

From the Editor

Unlocking potential: The strategic role of mentoring in professional development

I write this *From the Editor* after recording an episode of the *Learn at WORK* podcast with Dr. Robin Orr as the guest. This episode will be available later in the year, but since his special section on *Physical Employment Standards* is part of this issue, I thought I would share one of the topics we discussed—the importance of mentoring. Recently my colleagues Dr. Nancy Doyle, Dr. Liat Gafni-Lachter and I had a poster presentation on this topic titled *Assessing, Reflecting, and Creating Academic Mentoring Competencies* at an occupational therapy conference. This has been a topic of long interest to us both as mentors of students and as mentors to each other as academicians. I thought I would share some of the content from the poster in this *From the Editor*. Mentoring is a goal-oriented learning process that takes place in a supportive relationship where a mentor facilitates the personal and professional growth of the mentee. Mentoring is perceived as central to skill acquisition in occupational therapy and was found to support the development of well-being and resilience. It has also been shown to be a powerful practice for promoting leadership and redistributing engagement in diversity, equity, belonging, and inclusion initiatives. The use of mentoring is reported across multiple practice settings and developmental stages of occupational therapists. Despite its importance, training on effective mentoring, which is compassionate, and promotes skills development, is sparse. Mentoring is a cornerstone of our Boston University online post-professional doctorate in occupational therapy (PP-OTD) program. Mentoring within our faculty is guided by Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory. Learning is social, inseparable from practice, evolving, and mutually beneficial. Less and more experienced faculty learn together and nurture one another in the role of academic mentor by:

- modeling inclusive, interactive mentoring approaches,

- fostering a sense of community,
- elevating fulfillment of professional goals,
- enhancing organizational commitment,
- facilitating optimal student outcomes.

Using participatory action research (PAR) we assess the needs of mentors to provide the best mentoring and develop strategies to enhance their skills, confidence, and satisfaction. Participants included all consenting members of our mentoring team of PP-OTD faculty. Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, each mentor completed an electronic anonymous form of the Mentoring Capacity Assessment (University of Wisconsin-Madison Institute for Clinical and Translational Research, 2013). Results were collaboratively analyzed to identify patterns, themes, and insights about mentoring competencies. Researchers' and participants' perspectives were integrated into the analysis to develop strategies for advancement. Twenty mentors participated in this study. Based on the responses, three strategies were collaboratively developed to promote mentoring competencies:

1. **Mentor's hub:** creation of an online Mentors' hub that contains resources for mentoring and a virtual discussion board to ask, consult and support each other.
2. **Collaborative training:** A half-day workshop to discuss strategies to communicate effectively, align expectations, address diversity of multiple intersecting identities with cultural humility, promote mentees' professional development, and facilitate mentees' self-efficacy and resilience.
3. **Monthly mentors' circle meeting:** Although this aspect had been ongoing for many years, we reinforced our own check in, support, continued education, and professional development along with discussions of any student issues.

Based on this study we concluded that:

Facilitating effective solutions: Utilizing participatory action research promotes dynamic learning experiences that embrace diverse viewpoints, facilitating the creation of meaningful solutions through engaging and impactful strategies.

Empowering mentor growth: Fostering mentors' skills and confidence elevates their satisfaction, which in turn contributes to student success and bolsters the organization's reputation.

Strengthening team engagement: Engaging a team of seasoned professionals cultivates a stronger organizational connection and enthusiasm for their roles, fostering a sense of belonging.

If you would like to access the poster, references, and resources, please go to: <https://padlet.com/lgafni/bu-pp-otd-mentoring-studies-2gbsphrc68af1go5>

There are 15 regular papers in this issue on topics such as teleconsultation, driver drowsiness, return-to-work, working from home and worker engagement. The *Editor's Choice* paper is *The engagement chasm: Time for competency-based training in employee engagement for healthcare and beyond* authored by Hassan et al. This is an interesting paper about the development of a competency-based educational

curriculum for engagement and adds to the evidence-based literature in this area. Congratulations to the authors.

As mentioned, this issue contains a special section of 16 papers from a conference on *Physical Employment Standards* with a Guest Editorial by Dr. Orr. My gratitude to Dr. Orr for his leadership in organizing this special section and congratulations on a very successful conference.

I hope you are enjoying our *Learn at WORK* podcast episodes. I know that I am thoroughly enjoying moderating them! This monthly podcast provides a snapshot into the careers of authors who have published in *WORK* and/or Editorial Board members. Some of these guests include Drs. Matheson, Shaw, Phillips, Rice, Vanroelen, and Orr. Learn more about *WORK* on our website: workjournal.org.

With kind regards,

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