sought next, in that interview questions may require revision, etc.

- ?? expand or collapse present categories by continuing to explore and code the data as it comes in, until each category appears saturated.

- ?? link categories to form a tentative conceptual framework.

- ?? verification occurs through further interviewing, or by going back to participants to validate the conceptual framework.

- ?? the investigator then returns to the existing research to compare his work to others in order to see where and how its fits into the theoretical scheme of things.

- ?? propose a model.

3) ***Prepare research report:*** report the "slice" (Glaser, l978, p. 141) of growing

theory so others can "use it and grow with it" (ibid., p.141).

As Glaser observes, although one talks about GT as a series of methodological steps

from data collection to producing a finished product, it is important to understand that

data collection and analysis occurs simultaneously; that one must keep reentering the data

until there is evidence that no new themes are arising, and that the categories are well

integrated. In other words, the data is saturated. And although this "tripping back and

forth from data to their theory" (Glaser, 1978, p.15) is not a new procedure for

researchers using qualitative methods, it is fundamental as it gives rise to the relationship

between data and theory.


Validity and Reliability

In general, given the subjective nature of qualitative research, the question always

arises whether the research is truthful and to what degree it describes what it has set out to

describe. In specific, GT is not immune to these concerns. Proponents of GT attest to the

rigor of this approach on two grounds. On the one hand, the constant comparison method has

been likened to factor analysis where, as previously stated, every piece of data is compared

with every other piece of data. Hence, large amounts of data are not only reduced to a

solution with a few factors, but these comparison techniques allow the underlying pattern of

relationships to emerge (Glaser, l978; Kim, l975). And through this constant comparison

method, whereby one is continually checking tentative conceptualisations of the

phenomenon, the "problem of elitism or, we-know-what's-best-for-you, can be avoided"

(Stern et al. l984, p.383). On the other hand, GT retains the strength of the theory generating

capabilities inherent to qualitative methodologies. Therefore, it would appear that in fusing

the essences of qualitative and quantitative methods a two-fold advantage might be realized

by the researcher in finding natural solutions to problems under study. First, in retaining

theory building techniques that call for continually redesigning of the analysis, the approach

allows for the creative flow of ideas; and second, through careful coding of the data--in

addition to the constant comparison method of new data--the approach assures that emerging

theory is grounded in the present data and not forcibly into some previous theories that don't

fit (Ibid, 1984). That said, Glaser and Strauss (1967) emphasize that in order for a theory to

have credibility--in other words, validity--it must "fit, have grab and work" (p.3). *Fit* refers

the categories in that they must be readily evident from the data—or be grounded, to have

*grab* is to have relevance to the participant group, and for it to *work* is to have the theory

explain what happened. De Milo, Lipton and Perlis (1979) substantiate this claim when they

observe that the true test of a theory--and its acceptability--is whether (or not) it is reasonable

and makes sense. To this end, Glaser (1978) suggests that findings are soon forgotten, but not

good ideas.

One challenge researchers must face when using qualitative research method comes in

the form of researcher as instrument. In a naturalistic setting, Bogdan et al., (1998) and Stern

et al. (1984) observe that it is almost impossible to control for the presence of the investigator,

however, in view of the conduct of naturalistic research, one does not attempt to remove

oneself from the study. It is understood that most researchers come to the field armed with

many years of professional and personal experience, and rather than attempting to suppress

one's background, past experience can actually help to aid the researchers understanding of

the problem under study. As such, given that I am an adult learner in a graduate distance

education program, I am viewed as an appropriate source of knowledge. Further, Bogdan et al. (1998) point out that what qualitative researchers attempt to do is to objectively study the subjective states of their subjects, in order to add knowledge in an area of study, not to pass judgement on a setting.  And given that qualitative studies are not "impressionistic essays made after a quick visit to the field" (pp.33-34), the researcher must bear the weight of any interpretation; so the researcher must constantly confront his or her own opinions and prejudices with the data.  In the case of this research, I have, as far as it is possible, considered by own biases, and given that I have not experienced a mentoring relationship in my graduate education, felt relatively free to enter into the data with few preconceived notions about mentoring in this context.  However, having been in a position where I was a mentor to another person, in a face-to-face work environment many years ago, I acknowledge that I am not unaware of many of the facets of the mentoring experience. In fact, much of what has been written about face-to-face experiences was indeed congruent with my own experiences. Upon reflection, I understand that in recognizing my past face-to-face mentoring experience, present interactions with study participants will provide great potential for me for new ways of thinking about mentoring in this distance education context To that end, Bogdan et al. (1998) suggests that our initial thoughts and assumptions become fragile as they confront the empirical evidence encountered in the field. Also, it is well to consider that since many opinions and prejudices are superficial, the data collected "provides a much more detailed rendering of events than even the most creatively prejudiced mind might have imagined prior to the study" (Ibid, p.34).

Given this understanding, however, Glaser (1978) directs the researcher to try and keep an open mind and to enter the setting with as few "predetermined ideas about the

phenomenon as possible…especially logically deducted, a priori hypothesis…since this will aid the analyst to remain sensitive to the data by recording events and detect happenings (p.3). ”  The implication here is if the researcher is too imbued with existing concepts from the literature, one will be less sensitive to the themes arising from the data during their own study. However, in order to increase researcher objectivity, Glaser (1978) posits that the generation of preconceived ideas/hypothesis may be decreased if the researcher limits the extent to which he returns to the existing literature and visits "grand theories" (p.10).  "There will be plenty of time", Glaser (1978) continues, "to return to the literature during the saturation point, as the analyst discovers how his work fits into the literature and where his contributions lie" (p.32). In keeping with this process, not once during the data collection and analysis phase, did I return to the literature. Theoretical reasons notwithstanding, I did not do so for practical reasons; in that I had so much data of my own to contend with that adding one more piece of literature from elsewhere may have confused my purpose.  Moreover, considering that all of the previous research that has been conducted has been so in contexts very unlike the context in which my own study was situated, revisiting the literature during the data analysis and collection phases might not have proved to add much value anyway.

Another factor to consider regarding the notion of researcher as instrument has to do with the researcher's behavior and practices and how this can influence the outcome of the interviews, given that an interview is a complex social interaction (Berg, 1989). In consideration that I was a stranger to all but two participants, I wanted to help put them all at ease. Hence, I met the participants in the place of their choosing.  Four people chose a restaurant/coffee house, three people chose their work setting, one person chose a park, two people elected to participate by videoconferencing and the remaining twelve chose their

homes. For these interviews, I dressed neatly to reflect my professional intentions, yet casual enough to convey a conversational image (Murphy, l995). Bogdan et al. (l998) makes reference to this issue of dressing and presenting oneself, since it can affect the outcome of an interview. Because the introduction of a tape recorder can potentially make interviewees feel uncomfortable, I asked each person whether or not they would mind if their interview was recorded. The issue of confidentiality in regards to taped conversations and the publishing of results in a way that no person could be personally identified, was reiterated. No formal list of questions was presented nor was evident to the participants, as the interviews were relatively unstructured in nature. In all cases, the conversation began spontaneously, and the participants were enthusiastic.

An additional point to consider here relates to the notion of participant as informant. In the previous discussion regarding perceptions, it was suggested that perceptions are observations about mental events--that we own--or which belong to other people. Collectively or individually, we come to understand these perceptions because as social beings we interact with each other and share a common language. Hence, in trying to understand the phenomenon of mentoring in a distance education environment would mean entering the "social organization of those actors" (Glaser, l978, p.45), as it is presumed that 'those actors' who study in a distance education environment would be the most dependable people to inform this study. Furthermore, Glaser (l978) states, "this social organization always provides a framework of concepts to be used by participants in designating the principal structure, processual and interaction feature on the action under study" (p.45). Hence, this provides the rationale in choosing participants from two graduate distance education programs.

Another consideration in regards to reliability and validity is whether or not the researcher has correctly interpreted the data. Naturally, qualitative researchers are concerned with the comprehensiveness and accuracy of their data. Hence, reliability is viewed as a fit between what is recorded as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations (Bogden et al., l998). Grounded theorists like other qualitative researchers and sociologists report, "what is actually going on, not what ought to go on" (Glaser, l978, p.14). In the case of this research, direct quotes and statements are taken from the interviews (transcripts)--and not sentences paraphrased by the researcher--in order substantiate the derived categories and their respective properties. I then returned to a portion of the informants to have them appraise the analysis, clarify the categories and attributes and where necessary and check for relevance. This verification by informants provided "stabilization" (Ibid, p.47) of the categories and thus, the conceptual framework. And although basic social processes remain in general, "their variation and relevance is ever changing in our world…thus, a theory can never be more correct than its ability to work the data" (Ibid, p.5). In this sense, given that variables vary, theories can never be proved or confirmed and therefore knowledge acquired through research is never complete (Ljosa, l996; Polit et al., l997; Wolcott, l994). As such, Glaser and Strauss (l967) emphasize that GT's "readily modifiability allows for openness of correction and change in the emerging theory…there are no pet hypothesis…there is only trying to discover what categories and their interrelations fit and work best" (Ibid, p.47).

In regards to the generalizability of findings in this GT study, as a researcher I do not think of this concept in the conventional way. Rather, I agree with the following statement that the point here is to "derive statements of general social processes" (Bogdan et al., l998,

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p.32) rather than to ascertain a statement of commonality between similar settings; which is congruent with the assumption that human behavior is neither random nor idiosyncratic. Therefore, the concern here is not with the question whether these findings are generalizable, but rather "with the question of to which other settings and subjects they are generalizable" (Ibid, p.33). So, generating a grounded theory which is considered substantive rather than formal or 'grand' has greater specificity and hence usefulness to practice, often lacking in theories that cover more global concerns (Merriam, l998). Finally, theory generated in this manner may then serve as a conceptual framework on which to base a testable hypothesis and subsequent quantitative studies.

Collection Strategies

Theory generation is both an art and a science. On the one hand, the 'art' comes from the exploratory nature of GT and the creative process required in explicating the phenomenon, mentoring, in a distance education environment. On the other hand, the rigor of the scientific process of GT is realized through the analytic induction inherent in the constant comparison method. Hence, GT combines the artistic and scientific natures of qualitative methods to enhance our understanding of mentoring in a distance learning environment, an area where little previous research has been conducted. So given the exploratory nature of this research, the interview method was chosen as the principle data collection tool.

Since gathering adult learners perceptions of this phenomenon may be achieved through the interviewing process, and since borrowing tools and focusing on previous research and theories is discouraged in the GT process, no other form of data collection was used. As such, Glaser (1978) states of data collecting, "decisions to study sociological

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perspectives and on a general problem area are not based on a preconceived framework of concepts and hypothesis…the researcher does not have to know beforehand, he has to believe his data" (pp.44-45).  In addition, Bogdan et al. (1998), Glaser (1978), and Stern et al. (1984) recommend interviewing as a data collection method, as it is essentially a purposeful conversation meant to garner information.

Recruitment of Study Participants

Selecting participants for this research was done in a fairly systematic fashion, and in congruence with the GT guidelines previously outlined, that non-probability sampling methods be used.  In consideration of the context of the study and the research questions driving this research, eligibility criteria were as follows:

- ?? both genders
- ?? those studying part time or full time in a formal educational program, delivered via distance education technologies (non face-to-face)
- ?? participants voluntarily agreed to be interviewed on tape

Delimitations were as follows:

- ?? adult learners
- ?? current registration in a graduate distance education program with a minimum of two course 'core' courses completed
- ?? recent graduates (convocation June 2000) of a graduate distance education program
- ?? residents of the province of Alberta

The first three delimitations were selected because their potential effect on the ability of participants to inform the study, therefore limiting the reliability of the findings. The last delimitation was selected for ease of travel, considering that I reside in the province of Alberta and wanted to collect the majority of the data via face-to-face interviews.

Following ethical approval of this thesis research granted by the distance education university's Ethics Committee, permission was sought from the program director to have my request for participants publicized via the graduate student email list. Once granted, an administrative assistant in the graduate program placed my written request for volunteers on the graduate student email list. Within a week of the initial email posting outlining the tenants of this thesis research and requesting volunteers, 30 people responded. From this initial volunteer pool, 24 people were deemed eligible and interviews were conducted over a seven-week period. Two interviews were subsequently dropped, when it was rediscovered that the eligibility criteria had not been met, leaving the total number of interviews used in this analysis at 22. Participants were geographically dispersed throughout the province of Alberta, and with the exception of two interviews conducted via videoconferencing the remainder were conducted face-to-face.

The following are demographics of the participant pool:

- ?? n=22; fifteen females, and seven males
- ?? participants resided in the following locations: Athabasca, Calgary, Canmore, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Red Deer, and St. Albert.
- ?? average number of graduate courses taken for active programme students, six;
- ?? number of students at the thesis/project stage, four
- ?? number of recent program graduates, five

??  number of participants who had studied in a distance education program at the

undergraduate level, seven

??  number of participants who validated the findings, five.

The Interview Process

Upon first meeting the participant, I engaged them in light conversation to 'break the ice', inquiring about their professions and experiences with distance education.  In turn, I shared some personal history and briefly discussed an outline of my thesis research.  None of this personal information was included on the tape.  The consent form was then presented and signed, except in the two cases where the interviews were conducted via video-conferencing. As a point of departure for the actual interview, I encouraged the process by inviting participants to speak on their perceptions of mentoring in a distance education environment, what mentoring or having a mentor would mean in this kind of a learning environment, and to include their past and present experiences. As well, given that there was no contextually appropriate definition available, I purposely did not predefine mentoring for this study.  However, only two of the informants asked what my operational definition of mentoring was.  To this I explained, in consideration that mentoring had not been studied in this context before, and therefore no contextually appropriate definition was available, part of the task at hand was to derive the attributes of the phenomenon, which subsequently could be used toward a definition.  This response appeared to make sense to the informants and therefore satisfy the question.

Considering that data collection and analysis in GT is a concurrent, ongoing and an iterative process, in the latter interviews some questions previously addressed took on new directions in order to help confirm or rule out tentative (theoretical) suppositions.

As previously mentioned, the interviews were relatively unstructured, so that the participant could relate their perceptions and perspectives in their own words.  I encouraged the interviews to proceed through gentle prompting and directed the conversation back on course only if it strayed far from the original topic. The average length of the interviews was approximately 1.25 hours.


Data Collection and Analysis

Having previously discussed GT from a theoretical perspective, a discussion regarding the actual data collection and analysis procedures is in order. From the outset of this section, it should be, once again, stressed that data analysis and data collection were conducted concurrently. That is, in congruence with GT the guidelines outlined at the beginning of this chapter, I followed a systematic process, which allowed for some control of the scope of data collection and thus making multiple interviews theoretically relevant. Hence, to get a sense of how an emergent theory can be inducted from perceptions and observations of the social phenomenon 'mentoring' is to become aware about how these procedures and processes operated within this study. My approach was as follows:

1) Interviews were conducted and captured on tape

2) Shortly after returning from the field, I transcribed each interview from the tape into a scribbler. While transcribing the interviews verbatim, I made notes about the themes that began to emerge from the data; notes that were generated in response to the

following questions I continually asked myself: 'what does this mean when this person is saying this or that, and 'how is it different (or the same) from the other interviews?' and, 'what is actually happening here (in the data)?, 'what is the social process that is occurring and what accounts for this process'?, and 'what does this incident indicate'? So from the outset of the transcribing process and while I entered each handwritten transcript onto my personal computer, I became attuned with the data, since I began immediately to look for key issues, events and activities that surfaced and could potentially serve as future categories or properties of categories. Categories are considered to be the conceptual elements of a theory, while properties/attributes are aspects or characteristics of that category.

3) Open coding of the data is another process that was integrated, after the text/data from the interviews were separated line by line. Essentially, codes are words that emerge from the data since they represent what is happening—e.g. actions or incidences--in the setting. They are termed codes, because they "codify the substance of the data" (Stern et al., l984, p.377), and were attributed to each individual line of data. And although this process was challenging and very time consuming, it was fundamental to the process of GT given that these conceptual codes are the links between the data and the theory, because they represent the underlying patterns of what was occurring within the data. As well, since the coding process constantly stimulated new ideas, I was able to generate new and more codes that might fit and work. From there, I began to formulate categories from the clusters of codes that seemed to fit together all the while constantly comparing them with each other to

ensure full coverage of the data. These categories, supported by evidence from the text, were recorded in detailed memos.

4)  While reading and rereading the data and through constantly comparing the differences and similarities among the considerable data, not only was I able to generate categories and their theoretical properties, but also I was able to recognize the relationships among them. Glaser et al. (1967) acknowledges that this is part of the evolution of GT, and that researchers should form 'hypotheses' (not in the quantitative-deductive sense) or questions about the nature of these relationships and then "verify as much as possible without being tested…proof does not need to be established…generating hypothesis requires evidence enough only to establish a suggestion" (ibid., pp.39-40) in the course of the research. Hence, for every potential category that I recognized, I would write a series of 'hypothesis' about that data, and then continue to compare incoming data to 'verify' how well these suppositions fit. In a process that is iterative, many were discarded, however as new categories and properties emerged, new 'hypothesis' were sought and new relationships were identified, until no new categories were found and the data saturated.

5) Once the data appeared to be saturated, categories were linked together to form a tentative conceptual framework explaining the phenomenon 'mentoring' in a distance education environment. Having reached this point signalled the need to return to Glaser and Strauss' (l968) guidelines to begin to determine the credibility of the theory, by ascertaining its 'fit, grab and workability'.  Hence, this process was initiated in my return to a portion of the informants to ascertain the degree of relevance of my theoretical framework; and it was this tentative framework or

explanation of this phenomenon that formed the basis of the discussion during the revisits with five of the original interviewees. Once again, these revisits yielded many rich insights in the same spirit as the original interviews. Participants were able to give their input freely and appraise the categories and their properties, discuss how well comments taken directly from the data were placed in regards to the categories, give and receive clarification on categories, and elaborate where necessary. In short, these participants verified the relevance of the categories/framework generated from the data, because they felt it explained the phenomenon 'mentoring' from their perspective. This indicates 'fit'. In addition, the framework was deemed faithful to the data from which it was induced, because the participants who informed the data easily understood the framework and stated that it made "sense" to them, and was "legitimate" since it was perceived to be reality based. Given this perspective, in that several of the adults who informed this research are also practitioners in the field of distance learning, indicates that this theory would be understandable from a practitioners perspective as well. This indicates 'grab'. As for the ability of the theory to 'work', applicability of the theory to a range of distance learning situations, and the presence of "richness and sensitivity within the theory to reflect the subtleties of interaction within the phenomenon" (Kearney et al., l995, p.210), were achieved by an appropriate sample size and in-depth interviews. The data included a wide range of variation of perspectives, given that the adult learner population interviewed for this research was fairly diverse in their personal and educational backgrounds.

6) At this point, two processes occurred. The first was a return to the literature to ascertain where this research and theoretical framework may fit into the current

thinking, which lead to the second, the development of a model that attempts to explain mentoring behavior in a distance education environment, from the perspective of the adult learner.

Conclusion

The aim of the GT approach is to discover underlying social forces that shape human behavior. It does so by an inductive approach that works within a matrix where several processes go on at once, rather than following a set of linear steps; it does so by allowing the researcher to enter into a naturalistic setting where the 'actors' involved in the social process (phenomenon) may be found, and it does so by enabling the researcher to generate theory that is grounded in the current participants perspectives and not through verification of previously derived theories.

Among the most appropriate uses of the GT approach is when the researcher is interested in generating theory in an area where little or no theory exists or in a situation where existing theory fails to explain a set of circumstances. Such is the case here, where little research has been conducted on mentoring in a distance learning environment.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

"To know someone here or there with whom you can feel there is understanding in spite of distances or thoughts unexpressed—that can make life a garden." (Goethe)

The methodology described in the previous chapter has laid the foundation for our understanding of what will be described in this chapter, a theoretical framework for describing the phenomenon or social process, 'mentoring', in a distance education environment. This framework and its interpretation is the culmination of over 100 pages of typed transcripts from 22 taped interviews collected over a seven-week period, and consist of seven categories and their 12 respective properties. Excerpts taken from the data from which the categories and properties were derived, is 'raw', in that no attempt has been made to alter the participant's statements. Also, in order to provide anonymity to the participants, neither names nor acronyms been used in identifying participants. Refer to Table 1.

Table 1.

Description of Categories and Properties

| CATEGORIES | PROPERTIES |
|---|---|
| 1) A Merger | A) The Impetus |
| 2) Constancy | A) Committed<br>B) Reciprocity<br>C) Authenticity |
| 3) Transcends | A) Distance not a barrier<br>B) Presence |
| 4) Transforms | A) Change<br>B) Recurring phenomenon<br>C) Boundary recognition |
| 5) Holistic | A) Support the whole person and learning experience<br>B) Personal history |
| 6) Informal | A) Relaxed relationship<br>B) Mentoring is distinct from advising |

Category 1:  A Merger

    In the distance education academic context in which this study was situated, relationships formed for a variety of reasons.  Whether it was for professional or career development, was academically motivated and therefore involved the teaching–learning process, to fulfil a need or desire, or was simply serendipitous (timing), there appeared to be an occurrence that drew the two individuals together. The attribute/property of this category is: the impetus.

> ***The Impetus***:  In the case of the participants in this research, those who became involved in mentoring relationships identified that there was either an incident that brought them together, prior knowledge of the person acted as an impetus in forming the relationship, or it was one of those 'perfect timing' moments—simply 'being present' at the right time.  The following statements are offered:
>
> ?? "We just clicked."
>
> ?? "It just happened."
>
> ?? "I think I really lucked out."
>
> ?? "Philosophies of education brought us together."
>
> ?? "At that point I needed something that he could give."
>
> ?? "This person took an interest in us."
>
> ?? "We knew each other from before…and there are some other sorts of reasons."
>
> ?? "I was so shocked, that someone would be so supportive of my ideas.  I was really blown away that someone would be interested in my ideas."

?? "Took an interest. This interest maybe spring boarded from the academic, but also a personal sort of flavor to that interest."

Category 2:  Constancy

One of the themes to surface during the interviewing of graduate student was the notion that their mentors 'were always there for them'.  This perception connotes stability, consistency, and continuity; features that are often present in developmental kinds of relationships.  And it is perhaps this kind of orientation on behalf of the mentors, which provides an important level of support for graduate learners in a distance education environment.  Within this category, the following attributes/properties were identified: committed, reciprocity, and authenticity.

*Committed:*    the graduate students observed that there was sense of dedication on the part of the mentor to their relationship, regardless of where the student was in his or her program.   Also exhibited was a level of awareness that their mentors were, and could be depended upon, for assistance or direction whenever the occasion arose. These sentiments are expressed in the following excerpts from the interviews:

?? "He went out of his way to connect with me and the other students, and that impressed me."

?? "I could always count on her being there for me."

?? "Always very responsive to my needs."

?? "I would approach him for feedback before I approached my own advisor."

?? "Because I was in a formal program of study, this was a long-term relationship."

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?? "It was not maintenance free, it required a lot of work it keep it going. We cultivated it."

***Reciprocity***: closely associated with the attribute commitment, was the idea that this kind of a relationship could not exist without two parties being involved, voluntarily, on an equal basis. Without this give and take, and sharing of the benefits of each other's gifts, it was suggested that neither would it be a mentoring relationship nor would it survive. Students also expressed their appreciation when they were able to work together with their mentor in coursework, as well as seeking them out for independent study/project work. The following are some perspectives for this attribute:

?? "There was respect there, mutual respect. I admired him for what he had done and visa-versa."

?? "Two way respect. Goes beyond the basic level of respect…goes the 'extra' in a mentoring relationship."

?? "We have a similarity of thinking and shared philosophies. We developed a rapport."

?? "I believe it was mutually fulfilling."

?? "We were both faithful to it, you had to be."

?? "It's a 2 way street—we understand where each other is coming from and where we want to go."

?? "I think it is a very unselfish thing to do."

?? "Mentorship is work—it is not something that is just given to you."

*Authenticity:* in the data it was readily apparent that honesty was a very important stepping stone to building a meaningful mentoring relationship and a characteristic sought out in mentors. Here is what the participants had to say:

- ?? "The connection has to be truthful and can't be based on platitudes."

- ?? "The element of trust has to be there. They need to be able to hold a confidence."

- ?? "There is a certain amount of richness between two people that cannot be false."

- ?? "I felt freer to ask the important and difficult questions."

- ?? "Some people are just mentors. You can feel it in their personality—they are receptive and warm people. You want to go to them again and again."

- ?? "It was a very non-threatening environment."

- ?? "That which is contrived tends not to work."

Category 3: Transforms

Moving from one place to another is another theme that came to the fore in these interviews. Whether it is in reference to the natural progression of a student moving forward through a formal program with help and support from a mentor, or in reference to certain experiences as providing a kind of enlightenment for those involved in the relationship, the implication is twofold. First, the people in the relationship change or evolve, and second, the relationship itself does not remain static. From the perspective of the learner, this growth and development or these changes that occurred were viewed, positively. Attributes/properties

related to this category are, change, mentoring as a recurring phenomenon and boundary recognition.

*Change*:  it is universally acknowledged that meaningful interaction with another human can somehow alter your perceptions and experiences with the world, especially if those interactions are consistent and with the same person.  In the case of these subjects, within their academic experience, interacting with a mentor not only helped them to learn and grow as students and professionals, but left them with the impression, that the mentor grew as well.  Here are some examples of what the participants had to say in this regard:

?? "Sure he had knowledge that I did not, but he was learning about my venture as well."

?? "There is something about mentorship that allows you to not only learn from their knowledge, but skill too."

?? "We were working on a goal, together."

?? "He made me rely heavily on my own intuition, but I learned so much."

?? "Opening the door to what is, and what is possible."

?? "You move from outside the public domain of CMC, to a more personal and private mentoring relationship."

?? "A bond through school has formed into a friendship."

?? "It must be gratifying to them."

?? " You come away from your encounter with something you never had before. That is good."

?? "These are learning experiences that you need, a trusting relationship, so when I am questioning myself or wanting to experiment, they are there to bounce idea off."

*Recurring phenomenon*:  the experience of participating in a mentoring relationship impressed upon the participants the full value of such a relationship, and as a result, they would consider taking on the role themselves.  This is evidenced in the following:

?? "One of the reasons I went to the virtual distance education idea for my venture, was because of the mentoring potential. It is very valuable."

?? "In receiving that, you in turn learn how to do it."

?? "It's like a skill you pass along in a therapeutic manor."

?? "Mentoring begats mentoring."

?? "I would do it again."

*Boundary recognition*: participants in this research expressed an astute awareness that mentoring relationships exhibit the same kinds of characteristics and parameters as do other relationships, in that they change according to need, they are different depending on the context and the people involved, they are workable for some and not for others, and they are all unique in terms of longevity. Direct quotes regarding this attribute are as follows:

?? "It shouldn't be demanded by a student or thrust upon a student if they don't want it."

?? "Your life experiences and stage of life impact your relationships…it is cyclical…at certain times in your academic career you need things more than at other times."

?? "This may be a selfish idea, but I want, what I want when I want it…maybe it is because of where I am in my life."

?? "Each experience is unique, because there are a different set of circumstances and motivations."

?? "With the new distance education typologies, mentoring at a distance is becoming easier—with video-conferencing is should be more doable".

?? "When I came into this program and had this mentoring experience, I found that it made distance learning more exciting…yet I had not missed it. So that makes me wonder if it is necessary, or for everyone."

?? "It worked for me, but I could see this not working for others."

?? "Until you try it, don't discount it.  And even if you try it and it doesn't work there are other factors to consider.  I think a lot of people refuse to accept that things can be done by distance."

?? "We all wear different colored glasses, so how we perceive mentoring is related to our experiences.  Maybe one doesn't believe in mentoring because they have not had the opportunity to explore it."

?? "Sometimes it might not work because of ulterior motives. Seeking something for their own ends, and it doesn't work."

?? "I am not sure that everyone can easily enter a mentoring relationship by

distance. But then there are those who cannot easily enter a mentoring

relationship face to face".

?? "There was not a lot of incentive to go out and look for someone who may

become meaningful in your academic career."

?? "For me it is really need based."

?? "It is one thing that you will need to eventually remove yourself from."

?? "The mentoring relationship that lasted the longest was the one where we

were connected, on a deeper, more personal level."


Category 4:  Transcends

That there was a separation in time and space between the two parties involved in the

mentoring relationship in a distance education environment was not perceived to be an issue.

In fact, learners spoke of the ease of use of email in fostering private, two way

communication in an environment that allowed not only for freedom from the constraints of

time, but in addition, encouraged reflective thinking.  Two attributes/properties of this

category were found to be: distance not a barrier, and presence.

   ***Distance not a barrier***:  the majority of learners who experienced mentoring

   relationships at a distance had never actually met their counterpart face to face, yet,

   there did not appear to be any necessity to do so.  In many cases, it was simply not

   possible, due to the geographical differences; but in the cases where it was possible,

   the majority of learners did not express a great need to pursue this end. However, if

and when a face-to-face meeting did occur, it was acknowledged as a good experience. Learner's thoughts on this aspect are as follows:

?? "Distances can be traversed. And the distance is what you make of it—it is really in the mind. If you've got this in your mind that this person is so many miles away and therefore you have nothing in common, then you are in trouble. Disregard the actual geographical difference and it makes a lot of difference."

?? "Distance is a funny word, and I've had people say to me in the past that, that course is now distance. And my question is--who moved"?

?? "You don't have to meet face-to-face to have a relationship."

?? "Shared ideas across national boundaries."

?? "In my case, meeting face to face was impossible, but I didn't miss it."

?? "Once we'd gotten the seed going in the relationship, it didn't matter where we were."

?? "If you want, you can emulate the face-to-face environment of mentoring in a distance education environment."

?? "This has gone beyond University boundaries."

?? "Distance did not stand in the way."

?? "To sustain it, without ever meeting this person face-to-face, is unreal."

?? "I'm thinking if the purpose of a mentoring relationship, or one of the features would be, that one person would have the availability to offer something that helps—encouragement, information, or whatever it takes—then in fact technology would allow it to happen whenever it needed to happen."

?? "The other thing that with asynchronous communication, I was made to feel important. I have no idea how many times that person was interrupted in writing that message to me, but I was never made to feel unimportant."

?? "I thought of how it feels to sit in your own comfortable slippers in your own comfortable environment and communicate. So you can be in a very comfortable place for you, surrounded by the things that make you feel who you are. Not like when you feel sometimes, you know, when you really don't belong to that seat you are sitting in."

*Presence*: closely associated with the attribute/property transcends, was the participants perception that regardless of where they were situated in proximity to their mentor, the mentors were—figuratively speaking--always there in the 'back of their (the learners) minds, and at the ends of their fingertips' (email and telephone). This provided the learners with a sense of security that they could turn to someone should they need too. The following are some clues in support of this notion:

?? "Not out of sight, out of mind."

?? "He is more present than if we had been face-to-face."

?? "You don't forget about them just because you don't see them."

?? "If I send a message, it may take a day or two for a response, but I know it is coming, on her time."

?? "The longevity of a non face-to-face relationship seems to have greater staying power, because you aren't dropping out of sight. It's a psychological perception that I still have a connection and I don't feel like I need to send a

message just to help maintain that relationship.  I don't need to send a message

to say 'keep in touch'.  It is like, he is there and I'll contact him if I need to."


Category 5:  Holistic

    Distance education students, are people who have families, jobs, and other obligations

outside of their learning environment; and as such, cannot separate themselves from these

contexts in order to seek an advanced degree, but rather, it provides rationale for adult

learners who seek distance education as an alternative mode of study. The point is, that

distance education students, as adults, come to the learning arena with as many skills and

strengths to support their learning, as they come with outside commitments. Here, learners

recognized that not only was it important that their mentors acknowledge them as person who

has other (outside) needs, but as a person who had academic and professional strengths as

well. Hence, it was the learner's perception that mentorship encompassed more than just an

academic role; it was multi-faceted in nature.   The attributes/properties for this category are:

supports the whole person and learning experience and personal history.

> ***Supports the whole person and learning experience:*** having many of the learner's
>
> needs—psychosocial, academic, administrative, technical--being met by the mentor
>
> was an important facet of this relationship. However, not all participants expressed
>
> that they needed all of these elements of support on a regular basis.  Rather, it was on
>
> an as need basis or situational.  In addition, participants expressed that it was
>
> important that mentors acknowledged them as people and not just graduate students
>
> because this helped to personalize their relationship and therefore contributed to a

more meaningful and therefore, less mechanical experience.  Here is what participants said:

?? "I am not just a student or a person who is learning this material…it is part of my life but not all.  It is the encouragement to bring your skills to that material, so you can better use it…in asking 'what does it mean to you'?  This helps you to grow more than just academically."

?? "It about supporting the experience of what you are going through, as well as the creation of meaningful experiences."

?? "The most important thing is the person.  Self-esteem is incredibly important to students."

?? "Taking the systems perspective and we very much believe in systems, and we believe in it in the educational setting.  Understanding the role of the student and the family."

?? "The idea of sharing common experiences, and your reactions to them."

?? "We had good discussions about many things, he was always interested in what I was doing."

?? "Feel free to talk about yourself--what is going on with you and your program."

?? "She had the capacity to let you know that she cared what happened."

?? "He was very respectful of me as an adult."

?? "He was someone who continually encouraged you to move ahead, but at the same time recognized where you were as a person."

?? "We connected on many different levels."

?? "He was tremendously helpful in many ways. I experienced many changes in the past year."

?? "By meeting my basic needs for encouragement and motivation, the relationship progressed in terms of asking more questions about courses, questions about career choices and references and possible directions to channel my skills."

***Personal history***:  participants projected about the importance of knowing about their mentor and their mentor knowing about them.  This idea supports the attribute of authenticity as helping to provide a foundation in a mentoring relationship. Some comments were:

?? "She had done her homework, she knew about my background."

?? "We knew each other before I enrolled in this program."

?? "There was a sharing of his personal life, and you knew it could grow from there."

?? "His outlook was different and personal, that's when I connected with him."

?? "Those who share of themselves make the difference."

?? "I need some kind of knowledge of the whole person."

?? "If you don't know about each other, than it is just mechanics."

?? "To be a good mentor, they have to know and respect something about you…and about what you are learning and about what is important to you.  So it is a two way relationship."

Category 6:  Informal

Many participants in this study remarked that the atmosphere between themselves and their mentor was quite relaxed; that the non face-to-face environment promoted an ease of feeling, of comfort. Speculation as to why this might be, lead the participants to suggest that because the main forms of two way communication between each other was email and the telephone—which can be both private and personal—these modes do not complicate the interaction with unnecessary issues about physicality.

Moreover, the idea of informality as a category was further supported by participants' suggestions about the benefits of asynchronous technology used in distance education:  in the convenience of 'time and place' messaging for both parties, the elimination of having to negotiate appointments with secretaries and accommodating schedules and relying on restricted office hours provides for a more relaxed atmosphere, and as well promotes a sense of equality in that students, as adult learners, are not sitting on the 'other side' of a Professor's desk.

Participants also exhibited an awareness about the level of scholarship within their graduate community of learners—learners who possess not only multiple and advanced degrees but who also come armed with many years of valuable work related experience—many of those years spent working with technology and in the field of distance education. And although learners acknowledged they had much to learn from their mentors, they also felt they had much to contribute and were quite self directed in their learning; and therefore the relationship was more like a partnership. Noted attributes/properties of this category are:  relaxed relationship and mentoring is distinct from advising.

***Relaxed relationship***: having the freedom to use email to 'talk' or to ask and respond to questions anytime day or night, liberated the participant from the constraints of always appearing 'pert and on time', as one feels they often must in a face-to-face interaction. Many participants also expressed that with increased contact with their mentor, their comfort and confidence levels rose to the point that they felt they were free to discuss topics and address issues that were outside the university parameters. Here are some excerpts from the interviews:

- ?? "And I think, that we called each other by first names was helpful. I think addressing them by their first names is healthy. If I call them by their first name, then that makes us more equal. I would feel inferior if I was required to call them Dr."

- ?? "Where I come from the opinion is that Jack is as good as his master."

- ?? "The non face-to-face environment gives you courage."

- ?? "It was a more relaxed atmosphere."

- ?? "It was so easy, you don't have to make an appointment."

- ?? "I really think mentoring should be laid back."

- ?? "I like to use humor. Not to be always so serious."

- ?? "It is a much more collegial atmosphere that I was accustomed to."

- ?? "With these new technologies, I felt like we were learning together, and this made me feel like we were peers. It was very encouraging."

- ?? "Brief interactions with email are more efficient and meaningful because they are more concise. You are able to capture the moment when it is relevant."

- ?? "I think the pedestals are much smaller in distance education."

?? "I felt many of those barriers or lines between the Professor as expert and the student as the non-expert, were erased."

?? "Part of it is the level of expertise, in that distance education is a new field and new in people's minds. So, you don't have someone grandstanding on 300 years of chemistry and have a degree from 'such and such' a place—making you feel like an underling."

*Mentoring is distinct from advising*: it was fairly readily perceived by participants that the mentoring role and the advisory role were distinct from each other. Although it was acknowledged that one's advisor could indeed become a mentor (and in fact, were), all advisors were not mentors. It appears that mentoring connotes more of a personal relationship than does advising and that mentoring is defined more in terms of the nature of the relationship rather than the purpose it serves. Hence, it is conceivable that the advisory role is understood to be a more formal role—and this would be evidenced in the fact that advisors in graduate programs are 'appointed' and it is their role to perform administrative type duties whereas mentorship relationships tend to be formed spontaneously, informally, and voluntarily between two people—solidified by a mutual bond, and kind of unspoken, agreement. Here is what participants had to say on this subject:

?? "One would be a volunteer arrangement, and the other a paid position."

?? "Mentoring is a greater role than just an administrative advisor."

?? "The contact with my advisor had to do with something in respect to my program".

?? "Has to be in an atmosphere where you aren't academically judged."

?? "Must be a non-judgemental arrangement."

?? "If you are not proactive, or a very hands off advisor, you aren't likely going to be a mentor."

?? "I have a great advisor, but there is not that little spark."

?? "Some of it has to be accidental."

<u>Summary</u>

In summary, mentoring in a distance education environment appears to be a complex interaction that is multi-focal in nature.  In using the GT data collection and analysis method, the categories or conceptual elements of the phenomenon were discovered to be:  a merger, constancy, transcends, transforms holistic and informal; whereas, the attributes or specific aspects of these categories were discovered to be: impetus, committed, authenticity, reciprocity, distance not a barrier, presence, change, recurring phenomenon, boundary recognition, supports the whole person and learning experience, personal history, relaxed relationship, and mentoring is distinct from advising. These categories and attributes of the phenomenon—mentoring in a distance education environment—not only provide the theoretical elements of the framework, but aid in helping to conceptualise the phenomenon in this context.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## THEORETICAL MODEL

"It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data." (Sherlock Holmes)

This final stage of the GT methodology marks the return to the literature to discover where and how the findings of this research fit into what has been previously studied and culminates with the presentation of a model. Glaser (l978) remarks that this stage "has that little slice of reality" (p.129) about it and may be rather sobering, because a person is still, quite often, caught up in the richness of the data from one's own research. A little logic, Glaser (l978) infers, goes a long way.

In order to get a visual perspective of how this thesis research integrates and expands upon the current mentoring research, Table 2 profiles similar themes found in various research reports and informational literature (column one), outlines the authors of the same (column two), and then highlights if the present findings were discovered as a comparison (column three). A discussion of Table 2 follows. It is important to note, that since this thesis research is original in that no other research was found that studied adult learners perceptions of mentoring in a distance education environment, all of the studies included in this matrix were written based on a face to face perspective/mentoring model. As well, the research reports made use of methodologies that are both qualitative and quantitative in type, and all publications included here are from the disciplines of business/industry, psychology, education, and the health sciences. Further, each of these studies measures, implements and interprets the phenomenon mentoring in terms of its own needs, goals and resources. As such, corporations are concerned primarily with productivity and profit, institutions of higher education with nurturance of individuals' scholarship and creativity, and professional groups

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with performance management and effective marketing of services (Cardin, l990). Hence,

understanding mentoring as a phenomenon affecting adult development requires the

integration of these perspectives.

Table 2.

Comparison of the Current Literature with the Findings of this Study

| Categories/attributes of mentor | Current research | Present findings |
| --- | --- | --- |
| A merger: formally arranged, face-to-face. | Chao et al., (1992), Cosgrove (1986), Douglass (1997), Gaskill (1993), Geiger et al., (1995), Hope (1999), Kram (1985), Murray (1991), Noe (1988), Phillip-Jones (1982), Ragins et al., (1999), Schmidt et al., (1980), Van Collie (1998), Walsh et al., (1999), Whitely et al., (1992), Wilbur (1987), Wunsch (1994), Zey (1988). | Not found in present study |
| A merger: informal arrangement, face-to-face. | Allen et al. (1999), Beans (1999), Busen (1999), Chao et al. (1992), Erickson (1963), Kalbetlech (1993), Kram (1985), Levinson , (1978), Lyons et al., (1990), Olian et al., (1998), Olian et al., (1993), Ragins et al., (1999), Sands et al., (1991), Wunsch (1994). | Verified in present study |
| A merger: formally arranged, non face-to-face. | Armour (1999), Bludnicki (1998), Cobb (1998), Coughlan (1980), Kerka (1998), Owens et al., (1995), Saurino et al., (1999), Single et al., (1999). | Not found in present study |
| A 'spark', chemistry, or incident that helps initiate relationship. | Belcher et al., (1998), Busen (1999), Darling (1984), Hayes (1998), Kram et al., (1983), Murray (1991), Ragins et al. (1999), Yoder (1990). | Verified in present study |
| Unspoken pledge, time and personal investment. | Alan et al. (1999), Bova et al. (1984), Dombeck (1999), Healy (1980), Kram (1985), Mullen (1999), Neary (1997), Osborn et al. (1999), Schmidt et al., (1980), Van Collie (1998), Wilbur (1987), Zey (1988). | Verified in present study |

| Give and take, two way relationship. Flexibility. | Blankmeyer (1996), Boyle et al. (1998), Busen et al. (1999), Bush (1985), Carmin (1988), Clawson (1980), Gerstein (1985), Healy et al., (1980), Jacobi (1991), Lyons et al., (1990), Melis et al., (1994), Moore et al., (1988), Mullen (1999), O'Neil (1981), Osborn et al., (1999), Schmidt et al., (1980), Shannon (1995). | Verified in present study |
|---|---|---|
| Respect, trust, authenticity, and mutuality. | Allen et al., (1999), Blankmeyer (1996), Borman et al., (1984), Busen et al., (1999), Clawson (1980), Darling (1984), Evans (2000), Gaffney (1995), Kartje (1996), Kram (1985), Levinson (1978), Mullen (1999), Osborn (1999), Phillips (1977), Tetoni et al., (1992), Zey (1984). | Verified in present study |
| Personal and professional growth. | Borman (1984), Gerhke (1988), Hardcastle (1988), Healy et al., (1990), Kram et al. (1985), Levinson (1978), Levinson (1961), Osborn et al., (1999), Philips (1977), Rawles (1980), Schmidt et al., (1980), Zey (1988). | Verified in present study |
| Mentoring resounds. | Boyle et al.. (1998), Busch (1985), Busen (1999), Davidhizar (1988), Kanter (1977), Levinson (1978), Sands et al. (1991), Schmidt et al., (1980), Stewart et al. (1996), Wilbur (1987), Yoder (1990). | Verified in present study |
| Negative consequences. | Heinich (1995), Hunt (1981), Kram et al., (1985), Levinson (1978), Murphy (1995), Noe (1988), Schmidt et al., (1980), Yoder (1990). | This risk was recognized by participants but not experienced |
| Longevity of relationship. | Busch (1985), Busen (1999), Clawson (1980), Hunt (1981), Kram et al., (1985), Levinson (1978), Philips-Jones (1982), Whitely et al., (1991), Zey (1984). | Participants recognized that as each relationship was unique it would be varying in duration |

| Lack of face-to-face interaction, is not an issue. | Kerka (1998) | Verified in present study |
|---|---|---|
| Mental inhabitance | Burton (l979), Kartje (1996), Levinson et al., (1978), Osborn et al., (1999), Phillips-Jones (1982), Phillips (1977) | Verified in present study |
| Complex, multipurpose interaction/relationship, that is supportive in many ways. | Borman et al. (1984), Brown et al. (1982), Carmin (1988), Hunt (1981), Kartje (1996), Kerka (1998), Kram et al., (1985), Mullen (1999), Noe(1988), Olian et al., (1985), Osborn et al., (1999), Shannon (1995), Van Collie (1998), Waldeck et al., (1997), Welch (1996), Zey (1988). | Verified in present study |
| Personal disclosure, personal sharing and open communication, interrelating, friendship. | Allen et al., (1999), Belcher et al., (1998), Borman et al., (1984), Boyle-Single et al., (1999), Kram et al., (1985), Luebs et al., (1998), Mullen et al., (1999), Noe (1988), Sands et al., (1991), Selke et al., (1993), Shannon (1995). | Verified in present study |
| Casual atmosphere, freedom. | Chao et al., (1992), Clawson (1980), Gerstein (1985), Ragins et al., (1999) . | Verified in present study |
| Feeling of being peers, equality. | Berg et al., (1983), Boyce et al., (1998), Ervin (1993), Girves et al., (1988), Mullen (1999), Neary (1997), Osborn et al. (1999), Papalewis et al. (1992), Shannon (1995), Tetoni et al. (1992),. | Verified in present study |
| Mentoring is different from advising. | Gaffney (1995), Lyons et al. (1990), Moore et al., (1988), Neary (1997), Osborn (1999), Selke et al., (1993), Shannon (1995), Tetoni et al., (1992), Waldeck et al., (1997), Welch (1996). | Verified in present study |

As mentorship is an aspect of social learning where we are in fact mixing and relating to others, it is not surprising to learn that many of the themes that were discovered in this research—given its non face-to-face context—are not completely dissimilar from the themes inherent in studies carried out in face-to-face contexts. And it is in these similarities that we may find, not only better 'fit' and more 'grab' to the theoretical framework, but we may move toward greater 'reliability' of the findings. That said there are some differences that should be discussed here, because the impact of mentoring in a distance education environment cannot be fully appreciated unless the difference in contexts is taken into account. By the same token, it is these differences, which further help to explain the phenomenon mentoring in a distance education environment, and therefore expand on the current theories about mentoring.

Entry One: Formally arranged mentorship (face-to-face): this theme was not supported by the data. But given the nature of the context of this study in that graduate students are studying at a distance and geographically dispersed from their university and professors, this is not a surprising finding.

Entry Two: Informal mentor arrangement (face-to-face): this theme which was significant in the face-to-face literature, has relevance in a non face-to-face educational environment. As previously mentioned, all mentoring relationships entered into by participants were done so 'informally'. This means either the student or the professor initiated these relationships without any outside influence—a notion

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that reflects the underlying presumption that both parties had a choice, and were both personally (internally) motivated to participate in this kind of relationship. In accepting this corollary, that participants engaged in these relationships because they sincerely wished to do so, moves toward understanding mentoring in this context, as a less traditional--or less formal—process, yet equally as interactive, yielding a more flexible and workable, situation. Hence, the data from this study supports the category 'A Merger'.

Entry Three:  Formally arranged mentorship (non-face-to-face):  this theme was not supported by the data in this research.  No formal mentoring relationships/programs were entered into by participants, nor were any offered or recommended by mentors. As previously mentioned, all relationships were informal arrangements, and it was perceived by participants that their distance education university did not offer a formal mentoring program.  When I asked participants if they thought a formal mentoring program would be a good idea in our distance learning environment, all stated it would likely be beneficial, a few stated that they would definitely participate, while the majority were undecided whether or not they would themselves enrol in such a program.  Possible explanations to why participants were undecided about formal mentoring programs may have to do with the freedom associated with distance learning and that being involved in a formally arranged program imposes certain parameters, and that many of the students were well into their programs and perhaps believe that these kinds of arranged programs would be better suited to pre-program or first year students to aid in role enculturation, and the like.  There is also the

possibility that participants believe that formal mentoring programs reflect the thinking reminiscent of the industrial age, in that many of these programs were used to aid advancement through organizations hierarchies (academic and in industry), and are therefore more power orientated and not congruent with the learner centered environment in which they find themselves.

From the standpoint of formal or assigned mentoring programs at a distance-- referred to as tele-mentoring--appears to concentrate in the areas of, pre-service teacher education, precepting in nursing education, support for women in the science professions and K-12 education. From a slightly different angle of formal programs, the Empire College offers an individualized curriculum with external studies or distance learning, however the labels of instructor or tutor or advisor are used interchangeably with the term mentor, but the roles are congruent with that of an assigned advisor.

Entry Four: Mutual attraction, personal chemistry: this theme was clearly supported in the data from this research and is fits with the attribute, 'The Impetus.' For obvious reasons, compared to a non face-to-face situation, it is likely less difficult to connect with a mentor in a face-to-face environment. In view of this, it is conceivable then, that the 'sparks' or 'chemistry' that occurs when interacting via personal email or on the CMC, is personified because of the physical separation between the participants in a distance learning environment and therefore brings to the fore an apparent opportunity that otherwise might be overlooked or dismissed. Reciprocally,

participants pointed out that the absence of a 'spark' or 'chemistry' between two people would be a strong reason for a relationship not occurring.

Entry Five:  Unspoken pledge, time and personal investment:  this theme was clearly supported in the data, and is akin to the attribute 'Committed' within the category 'Constancy'.  Professors who become involved in mentor relationships in a learning environment are dedicated to the success of learners. Because this dedication requires time, energy and a personal investment from both parties involved, there is an unspoken level of commitment present.

Entry Six:  Give and take, mutuality, two-way relationship:  these themes were clearly supported in the data and are discovered as the attribute 'Reciprocity' within the category 'Constancy'.  Flexibility within a relationship, any relationship, promotes the understating that both people involved have needs and rights and within that relationship.  And in promoting a model of mentoring that is less formal and more flexible in nature than many traditional academic mentoring models, speaks to creating a polarity between the strengths of the professors and the needs of the students (Selke & Wong, l993).

Entry Seven: Respect and trust:  these themes were greatly supported in the data and are compatible with the attribute 'Authenticity' within the category 'Constancy'. Having a personal esteem for and confidence in another person, as well as observing honesty, were characteristics perceived to be important to learners, and among those

characteristics that aided in solidifying a mentoring relationship. From this one can surmise that it is mutual respect, and not mutual affection, that gives mentoring relationships strength.

Entry Eight: <u>Personal growth and movement</u>: these themes were clearly supported in the data from this research and are akin to the attribute 'Change' within the category 'Transforms'. Regardless of the context, all the literature acknowledges that both participants in a mentoring relationship receive benefit from the interactions, and these interactions lead to a feeling, a place, or achievement that was not there before. This notion connotes change.

Entry Nine: <u>Mentoring resounds</u>: This theme was supported in the data from this research and was discovered as the attribute 'Recurring phenomenon' within the category 'Transforms'. Given that the mentoring experiences related in this study were positive and fulfilling, left me with the impression that learners would not only hesitate to involve themselves in another relationship, but act themselves as a mentor. One person even suggested that an unfortunate mentoring experience would not be enough to dissuade her from getting involved again, given of the overall added value of mentoring. And it is here that one begins to see more clearly that mentoring is one manifestation of a mid-life task (Merriam, l983).

Entry Ten: <u>Negative consequences of mentoring</u>: this theme was not directly supported by the data in this research, in that no untoward experiences were related,

however, participants were keenly aware that all relationships have an element of risk and limits attached to them, therefore crossing those limits could result in difficulties.

Entry Eleven:  Longevity of relationship:  this theme was supported by the data in this research, and is consistent with the category 'Boundary recognition' within the category 'Transforms'. In consideration that each mentoring relationship is informally arranged and unique to the people involved, it is not difficult to understand each would be of different duration. Unlike the literature, which reports formal mentoring relationships to be of preset durations, these findings are similar to the reports on informal relationships, which are said to occupy varied time spans.

Entry Twelve:  Lack of face-to-face interaction not an issue:  this theme was strongly supported in the data from this research, and is akin to the attribute 'Distance not a barrier' within the category 'Transcends'. Given that the implementation of formal mentoring programs at a distance is relatively new and that this phenomenon has not been studied in a non face-to-face environment before, it is not surprising to find that the literature did not largely bear out here.  For one, however, this attribute may serve to distinguish the phenomenon in this non face-to-face context, from that which has been previously studied.

At the outset of this report, I observed that the phenomenon mentoring was grounded in one to one relationships, borne of a face-to-face environment. This observation is not so profound, in view that for hundreds of years people have worked and studied together in face-to-face environments, and it is only in the last couple of

decades that have we seen a departure from the traditional ways people work, study and interact.  Many reasons may account for this change, but chief among them is the integration of sophisticated communication technologies, in many of our environments, that allow us the immediacy and freedom to connect with each other without physical presence.  Yet the idea of being face-to-face as a necessary tenet of personal, academic or professional relationships remains, and is very pervasive. It is perhaps the idea that the element of 'nurturing', a characteristic found in developmental kinds of relationships, would be nonexistent or lost in the absence of being face-to-face with one another.  Yet this notion is wholly unsupported in the data from this research, where it was found that mentoring can and does exist in a non face-to-face environment mediated by communications technology, that the geographical distance between participants in a mentoring relationships is not a barrier in initiating or sustaining a relationship, and that indeed, 'nurturing' in this environment is alive and well. Certainly, from the findings of this research, there is no reason to suppose that geographical distance depersonalizes a relationship.

What is ironic is that there are many people in traditional learning environments who think little of distance education programs principally because of the separation between the learner and their learning environment when in fact the 'distance' in distance education in not the goal, connectedness is (Gilbert, 2000), and this was a significant point discovered in this research.  Connectedness being that of the learners, ideas, teachers, information, and each other, ameliorated by asynchronous and synchronous communications technology.  Certainly, technology may be viewed as the driver, but it is people's ideas that transcend.

For as long as people have been separated and writing (or telephoning) each other, there has been effective non face-to-face communication and connectedness. In the case of this research, where email and the telephone were the principal methods of communication between the participants in a mentoring relationship, the lack of face-to-face interaction did not propose a barrier in that relationship. The point here is that people seek human relationships, and will therefore use whatever means at their disposal to initiate and maintain these relationships, regardless of their origins.

From another perspective, suggesting that it is not possible to be involved in a developmental relationship like mentoring without communicating face-to-face is akin to suggesting that those people with sensory defects would be unable to connect with or cultivate a relationship with another in unless they were continually in each others physical presence. But history and experience tell us that this is not so.

Entry Thirteen: Mental inhabitance: this theme is strongly supported in the data of this research and is in accord with the attribute 'Presence' within the category 'Transforms'. The fact that there were only a few studies in which this theme was evident, suggests that perhaps this is not as an important attribute in a face-to-face relationship, as it would be in a non face-to-face relationship. In other words, when you have the ability to connect face-to-face with your mentor on a daily (or so) basis, it becomes less of a question or concern whether your mentor is 'going to bat' for you, since one often sees evidence of this within ones environment. However, this is significant in a non face-to-face relationship. Believing and understanding that your mentor is 'there for you', despite the geographical distance, despite the fact that your

communication may be asynchronous and less frequent than should you be face-to-face, provides one with not only a sense of comfort and security, but the great unspoken benefit of psychological support, much valued in a distance learning environment. In addition, the point that participants placed trust in their mentors, is not lost here, and may in part account for this psychological attribute of presence.

Entry Fourteen:  Mentoring is a complex, multi-purpose interaction:  this theme was greatly supported in the data of this research and is befitting with the attribute 'Supports the whole person and experience' within the category 'Holistic'.  It was pretty clear from the data that the role of a mentor and a mentoring relationship in this adult learning environment was multifaceted because it involved and revolved around issues that were not only academic, but personal and professional as well. As previously stated, adults bring to the learning arena not only their strengths but their needs as well, and these are not isolated to simply academic needs.  Hence, if a climate for personal development is inherent in the goals of education—e.g. learning—then this attribute of 'supporting the whole learner and experience' is logical. As well, there is much discussion regarding the concepts of life-long and adult learning as not being exclusive from the other. In consideration of this, mentoring would fit within the life-long learning paradigm, and thus may be viewed from a holistic or systems perspective.  As such, mentoring would respond with the flexibility to human differences, obstacles, other needs and life circumstances (Mullen et al., l999).

Entry Fifteen:  Personal disclosure, open communication:  these themes were wholly

supported in the data from this research, and are akin to the attribute 'Personal

history' within the category 'Holism'. I think it quite safe to say, that it would be

relatively difficult to have a personal relationship with another person, without

knowing something about what made them who they are. Whether it was learning

about each other's professional history or personal lives or involvement with other

teachers and students, in this study, informants suggested it was this self-disclosure

that personalized the relationship.  Although not elucidated from the data, it would be

interesting to learn how concerted an effort students made in seeking and sharing

personal history in this context, and if and to what degree it was dependant on the

'distance' variable.

Entries Sixteen and Seventeen:  Casual atmosphere, freedom, feeling of equality:

these themes were clearly supported in the data from this research, and are congruent

with the attribute 'Relaxed relationship' within the category 'Informal'. Here again,

we find that this attribute is one that may distinguish itself from the research that has

been previously conducted.  Based on a review of the literature, formal (and some

informal) mentoring relationships within industry, and relationships formed in

traditional educational environments operate within certain constraints. However

important these constraints the most significant among these, appears to revolve

around the issue of power—power that resides in the hands of the mentor. In other

words, the mentor's power is derived from higher authority (or personal power),

which not only results in an asymmetrical mentoring relationship, but implies that because one person is the 'expert', there is only one right way of going things.

But this research does not support this notion, in fact, the attributes elucidated from the data maintains quite the opposite. At the risk of repeating myself, I must once again point out that the mentoring relationships found in this research were indeed informal in nature, entered into by the participants of their own free will. Knowing this makes easier to understand the idea that an informal relationship would be then less constrained by the parameters that bind authority based relationships— for example, lack of freedom, restricted flexibility and creativity, censorship, indoctrination, and the like. Further, since participants are encouraged and assisted to grow within this relationship--instead of being offered mentoring as some form of prescriptive intervention--the relationship finds symmetry.

The fact that participants are involved in a distance learning environment that focuses on learner centeredness, works to prevent the unbalanced power that is apparent in more traditional/teacher centred environments. And given that this learning environment provides some control for the learner, participants felt that they could not only contribute to the relationship from a professional standpoint and maintain self-directedness and autonomy, but be enriched by sensitive involvement from a person who had much to offer. Booth (1994) speaks to this issue in of finding a delicate balance in a mentoring relationship when he says, "What is the proper balance between an honest acknowledgement of we're both ignorant, we're both inquiring, we both make mistakes…and yet acknowledge that, I have something valuable to offer you" (p.34).

Another point on this category 'informal' has to do with the presupposition that mentors are always older than those they mentor. While this variable is apparent in the majority of the popular literature and research conducted in face-to-face environments, it was found to have less significance in a non face-to-face environment. In explaining why this might be so, one obvious reason comes to mind and that has to do with the anonymity of the participants physical characteristics. Given that the majority of the participants in the mentoring relationships had never actually met other person face-to-face, each would have little idea of the age of the other, and thus would not necessarily be drawn to each other because of this characteristic. It is conceivable then, that circumstance, need and serendipity played a greater role in initiating relationships then did age.

Another plausible argument may be that, as adults re-enter the educational system to complete a graduate degree or to add to their present graduate or doctoral degrees, they do so as more mature students. Since the Master's programme (used in this study) inception in l994, demographical data show that the average age of program students is 41.3 years, while the range is 22-65 years. Likewise, with the Diploma programme, data since 1999 show the average student age is 43.9 years, while the range is 26-63 years. Reciprocally, it is possible that a professor teaching in either of these programs could have completed a PhD and has several years of practical experience and enter into teaching at the university, and be of the same or similar age as the students—and possibly even be younger! In the final analysis, age is not considered to be a construct in conceptualising mentor in a distance education

environment. To that end, Chambers (l992) suggests that it is experience, rather than age, qualification or status that is important to adults in learning environments.

This point of age—or that of being 'older'—invariably leads to another argument regarding mentoring as it is portrayed in some of the research and popular literature, and that has to do with mentors as also being 'intellectually superior' when compared to their protégés. From his point of view, Booth (l994) suggested earlier that, mentoring is a delicate balance. So may it also be from the protégés point of view. As Selke et al. (l993) points out, that adult learners with many years of practical experience are often more accustomed in dispensing advice then receiving it.  That said there is no question that participants viewed their mentors as bringing very valuable practical and especially valuable research knowledge into their relationship. But there were also students who perceived they to have as much or perhaps even greater practical experience with some of the learning technologies than did their mentors.  So from this perspective, it is not a question of viewing the mentor in this context from such a narrow perspective as being ultimately 'smarter', rather it is important to view the mentor in a more broad sense as having *different* gifts and strengths that the learner may wish to capitalize on. Moreover, it is well to mention again that mentoring in this environment does not just revolve around intellectual pursuits; rather, that mentors appeared to have an appreciation for *all aspects* of a students growth and development and were able to provide direction in areas where learners had more limited expertise. I suspect it is this reason why mentors are rightly viewed as being 'wiser', which we have seen is not necessarily the same as being 'intellectually superior or the expert'. As was evidenced in the interpretation of the

data discussed earlier, many participants suggested that the non face to-face interaction and the newness of the discipline of distance education levelled the playing field to a significant degree and thus helped to ease the barrier of the professor as the ultimate authority. It also helps to provide more symmetry to the relationship as previously mentioned, and thus solidifying the notion of 'Informal' as being a conceptually sound attribute of the phenomenon mentoring in this context.

Entry Eighteen: Advising is a separate role: this theme was clearly supported in the data from this research, and is consistent with the attribute 'Mentoring is distinct from advising', within the category 'Informal'. For the most part, this attribute is self-explanatory. Participants in this research believed the roles of advisor and mentor to be distinct from each other, principally because a mentor relationship was a personal relationship, and was not restricted to discussions about advancement through ones program. Therefore a mentoring relationship was perceived to a well-rounded relationship, whereas an advisory relationship was perceived to be less robust in character. Another explanation for this may revolve around the notion that longevity of an advising relationship is limited by the length of one's graduate program, whereas a mentoring relationship has the added advantage of being personal and therefore has the potential to outlive an advisory relationship.

## A Suggested Model of Mentoring

At the outset of this research, I intended to study the phenomenon 'mentoring' from adult learners perspectives within a distance learning environment. I chose the grounded

theory approach because of its capability to generate theory in order to aid the understanding

of this social processes/phenomenon considering that mentoring in this context had not been

previously studied.  Given that the purpose of generating theory is to explain something, I

will now discuss the relationships that were discovered among the categories and attributes.

As previously mentioned, Glaser et al. (l967) calls these identified relationships "hypotheses

(p.39)". What follows is a model, which may be considered a visual representation of all the

elements of this GT: the core variable, the categories and their respective attributes.


<u>Hypotheses</u>

The first among these is that of a "core variable" (ibid., p.140), which is considered to

be the heart of the theory and must explain most of the "variation" (Stern et al, l984, p.379)

in the processes of the research. As well, Stern et al. (l984) asserts, it should be "tidy and

easy to understand" (p.379).  In the case of this research, the core variable is termed '*Valuing*

*Perspectives*'. This variable consists of the word 'Value' which means to highly regard or to

prize, but is used in the verb tense, which expresses it as an action or mode of being. This is

an important point because I wanted to be able to express the life within the concept

mentoring in that it is not static, and valued not only for what transpired yesterday and today,

but is something that will be valued tomorrow and always. The other part of this core

variable consists of the word 'Perspective', which means objectivity or a mental view. And

this concept is equally as important since it serves to exemplify why we are drawn into

mentoring relationships. So when these two concepts are combined—Valuing Perspectives—

they form the core variable.  And it is because of, and subsequently through this process of

valuing perspectives that people successfully initiate and navigate mentoring relationships in this context.

I also hypothesized that people were drawn into mentoring relationships to give and receive some kind of 'support'. But in order to garner a deeper understanding of this process, I continued to examine this hypothesis from the 'why and what' perspective. Hence, I began to question my own hypothesis, in asking, "Why are mentoring relationships about support?" and moved to "Why are people seeking support?" and "What, other than the obvious, does support provide for them?" and then to "What is it that is so supportive regarding mentoring relationships that people seek and engage in them?' Herein lies the answer. Participants in this research engaged in mentoring relationships because they were open to receiving and through this benefit from, *the perspectives of others*. Further, because these adult learners had freedom within their mentor relationships and they did not consider themselves to be passive recipients of information and knowledge, the perspectives shared from their mentors, were either accepted or challenged in a way which allowed for personal growth. Hence, it is through this mental view or perspective, provided by mentors in this distance-learning environment, that was educationally nurturing and psychologically supportive, and ultimately, fulfilling. That said, when viewing the model it becomes easier to visualize the connections and understand the relationship between the associated categories—constancy, transforms and holistic.

Another hypothesized relationship between the core category and the remaining categories is that mentoring relationships provide life-enriching experiences for the participants involved. I would venture that these kinds of relationships not only provided added value to a graduate student's overall learning experience, but was also perceived to

provide added value to the role of the professoriate. Here again, it is through the process of valuing perspectives that participants in a mentoring relationship learn to direct what they have garnered from their mentor into experiences that are enriching for them as students, as professionals, and as humans.

This added value, however, would likely vary in intensity depending on the specific people in the relationship, and the circumstances surrounding its inception. It is also possible to explain the opposite viewpoint from this model, in that those who do not feel that mentoring would provide added value may not be open to such a relationship, or circumstances may not present themselves whereby a relationship may be initiated.

In sum, the model that follows, is representative of the theory, Valuing Perspectives, grounded in the data taken from adult learners in a distance education environment. As such, because a grounded theory is readily modifiable, I make no assertions about this theory as being complete. But rather to concur with Glaser and Strauss (l967) when they state, "so the published word is not the final one, but only a pause in the never ending process of generating theory" (p.40). Refer to Figure 1.

Figure 1.

A Model of the Relationship Between the Conceptual Elements and the Process of Mentoring
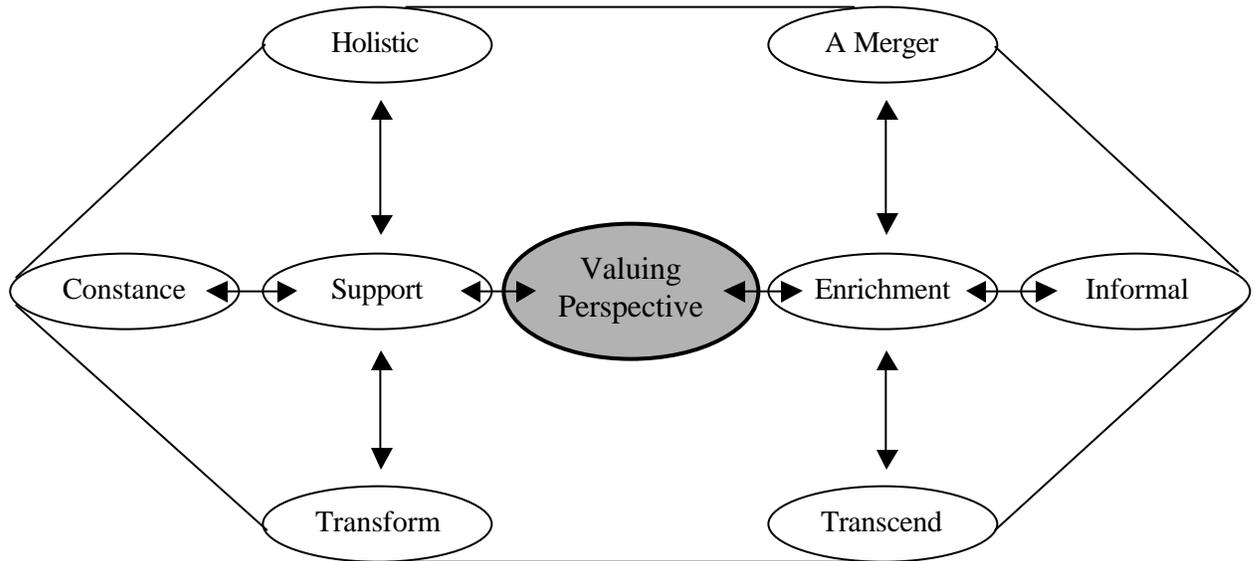
# CHAPTER SIX

# CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

"Touching the heart of one may influence the minds of the world" (not referenced, cited in Osborne et al., l999, p.5).

In certain qualitative research studies, it is inappropriate for a researcher to be required to provide conclusions at the end of the report. To a certain degree this is true of GT because the narratives and interpretation can speak for themselves; however, the nature of the process indicates that explanations aid other researchers in advancing, and practitioners in applying, the theory elsewhere. Hence, this last chapter will be devoted to summarizing the study, providing a definition of mentoring, briefly discussing peer mentoring as it was discovered here, providing suggestions for future research, and end with some personal reflections.

Summary of the Research

Given that the intent of this study was to investigate the perceptions of mentoring among adult learners in a distance learning environment, using a grounded theory approach, the following was elucidated:

1) That it is possible to initiate and sustain a mentoring relationship in distance learning environments, since differences in time and space were not perceived to be a barrier.

2) The geographical difference between participants in a mentoring relationship did not depersonalise their relationship, since there was an element of nurturing present.

3) Mentoring in this context is informal in nature and is therefore less constrained by authority and power directives.

4) Age of the participants is not considered to be a variable in conceptualising mentor and mentoring in this context.

5) Within the mentoring relationship, each person's perspective was highly valued and is therefore at the core of mentoring relationships.

6) That mentoring relationships were supportive in many ways.

7) That mentoring relationships were enriching educationally, professionally and emotionally.

8) That the conceptual elements of mentoring in a distance education environment consist of: a merger, constancy, transforms, transcends, holistic, and informal.

9) The attributes or characteristic of mentoring in a distance education environment are: an impetus, commitment, reciprocity, authenticity, change, recurring phenomenon, distance is not a barrier, presence, boundary recognition, supports the whole person and experience, personal history, casual atmosphere, and mentoring is distinct from advising.

10) Mentoring in this environment was not isolated among professors and students, but was discovered among peers.

11) That mentoring relationships are multi-dimensional in character.

12) That the grounded theory approach is a very useful tool to use for theory generation.

## Definition of Mentoring in this Context

Although it seems a little unusual to offer a definition at the *end* of a research project, part of the reason for elucidating the phenomenon was to discover the attributes of mentoring and therefore work toward providing a reality based definition. Hence, in keeping with my original purpose and discovering the conceptual elements of mentoring in this context, I am able to offer the following definition:

'Mentoring in a distance education environment is a complex multi-purpose interaction which allows for the participants involved to value each other's perspectives. Not constrained by the absence of face-to-face interaction, mentoring describes both a nurturing personal relationship and the activities of people who mutually share a bond of commitment to academic, professional and personal growth.'


## Peer Mentoring

As serendipity would have it, during the course of this research not only did the concept of mentoring from a student-professor perspective arise from the data, but from a peer-peer perspective as well.  But since this research focused on the interaction that occurred between a student and professor, I didn't perform a GT analysis of this phenomenon. However, from the data, it was clear that these peer-peer mentoring relationships were perceived by participants to be very important facets of their learning experiences, because they were both nurturing and supportive and growth orientated.  Hence, given this connected theme, studying this phenomenon in more depth might be an interesting study for the future.

<u>Implications of this Research</u>

One of the first implications that are apparent is that this research contributes to defining and conceptualising mentoring in this context.  This is important for two reasons: the first being that, well articulated concepts are necessary for knowledge development and research, and the second, in conceptualising mentoring in this context and subsequently offering a workable definition, this research avoids falling into the large category of research that has been previously criticized for failing to define mentoring according to its context.

Another implication is that this theoretical research serves to add to the previous body of knowledge regarding mentorship, in that mentoring can no longer only be known as a relationship that is conceived and nurtured in face-to-face environments. The fact is that mentoring relationships can transcend the boundaries of time and space and communications technologies aid in ameliorating the geographical differences between people.  It would seem that the old adage 'where there is a will, there is a way' rings true here.

That said, the next implication flows naturally. Since mentoring in this environment did successfully occur, this knowledge may provide a new or increased awareness for learners and professors in distance education environments and subsequently open them up to the possibilities of what is and what can be.  Hence, given all the perceived benefits of a mentoring relationship, an increased awareness may subsequently improve access to potential mentors, thus providing an impetus for more people to engage in such a relationship.  And if what the literature suggests is true—that contented or satisfied learners are more successful—mentoring in this environment may provide another means to keep learners on the road to success.

It is acknowledged that peer relationships were not studied to the same extent as were student-professor relationships. However, in understanding that peer-peer relationships in this learning environment were perceived to be very important and supportive provides a basis for thinking that a semi-formalized mentoring program may be useful in distance education programs. This premise revolves around a more senior student being available for a new entrant to aid with role enculturation kinds of activities and to help increase the new learners awareness of study groups and other informal or formal support systems.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Based on what was found in this study, I would like to suggest the following for future research:

1) This study focused on the perspectives of adult learners in a distance learning environment and did not study mentoring from the mentor's perspective. In this context, mentoring has yet to be studied from this perspective.

2) Because this research intended to generate theory and was therefore descriptive in nature, a more empirically based approach may be taken to measuring the perceptions of mentoring among adult learners in other distance learning environments. The constructs derived from this study may be subsequently useful in developing a survey tool that could be used in the same.

3) An empirical approach may be taken to discover if and to what degree mentoring in this environment contributed to learner success and satisfaction.

4) A long term study could be undertaken to learn the about the stages of mentoring relationship in this environment.

5) An exploratory or empirical study may be undertaken to learn about the long term effects, resulting from mentoring in this context.

6) A feasibility study could be undertaken to ascertain the utility of creating a semi-formal peer mentoring program.

7) An exploratory study may be undertaken to discover more about peer mentoring relationships in this learning environment.

Personal Reflections

The nuances of helping and supportive relationships have always held an interest for me and is akin to my mode of thinking, given my multiple years of working as a nurse at the bedside, and as a research assistant. As well, I have always marvelled in the uniqueness and strength of qualitative methodologies for allowing the complexity of human nature and social processes to be discovered by exploring it directly.  So, I have been allowed to satisfy an interest of mine in elucidating the phenomenon of mentoring, while employing a method that I believed would be up to the task.

During the many years that I worked as a research assistant, I had a dream that one day I would embark upon research of my own.  Now the dream has been realized in the journey that has been this thesis research; and I am very grateful for the existence of a distance graduate program, and all the wonderful professors who helped me along to this journeys' end.

I would like to bring this chapter to a close with this quote from Ker (1990, cited in

Shannon, l995, p.13), which is apropos in light of this study:

> The stress John Henry Newman lays on the personal interaction between the student
> and the teacher and on the university as an intellectual community is one that should
> strongly appeal to a culture which speaks to much about the need for both community
> and the personal element, precisely because of the lack of either in the modern
> industralized society, which is both atomised and depersonalised. The 'holistic' view
> that modern medicine, for example, takes of human beings is the same kind of
> education theory that the 'Idea of a University' puts forward: just as the psychological
> state of the physically sick person may be highly relevant to his /her recovery, quite
> apart from surgery and drugs, so too, the 'Idea' insists, the whole mind needs to be
> educated through active participation in a community of intellectual information, not
> just the memory through passive attendance on impersonal lectures.  Such a content
> for learning is so vital for Newman that he is prepared if necessary to abandon the
> basic formalities of academic instructions in favour of an association, however
> informal, of actual individual minds personally interacting.

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