

Reimagining mentoring and coaching in a world crisis

In my capacity as guest editor, I am pleased to introduce the second issue of volume 10 of the *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* (IJMCE). This guest-edited special issue's timely focus is mentoring and coaching in a time of crisis, pandemic and social distancing. Proactively dealing with current realities seems vitally important to the sustainability of the professions and lives. Reimagining mentoring and coaching, educational interactions, processes and models considering dramatic changes and human needs is, arguably, a worthy cause. Of interest are emerging issues of mentoring and coaching within disrupted world contexts in education (e.g. schools, universities and communities) and with value for a wide range of stakeholders (e.g. students, teachers, education leaders, researchers, faculty, policymakers, district personnel and parents).

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, while extremely challenging, has forced change and sparked an innovation wave felt in education. This collection's attention is on issues surrounding mentoring and coaching during times of crises, pandemics and social distancing to:

- (1) Raise awareness of what mentoring and coaching “look like” for people whose lives and communities have been completely disrupted and for whom norms and expectations of mentorship are under assault in educational settings, worldwide.
- (2) Contribute to the body of the literature pertaining to the role of mentoring and coaching in times of great challenge to participants (e.g. students, faculty, teachers and leaders) who may be experiencing distress and/or whose processes, programs and enterprises are under strain.

The seven featured articles speak to mentoring and coaching in times of adversity that “test” the capacity development, effectiveness, adaptability or resilience of people within dramatically changing educational settings, namely universities, schools and communities. Taken up within the papers are such topics as:

- (1) How mentorship and coaching can support the work, development and renewal of educators who, despite hardship and the unexpected, may turn adversity into opportunity.
- (2) How new and adapted forms of mentoring and coaching (e.g. virtual conferencing, online mentoring and group mentoring) can contribute to growth-fostering engagement and different types of mentoring and coaching support that address equity and justice.

Regarding design/methodological approaches, during the pandemic, authors adjusted expectations of mentoring and coaching practices in graduate school and prekindergarten through grade 12 (PK–12) schools/central offices for doctoral students, preservice teachers, academics/faculty and school leaders. Usual practices were adapted to research learning and development, and professional preparation, using various methods: exploratory pedagogy, self-study, narrative, interviews, surveys, talk moves and reflection.

The articles' findings (1) reveal the paradox of making academic progress in a crisis; (2) indicate the need for mentorship theory to conceptualize compassion and intimacy in relationships; (3) illustrate the value of manifesting care in relationships; (4) disclose that the mentor role was seen as unique and that online mentoring was well-received; (5) demonstrate



that mentorship training needs to become suitable for online education and (6) show that coaching can support simulation contexts, reflection and self-efficacy. Psychosocial functions of mentoring were given a prominent place for surviving, even thriving, in a pandemic among the unexpected outcomes and rich insights.

Across these papers, practical implications indicate that virtually engaging with mentoring and coaching in online contexts is trending and will escalate. Called upon are institutional supports, attention to mentees/coachees' and mentors/coachees' well-being, and compassionate mentoring and coaching. Ethics of care and wellness permeate the contributions, reminding us of the importance of the mentor – mentee and coach – coachee relationship in any circumstance while simultaneously focusing on the special challenges of mentoring and coaching during multiple and projected crises (pandemics, economic hardships, racial disparities, systemic racism, etc.). Thus, this issue contains new and significant information in the pandemic era that can inform education during post-pandemic times.

Originality and value are apparent – this collection illustrates that online mentoring and coaching facilitated development in a pandemic when social distancing was required. Also, creative approaches to mentoring and coaching should be assessed and can prove effective. This issue contributes to the body of the literature pertaining to mentoring and coaching in times of great challenge to groups experiencing distress and/or whose enterprises are under strain.

Accepted papers were initially reviewed by me and formally by three expert reviewers in mentoring and/or coaching, all of whom are recognized at the end of this overview for their service. Queries on, and detailed editing of, manuscripts was an additional service I provided all authors in this issue both on their original and revised submissions. Together, the authors and reviewers represent the USA, Turkey and the UAE.

Five articles are research studies of mentoring and two investigate coaching phenomena. Mentorship in graduate programs within higher education institutions proved topical in the pandemic, as evidenced by the first five papers. Within a coaching context, graduate students served as teacher participants in a sixth paper and school leaders within the field in the last one. Contributing authors reveal creative ways for reimagining programs, processes and relationships, and for making progress, achieving outcomes and expressing humanity. Mentors and coaches are shown to have pivoted to constructively deal with the disruptions while ensuring productivity and encouraging closeness in a relatively contactless world. As readers will see, the authors describe strategies for conducting research in uncertain times and adapting both practices and programs, including mindsets as well as expectations. These researchers express value for strengthening and deepening educational relationships with students and among colleagues – very likely, they radiate concern for the human condition.

In the first article, Carol A. Mullen (Virginia Tech, USA), an educational leadership professor, examines the progress of proposals and dissertations after the pandemic hit and mentor-mentee relationships rapidly transitioned to intensive online doctoral mentoring. "Online doctoral mentoring in a pandemic: help or hindrance to academic progress on dissertations?" describes an exploratory pedagogy that she (I) created and implemented in 2020 – the COVID-19 Dyadic Online Mentoring Intervention. Her (my) educational leadership mentees participated in the individualized mentoring, and their survey responses revealed benefits and drawbacks of technology for learning remotely. Data sources were analyzed for this qualitative study conducted in Virginia. Emergent themes shine light on 10 online mentoring strategies that mentees said they experienced. Paradoxically, in the face of a pandemic that unsettled reality they not only made academic progress but also benefitted from, and were enriched by, personal professional development opportunities. Mentees made headway in this world crisis, underscoring the point that effective mentoring is always needed and that strategic mentoring models commitment, resilience and adaptation.

The second article “Redefining mentorship in an era of crisis: responding to COVID-19 through compassionate relationships”, by educational leadership researchers Kara Lasater, Christy Smith, John Pijanowski and Kevin P. Brady (University of Arkansas, USA), also investigates graduate-level mentoring during COVID-19. Examining mentorship practices, they reflected on how mentoring could be improved to better support educational leadership students. The four authors conducted a self-study during the pandemic to examine their collective experiences as faculty mentors. Sources of data (e.g. memos) substantiate their dialogue and engagement. Thematic outcomes revealed (1) challenges brought on by profoundly stricken systems; (2) meeting students’ needs for understanding and support; (3) personal and professional boundary erosion and greater openness with mentees; (4) contending with their own sense-making and wellness needs as faculty and (5) navigating the crisis by centering values and priorities in relationships with students. A takeaway was that mentorship theory can benefit from more deeply conceptualizing compassion and intimacy in mentoring relationships.

“Learning to level up: personal narratives about mentoring for the professoriate during a crisis” (the third article) is by Kathleen Sellers (Miami University, USA), Tasneem Amatullah (Emirates College for Advanced Education, UAE) and Joel R. Malin (Miami University, USA). These educational leadership researchers, too, advance the value of relationships in academia, specifically the influence of care on mentoring and its effectiveness during and after crises. Using a narrative inquiry approach, they draw upon care theory and their mentoring experiences to unpack mentor-mentee relationships. Their results highlight emotional aspects of mentoring within the pandemic, ranging from (1) using constellation mentoring; (2) exercising “mentor humility” relative to mentee success; (3) valuing relationship longevity and (4) caring in mentoring relationships. Recommendations are offered to mentors and mentees for thoughtfully manifesting care in their academic relationships and producing positive results.

Also exploring mentoring in higher education, Kat R. McConnell (Marquette University, USA, counseling psychology) and Rachel Louise Geesa (Ball State University, USA, educational leadership) joined forces to consider the mentor role within a doctoral mentoring program in education. In this fourth article, “Filling the gaps: how the non-faculty mentor role contributes to the doctoral program support structure”, interest is in the perspectives of participants in a program that was forced online when the pandemic struck. Data were generated from individual interviews with mentors and mentees. Resultant themes distinguished support roles (mentoring, advising and dissertation chairing) in students’ lives and addressed how mentoring filled a gap in doctoral students’ needs and supported their success. In addition, suggestions were made for mentoring program improvement. Potential implications are that mentors and mentees saw the mentor role as unique, and that the response to online mentoring was positive.

Mentoring in teacher education is highlighted in the fifth article titled “Exploring online mentoring with preservice teachers in a pandemic and the need to deliver quality education”. Teacher educators Pinar Ersin (Bogaziçi University, Turkey) and Derin Atay (Bahçeşehir University, Turkey) explore mentoring experience in an online Turkish context from preservice teachers’ perspectives. The authors describe the value of social interaction involving preservice teachers and their cooperating teachers (mentors) for ensuring effective mentoring in the face of unexpected systemic and global disruption. Mentoring relationships took a different path when COVID-19 struck, shifting face-to-face interaction online. Preservice teachers completed a school experience course in an emergency and were formed into five focus groups and interviewed. The aim was to discover how they viewed online mentoring, specifically (1) their overall opinions, (2) supports received (and not received) and (3) expectations of online mentors and

university supervisors. It was found that they mostly had a positive mentoring experience, but given the constraints professional support was limited in some crucial respects. Notably, mentors' time and university supervisors' capacity to manage their practicum placements and offer supports were stressors. Takeaways are that mentorship training requires improvement; in the study context, areas identified for improvement included restructuring with suitability for online education and providing computer-assisted supports (e.g. materials and samples).

In "Coaching in the time of coronavirus 2019: how simulations spark reflection" (the sixth article), teacher educators Ann Marie Wernick, Jillian Marie Conry and Paige Daniel Ware (Southern Methodist University, USA) examined teacher-coach conversations during virtual coaching sessions. The idea was to enable teaching to be practiced within a mixed-reality simulation using a US-based private university's lab. "Talk moves" (e.g. agreeing and explaining) mobilized professional development by stimulating clinical experiences and reflection that informed remote teaching. Giving real-time feedback to teachers, talk moves involved asking probing questions to elicit reflection. The collaborative learning and knowledge construction of graduate students (pre- and in-service teachers) who were coached while quarantined mobilized the case study. Analyses of video recordings and coaching transcripts suggested that certain talk move sequences support vigorous, productive reflection. Probing questions played a special role for reflecting on the shared simulation context. Opportunities for virtually engaging with, and learning from, simulated experiences that support growth and reflection should be continued.

The seventh article (a research-informed practitioner paper) is titled "Crisis leadership and coaching: a tool for building educational leaders' self-efficacy through self-awareness and reflection". Educational leadership faculty Jodie Lynn Brinkmann, Carol Cash and Ted Price (Virginia Tech, USA) explored PK-12 administrators' leadership in a crisis context. Using phenomenological methods and naturalistic inquiry to examine US-based leader practices to adjust to, prepare for and deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, they investigated school leaders' efficacy in crisis management during the crisis. The cognitive coaching and reflection tool, originated by the researchers, was utilized for exploring self-efficacy in crisis school leadership. The educational leadership tool is structured around four foci, self-awareness/reflection and next steps: (1) educational leader, (2) educational leaders working with teachers, (3) educational leaders working with parents and (4) overall leadership advocacy. An original survey followed by a focus group with select PK-12 administrators probed their perceptions and experiences of leading in a crisis. The authors explored self-efficacy as reported by school leaders, finding that leaders attended to teachers' effectiveness and improvements in technology skills and confidence, with additional gains in resourcefulness and resilience. Moreover, thematic outcomes were self-care, professional development, communication, school climate, instruction, parent resources and advocacy. It was concluded that coaches working with school leaders and leaders themselves can use the data-driven cognitive coaching method to develop self-awareness and reflection. The goal is to build capacity for leader self-efficacy in managing crises.

Research in this issue could have real impact in real-life settings, worldwide. By consulting it, readers may better recognize barriers to impact and how to overcome them in their mentoring and coaching interactions, processes and programs. In pandemics and crises, we can adapt mindsets, plans, strategies, tools, interventions, programs and so forth and even innovate in entirely new ways to meet goals and forge ahead. One cannot help but notice the authors' courageous adaptability in the face of halted and rethought plans, and the dedication to their professions and commitment to innovative learning, academic homes, and stakeholders' futures. They share messages of hope, healing, renewal, well-being, resilience, empowerment and transformation within shifting worlds grounded in

mentoring and coaching. In post-pandemic times and during future crises, the ideas shared in this issue can be tapped to enrich educational worlds. Guest editorial

Dedication

This special issue is dedicated to all educational first responders on the frontlines of schools serving young people and universities preparing tomorrow's professionals today.

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Reviewer acknowledgments

I am grateful to the 24 international educators who reviewed manuscripts (November–December 2020) submitted for consideration in this issue, some of whom are *IJMCE* Editorial Advisory Board members. All stepped up, generously lending their expertise with timely, helpful commentaries while juggling the pandemic, end-of-semester crunch and holiday break. They are:

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(One reviewer preferred to remain anonymous).

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Readers, I am delighted for this opportunity to present significant, impressive mentoring and coaching works created in unprecedented times during a global pandemic. Spirited ideas, practices and potential implications reveal resilience in the face of multiple crises, and ways forward are worth seriously considering and possibly putting into practice. This issue offers the gift of renewal, love of humankind and hope for the New Year.

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About the guest editor



Carol A. Mullen, PhD, is Professor of Educational Leadership at Virginia Tech, USA. A twice-awarded US Fulbright Scholar, in 2020, the University of Toronto recognized her with The Excellence (OISE Leaders and Legends) Award. She was honored with the 2016 Jay D. Scribner Mentoring Award from the University Council for Educational Administration. She is a mentoring researcher and former editor of the *Mentoring and Tutoring* journal who served as guest editor: Mullen, C. A. (2000). Dynamic mentoring groups, programs, and structures: legacy special issue", *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 28(4), 387–515, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cmet20/current>. Recently, she authored *Revealing Creativity* (Springer, 2020) and *Canadian Indigenous Literature and Art* (Brill, 2020). Also, she edited *Creativity Under Duress in Education?* (Springer, 2019) and coedited *The Risky Business of Education Policy* (with C. H. Tienken, Routledge, 2022). The *Handbook of Social Justice Interventions in Education* (Mullen, editor, Springer) was published in 2021. Email: camullen@vt.edu