

The legacy of Mentor

The protégés of today are the mentors of tomorrow.” ~ Marilynne Miles Gray

MENTOR IN MEDIA

A historical parade of mentor-protégé relationships can resemble a key plot device. Mentors appear in various forms in literature, myths, fairy tales, fantasy, and children’s stories ...[and] come in an array of forms, from the classic bearded Merlin to the grandmotherly fairy godmother to the otherworldly elfin Yoda of the Star Wars trilogy.

In his book on Effective teaching and mentoring, Examples of mentors appear in literature such as Gandolf in Tolkien’s trilogy; Charlotte in Charlotte’s Web; Utnapishtim in the Gilgamesh epic; Shazam in Captain Marvel comics; the spider woman in Native American lore; the Belgian doctor in the Tarzan series; the little old lady in Babar; Teiresias in Greek legend. Some interpret these literary creations, however old or new, as Jungian archetypes.

DIVINE COMEDY

In Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, Virgil serves as a classic mentor to Dante as he undertakes in his quest for Truth. *The Divine Comedy* embeds all the richness of the mentor-protégé relationship. The relationship moves from a pairing of unequals as the mentor rescues the protégé to a downward plunge into the nine circle of hell – a necessary experience for the protégé’s transformation and a growing equality as the pair separate at journey’s end.



Virgil is willing to go through the transition with “a foot on either side of the gulf”, ready to offer a hand to help Dante swing across the chasm and by his very existence provide proof “the journey can be made, the leap taken”. His task complete, Virgil offers this benediction to Dante, “Free, upright, and whole is thy will and it were a fault not to act on its bidding; therefore over thyself I crown and miter thee.”

As he is a pagan, Virgil is unable to be a mentor in the Christian realm where Beatrice dwells. At the appropriate moment, it is the Christian female figure who takes over the role of mentor from the male counterpart. In the original *Odyssey*, as well, Athena steps in to rescue the protégé.

FROM RADIO TO MOVIES



In modern times, the media of comic books, radio, and television have also portrayed mentoring relationships such as Bruce Wayne’s role with Robin in *Batman* and Dick Tracy mentoring Junior. “Golden Age” radio serials often incorporated mentoring relationships as a part of the plot. Movies too have depicted mentor-protégé relationships. Films such as *The Miracle Worker* and *Chariots of Fire* are based upon the lives of actual mentor-protégé pairs. Others while fictitious still depict the classic roles as in the *Star Wars* trilogy (with Yoda and Obe-Wan Kenobi as mentors), *The Karate Kid* (Mr. Miyagi mentoring Daniel), the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *My Fair Lady* (based upon Shaw’s *Pygmalion*), *A Star is Born*, and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* are fictitious renditions of mentor-protégé relationships to name several examples.

The legacy of Mentor

INVITATION

The mentor-protégé collaborative twosome has been part of the warp and woof of human relationships for centuries. Though our present-day term “mentor” originated in Homeric times, the mentor-protégé relationship has been reflected in earliest literature from Genesis onward some 4500 or more years ago. It is not surprising that one can find numerous historical examples of informal mentoring as a recurrent theme across cultures, language barriers and in all genres.

This brief journey through the annals of history has revealed the potential for transformation and offers a challenge for wise implementation of the mentoring concept. How many are ready to embark upon that same transformational journey here and now? ~~

NOT THE LEAST SHYNESS, NOW, TELEMACHOS. YOU CAME ACROSS THE OPEN SEA FOR THIS – TO FIND OUT WHERE THE GREAT EARTH HIDES YOUR FATHER AND WHAT THE DOOM WAS THAT HE CAME UPON... REASON AND HEART WILL GIVE YOU WORDS, TELEMACHOS; AND A SPIRIT WILL COUNSEL OTHERS. I SHOULD SAY THE GODS WERE NEVER INDIFFERENT TO YOUR LIFE. THE ODYSSEY

REFERENCES

- Bagnal, C. W.; Pence, E. C.; Meriwether, T. N. (1985). Leaders as mentors. *Military Review* 65, 7: 4-20.
- Clawson, J. G. (1985). Is mentoring necessary? *Training & Development Journal* 39 (April) 4: 36-39.
- Cox, C. M. (1926). *The early mental traits of three hundred geniuses. Genetic studies of genius: Vol. II.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Cubberley, E. P. (1920). *The history of education.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Daloz, L. A. (1987). *Effective teaching and mentoring.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Davis, J. H., Jr. (1979). *Fenelon.* Boston: Twayne Publishers.
- Eby, F. & Arrowood, C. F. (1940). *The history and philosophy of education: Ancient and medieval.* Englewood Cliffs, N. J: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Fagan, M. (1987) Personal communication.
- Finkelstein, J. J. & Greenberg, M. (Eds.). (1967). *Oriental and biblical studies: Collected writings of E. A. Speizer* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Gray, W. A. . *Mentoring: Aid to excellence.* Keynote address presented at the Gifted Students Institute, Arlington, TX., (April 26, 1984).
- Gray, W. A. & Gray, M. M. (Eds.). (1986). *Mentoring: A comprehensive annotated bibliography of important references.* Vancouver: International Association for Mentoring.
- Head, Fay and Miles Gray, Marilynne. (1987) *The Legacy of Mentor: Insights into Western History, Literature and the Media.* *International Journal of Mentoring* Volume 2 Issue 2, 26-33.
- Jolemore, K. A. (1986) *The mentor: More than a teacher, more than a coach.* *Military Review* 66, (July) 7: 5-17.
- Koch, A. (1950). *Jefferson and Madison: The great collaboration.* New York. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Lash, J. P. (1980). *Helen and teacher.* New York: Delacorte Press.
- Levinson, D. J., Darrow, C. N., Klein, E. B., Levinson, M. H., & McKee, B. (1978). *The seasons of a man's life.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Phillips-Jones, L. L. (1983). Establishing formalized mentoring programs. *Training & Development Journal* 37 (February) 2: 38-42.
- Rutherford, E. (1987) *Sarum: The novel of England.* New York: Ivy Books.

The legacy of Mentor

Sanders, E. K. (1901). Fenelon: His friends and his enemies. London: Longmans, Green.

Severin, T. (1988) The Ulysses voyage: The search for the Odyssey. London: Arrow Books.

Silver, D. J. & Martin, B. (1974). A history of Judaism. Vol. 1: From Abraham to Maimonides. New York: Basic Books.

THE LABELS WE USE

• Athena was many-faceted. As Promachos (= “champion”), she was depicted as victor over the Persians in 454 BC; as Athena Ergane (=“of the craftsmen /common workman).

The Spartans handed down learning faithfully as they felt heredity was important especially in the professions. One followed the family trade. Women were treated more or less equally. Protégés were trained by professionals in the army and boys spent time in training from the age of seven.

Why did their civilization not flourish given these conditions? They were not particularly open to new ideas.

Spartans were indifferent to the arts, architecture, literature, international trade, philosophy, and preferred conquest, regimentation, observance of the law and efficiency. They were arrogant so that when they won in battle, they were not magnanimous. As a much disliked civilization, they were ideal targets for destruction at the hands of others.

SOME COMMON TERMS FOUND IN THE LITERATURE:

Term	first used	source	meaning
disciple	900 AD	Latin	now used as “pupil” or “learner”
apprentice	1362	Old French	legal term, any barrister of less than 16 years standing
tutor	1377	Fr/It/Sp	legal term, guard, custodian, defender
preceptor	1440	Latin	teacher, alternative term for tutor
Monitor	1546	Latin	In-school advice; to warn, admonisher
mentor	1750	Greek	to think, counsel
coach	1848	French	private tutor; athletic term from 1885 on