

## BACK TO LEARNING. THE ROLE OF MENTORSHIP

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### Abstract

Mentoring as a desired practice in educational organizations has come to the fore-front in discussions about learning and teaching in recent decades. How to develop good practices as mentors / masters in schools and workplaces and as professors in our institutions of higher education is a crucial question. Mentoring as a concept in educational theory in the European tradition is closely connected to what has been called the *Socratic Method*. The role of the teacher is to be an interlocutor, a person of experience with whom young people can converse. Questions and reflections should help to develop young peoples' curiosity and engagement in the search of new knowledge. This understanding of knowledge and learning corresponds with an apprenticeship model of learning. Contradictions between outlooks on ways of learning area central issue in our times. I discuss this problematic in relation to the scientific work of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Maria Montessori and Lev Vygotsky.

**Keywords:** social division of knowledge; vocational pedagogy; pedagogy of professions; cultural - historical activity theory.

### Introduction

For the past decades the development of information technology has brought revolutionary changes to the work of the hand and the mind in all practical professions as well as raising challenges to scientific work and the art of teaching. The expansion of education in formal institutions after World War II has created new fundamental questions about learning and teaching in society. In Norway 60 years ago, universities were the domain of a small elite. Most people had seven years of schooling. With industrial capitalism, vocational education and training of the working class developed in technical / vocational schools where hands - on learning in workshops is central as it is through apprenticeships in workplaces. Today young people are expected to complete thirteen years of formal schooling before entering the labor market and / or institutions of higher education. This is part of a global trend which harbors among other things a belief that the expansion of equal rights

to higher education will solve class contradictions in society. Reality has shown the complexities in these issues<sup>1,2</sup>.

One of the main findings in my research in the vocational sector over the past decades is that students and apprentices in the vocational trades prospered and learned when they were in activity in the workshop in the vocational school or in the workplace, while they found little meaning or relevance to the many hours spent in general education classrooms. They showed up in the workshop, but they failed to show up for the academic class<sup>3</sup>. What are the reasons that vocational students' and apprentices' experiences of learning and meaning in the workshop setting and working life have contrasted so sharply and so negatively with those of the school where learning takes place in classrooms? The practice in master / apprenticeship traditions and mentoring might play a key role in this regard.

The concept Mentor was inspired by Greek mythology. The character of Mentor in Homer's "Odyssey" brought the concept to life. Though the actual Mentor in the story is a somewhat ineffective old man, the goddess of Wisdom, Athena, takes on his appearance in order to guide young Telemachus in his time of difficulty. Through her actions, she is the wise Mentor to the young man.

### **New mentoring voices**

New mentoring voices have come to the fore in the recent decades. Women have entered the scientific world and have posed new fundamental questions to the traditional social division of knowledge. Women have also entered as participants in academic positions and they have presented theories critical of the prevalent ways of thinking in both social and natural sciences. One central question, posed by both men and women, is whether scientific paradigms have remained encapsulated within those intellectual traditions that emerged in Europe in the sixteenth century, the era which saw the increased dominance of science in Western Capitalist societies. The philosopher Thomas Kuhn called in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* for a change of paradigms in both natural and social sciences<sup>4</sup>. The sociologist Dorothy E. Smith calls for a shift of paradigms in her book *Institutional Ethnography. A Sociology for People*<sup>5</sup>. In pedagogy, the need for changes has created many schools of thought during the past hundred years.

One of the women pioneers, both as a pioneer in the medical profession and a revolutionary in pedagogy, was the Italian scientist Maria Montessori. She was the first woman to be allowed into the study of medicine in Italy, in 1896. She is famous as a philosopher and practitioner in educational science. Her ideas have

given inspiration to educators worldwide. Her devotion to research and practice among deprived children has spread its influence far beyond Italy. There are Montessori - inspired kindergartens and schools in many parts of the world, in Scandinavia, as well as in Latin America and Africa. She became an inspiration and a mentor for many educational scientists in the previous century. She had a strong belief in everybody's ability to learn and was deeply concerned about the teacher's ability to adjust and redeem the inherent abilities in human beings. A teacher should be a guide and a mentor.

### **Mentoring and the Socratic method**

Mentoring as a concept in educational theory is closely connected to what is called *the Socratic Method*. The role of the teacher was to be an interlocutor, a partner with whom young people could converse, discuss and analyze. Questions and reflections should help to develop young peoples' curiosity and engagement in the search for new knowledge. Through conversations and through posing and answering questions, participants' inherent understandings and insights are elaborated, clarified and deepened. Thanks to Socrates' famous student, Plato, and Plato's famous student, Aristotle, *the Socratic method* has come down to us. Another part of his thinking, *the Socratic turn*, implied turning away from mere perceptual knowledge and attempting broader, comparative explanations of external things. *The Socratic turn* involved respect for competence and the work of practitioners in various walks of life. Aristotle, following Socrates and Plato, developed his thinking about learning by taking practical craft competence as his "self - evident" starting point and model.

Socrates questioned whether science and philosophy of his time were really in touch with the living course of human life. We can ask the same question today. Time in academic classrooms has increased and time in workshops learning has decreased in recent reforms. Students and apprentices in the vocational trades prospered and learned when they were in practice in the workshops, whether in vocational schools or in the workplace; conversely, they did not find much meaning or relevance in the academic classrooms. Meaning and motivation are two sides of the same coin. The students I observed, and those I taught, regarded academic classrooms as contributing little meaning for their future life, since their scientific underpinning of their practical learning was presented as phenomena far away from their practical reality. On the other hand, the hands-on learning they found in school workshops and working life stayed with them for life.

## **Mentoring in the apprenticeship model of learning**

Workshop learning has its roots in apprenticeship learning as it was practiced in the guild system of feudal Europe. The guilds were organised in three ranks: master, journeymen and apprentices. Older and younger people worked and learned together in workshops. Hands - on learning was the order of the day. The master demonstrates, instructs and explains. The apprentices train and repeat, assisting each other with the help of the master till they perform the tasks without assistance. Vocational schools as they developed in the industrial era borrowed from the traditions of the guild system. Here, workshops were the main learning arena. On the other hand, there are the traditions of the classical Cathedral Schools of the Middle Ages, where students are sitting in rows listening to a teacher in front of them. Individual learners are disciplined by clock - hours and evaluated and graded in accordance to what they reproduce in exams. The reforms in education have tried to challenge these traditions and make the twain meet without much success till now.

These starkly contrasting traditions are present and visible in the educational system today and part of the contradictions between the work of hand and mind, between intellectual and manual labour as it has developed in society in recent centuries. It permeates our activities and is also fundamental to how we pose questions in scientific research<sup>6</sup>. The Brazilian scientist, Paulo Freire, attacked the traditional school for having “a banking concept of education” in which the student was viewed as a savings account to be filled with information from the teacher - savings which students could withdraw from the bank later. As an alternative, he suggested a Socratic approach: “*A Pedagogy of Questioning*”<sup>7</sup>.

## **From Socrates to Vygotsky in the new science of learning**

The questions posed by Socrates are central today both in science and pedagogy. New insight is emerging. Paulo Freire pointed to the dialectic between theory and practice. Theory without practice would be mere abstract thinking, just as practice without theory will be reduced to naïve action<sup>7,8</sup>. “Learning by doing” is a well - known concept from John Dewey’s laboratory schools in Chicago. Another of Dewey’s insights following *the Socratic turn* is his point of departure in that there is a form of useless theory that stands opposed to practice. Real scientific theory is located within the bounds of practice and functions as the impetus for expansion; it provides direction toward new possibilities<sup>9</sup>. This also mirrors the work and insight of Lev Vygotsky a hundred years ago<sup>10,11</sup>. He criticized traditional teaching for having an atomistic view of learning. Among other things, he felt that both the splitting

up of school subjects and the parcelling out of teaching content into individual subjects contributed to the elimination of the meaningfulness of the individual subjects. Knowledge, he argued, cannot be taken out of its natural context and passed on in isolation; it can only yield meaning and create motivation if it is taken up as a part of a whole.

He laid the groundwork for a scientific understanding of how human beings learn through activity and cooperation. As Vygotsky said: Neither the mind nor the hand can do much alone. The deed is brought to fruition through activity and cooperation. This points towards transcending traditional perceptions in the present social division of knowledge in society.

## Conclusions

New knowledge and practices are evolving. Research from both neuroscience and social science on learning are becoming part of critical debates in educational theory. These developments also lay the groundwork for challenging practice in educational institutions. “The master - apprentice learning model”, “learning through activity”, “situated learning”, “social learning” and “learning by doing” are now important concepts in the academic debate about learning<sup>12,13</sup>.

Learning theories rooted in master/apprentice traditions pose fundamental questions to the unnatural separation from our own humanity as it is practised in educational systems. Concepts relevant to the present century are vocational pedagogy and vocational didactics. Vocational pedagogy, a learner - centered approach to teaching and learning and vocational didactics, teaching and learning as they pertain to working life are new concepts in the field of education describing how youngsters in vocational school workshops learn through activities and in cooperation with a mentor and each other<sup>14,15</sup>.

The concept Pedagogy of professions has developed in relation to the contradictions in higher education, and new doors are opening towards adopting the master / apprenticeship traditions with mentoring and student cooperation. All this promises a brighter future for education everywhere.

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# **A NEW BEGINNING FOR EMERITI AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA: THE UBC EMERITUS COLLEGE**

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## **Abstract**

In recognition of the contributions and future potential of the University of British Columbia (UBC) emeriti, UBC and its Association of Professors Emeriti established an emeritus college in 2018. Baldwin and Zeig define an emeritus college as an organized unit of a university established to promote the continued intellectual, scholarly, and social involvement of retired faculty members. The emeritus college at UBC is the first of its kind in Canada and the latest one of a total of a very small number of them in North America. At UBC emeriti are working productively as a group of volunteers with a small paid staff and university funding to be creative and unique. This brief presentation on the experience of the UBC Emeritus College discusses our actions of the past few years and introduces some of our ideas, future programs and activities.

**Keywords:** Emeritus faculty; Emeritus colleges; faculty development; retirement; universities and colleges.

## **Introduction**

Established in 1987, UBC's Association of Professors Emeriti (UBC - APE) was the first association of retired emeritus faculty in Canada. The original purpose of UBC - APE was quite modest and practical: to create a social network of retired professors and advocate for a university-administered health care plan for retired faculty. Three decades later, the new UBC Emeritus College that replaced APE in 2018 acts to recognize and broaden the intellectual, social, and community volunteer networks of emeriti, and helps to sustain and deepen the University's commitment to its emeriti<sup>1</sup>. This accords with Flaherty's review<sup>2</sup> of the role of the emeritus colleges

in North America: that they serve as a permanent intellectual bridge to retirement for emeritus faculty. APE partially filled that role at UBC before the establishment of a formal emeritus college.

Even though the concept of the emeritus college had great merit, the prospect of convincing UBC of the need for one appeared daunting. Circumstances changed abruptly, however, following the arrival and expression of full support by the new president of UBC, Dr. Santa Ono, in 2016. At the president's invitation, emeriti in 2017 began drafting a full proposal for an emeritus college. We were naïvely unaware of how much work lay ahead for us. There simply were no clear blueprints to provide guidance, either for the University or for APE. In the end, we were able to establish the UBC Emeritus College quite quickly, but we then faced uncertainty in our attempts to implement the plan. This paper will describe what was involved in achieving and celebrating this noteworthy new home for UBC emeriti, and in planning for the secure future of the Emeritus College at the University of British Columbia.

### **Inaugural year of the UBC Emeritus College, May 2018 to June 2019**

Our proposal<sup>3</sup> to the governing bodies of the university took one year and the efforts only of a very small committee of our Association to prepare: UBC's Senate and Board of Governors approved the proposal in May - June, 2018. In order to develop strategies for organizing and re - organizing committees, programs, budget, staff, physical space, and publicity for the College, we then held two one - day summer planning retreats of our College Council. Over the winter of 2018 - 2019, the College negotiated a generous operating budget from the University; wrote job descriptions for, and hired, two part-time members of staff; created a substantial website; and negotiated and planned for temporary quarters and, eventually, modest permanent space in new building scheduled for 2022.

Most difficult of all were the College's negotiations with representatives of UBC's Senate and legal department over terms of reference for the governance of the College. The document had to incorporate the traditional structures of UBC - APE and also to comply with the myriad policies, regulations, and systems at UBC. Dissolution of the former UBC - APE was a necessary final step to implementing the College. The Senate and Board approved the terms of reference document<sup>4</sup> in March - April 2019, less than one year after the founding of the College.

We celebrated the one - year anniversary of the College in two different but equally



important ways. First, we held a very successful public event: a two - day interdisciplinary symposium, “Scholarship and the Future University,”<sup>5</sup> in April 2019. Invited speakers and panelists presented research and provoked discussion on topics ranging from the impact of World University Rankings on the changing nature of academic work, and interdisciplinary approaches to an emerging new area of research: “Outer Space Studies”. We also established the UBC Emeritus College Priorities Endowment Fund, which will be necessary for sustaining the programs of future generations of emeriti. Making the endowment possible was a personal donation of 50,000 \$ (approximately 37,500 €) from a UBC professor emeritus. The donor asked that his gift be used for promoting alternatives to the common practice of “closing the door behind” emeritus professors when they retire. It was this large donation that enabled the College in 2019 to establish at UBC a protected, high - interest endowment fund from which the Emeritus College receives a portion of the annual interest earned to spend on any aspect of its programs or operations. The University recently announced it will provide a donation that will match the original gift.

The Emeritus College has also in its first year increased its outreach to associations of retired university faculty in Canada, the United States, and abroad. Members of our executive have, for example, given talks on the founding of the College at the AROHE (American) meeting in Atlanta (2018), and in 2019 at the international congress of the European Association of Professors Emeriti in Athens, and at the College and University Retiree Association of Canada (CURAC) annual conference. We also sponsored the UBC Emeritus College panel, “Extending the Academic lifespan: Staying Connected After Retirement”, at the annual Congress of the Federation of the Humanities & Social Sciences in Canada and presented the College’s first Annual Report to the UBC Senate.

### **Transitional programs of interest**

Just before becoming an emeritus college, the Association in 2017 had negotiated with UBC for a research expense reimbursement fund of 100,000 \$ (approximately 75,000 €) per year from the president’s office. The fund awards partial reimbursements to support individual retired UBC faculty and librarians with the continuing scholarly activities for which they have no other sources of funding and emeriti created and funded the new UBC President’s Award for Distinguished Service by an Emeritus Professor that is presented annually at a special ceremony of the College. Two award winners have been chosen to date: one is a Business School emeritus

professor who applied his talents after retirement to rescuing small arts programs throughout British Columbia. The other is a Dante Scholar who retired from the Faculty of Arts in 2002 and since that time has developed and run a special scholarship fund and program for orphaned, secondary school girls who showed academic promise from the poorest, HIV - AIDS - ridden, parts of Kenya. Programs such as the two just described recognize and encourage the multiple aspects of academic life after official “retirement”.

### **What lies ahead**

In this busy past year for the Emeritus College we have taken time out to consider future plans. Among the ideas being discussed are: 1) making the Emeritus College Interdisciplinary Symposium an annual and eagerly - anticipated event 2) establishing a downtown Vancouver Emeritus Research Lecture Series on topics of interest to the public 3) introducing an annual award for excellence in the engagement of UBC emeriti with new areas of innovation, research, artistic creation, and collaborations. These and other ideas for future programs have the potential to secure additional donations for the College’s endowment fund and thus safeguard the long-term future of the College.

### **Conclusions**

Universities and colleges are recognizing the bold fact that, as Baldwin and Zeig<sup>6</sup> have argued, “the intellectual and social capital faculty build over a lengthy career do not expire with retirement”. The possibilities for emeritus professors today, it seems, are becoming endless. In our experience, however, without the enthusiastic support of the university, establishing an emeritus college would be impossible. Even when strongly supported by the university, bringing an emeritus college into being requires a great deal of effort on the part of usually only a few individual emeriti to keep up the momentum, which is critical. UBC emeriti believe that the UBC Emeritus College has been worth the time and effort as it provides the best intellectual bridge to retirement for those who want to remain engaged intellectually, academically, and socially post - retirement.

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