# Athena Rising? Mentoring in Higher Education

## Costina Denisa Bărbuceanu[*]

**Abstract**

The prerequisite for a mentor in the work environment is evermore present, but the availability of the mentors has also been limited, and the predominant gender was represented by men, patriarchal figures. Mentoring is furthermore "a relationship between an older, more experienced adult and an unrelated, younger protégé – a relationship in which the adult provides ongoing guidance, instruction and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the protégé." (Rhodes, 2009). Mentoring is seen as moreover "a dynamic reciprocal relationship in a work environment between an advanced career incumbent (mentor) and a beginner (protégé) aimed at promoting the career development of both." (Johnson, 2015). The mentor, a role model, who has the benevolence and ability to offer academic, professional and personal development paired with caring and nurture was somehow inaccessible, in the post-communist years, for students. In the academe environment the role of mentor is crucial, in order to channel the protégé on the right path to goal achievement. Mentoring is often regarded as being a developmental, circular process, in which the mentor guides, inspires, teaches and nurtures the protégé, who, can, in turn, become a mentor himself for others, sharing the same feelings and attention necessary in this relationship because furthermore "those who received mentoring as protégés were more likely to become mentors themselves one day" (Allen, Eby, 2011).

**Keywords:** *androcentric theory; mentor; protégé; cross-gender mentoring relationships.*

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**Introduction**

The role of Athena nowadays is no longer to be disguised under the mask of the mentor, but to openly show herself, in the position of the astute, diplomat, and facilitator women teachers that we call daily Athenas. Although Athena is the goddess of arts, war and wisdom, we recall her best for her the insight she is capable of. For centuries men have put frames moreover "... which make the human female carry the burden of ornament;" (Gilman, 2015), perceiving them likewise, overlooking or simply ignoring them. But women are warm, caring and overall positive and tend to excel at the work place, always needing to do more, despite the opposition that comes from everywhere. Men evaluate women differently, and this is not just the case of colleagues, but also of male students, who have the tendency of being judgemental towards the lady teachers in front of them.

Aspiring mentor teachers who want to undertake this role, that has been reserved to men, for so long, must confront double standards imposed by the society, because it is this habitat in which we coexist that makes the others blind to women potential. Women are primarily seen as caregivers, best fitted in family roles, and working women must do a huge amount of domestic labour which implies childcare and chores overload. Thus women mentors are likely to be unappealing to students in the present-day, patriarchal, post-communist Romania, thus hindering the projects for such aspiring mentors, downgrading it, and affecting promotion. Daily Athenas undergo obstacles such as visual scrutiny, sneering, envy, all these undermining their professional outcomes, contributions and achievement, making women somehow responsible for having lower aspirations than their male counterparts in climbing, similar, academic positions. The plain role of mentor/ teacher is to deliver career purpose for their mentees, and leadership throughout the procedure so that the mentees can have the chance to become better professionals, achieve their goals, and have perceptibility in the area they will develop. There is a psychosocial process that ultimately takes place between the incumbent and the mentor and it refers to nurture and caring, a process built on self-confidence, knowledge, meant to boost the protégé's personal, social and professional growth in his future career and social interaction within the academic environment or imminent job. Furthermore "Social reality is assumed to be similar to the natural world whose properties are believed to remain constant and unchanging. A typical objectivist understanding of reality would be revealed in mentoring and coaching by an emphasis on the rational elements of mentoring and coaching issues, with less consideration of the personal and social world of the learner." (Brockbank, McGil, 2006).

In the academe environment the role of mentor is crucial, in order to channel the protégé on the right path to goal achievement. Mentoring is often regarded as being a developmental, circular process, in which the mentor guides, inspires, teaches and nurtures the protégé, who, can, in turn, become a mentor himself for others, sharing the same feelings and attention necessary in this relationship because furthermore "those who received mentoring as protégés were more likely to become mentors themselves on day." (Allen, Eby, 2011). The prerequisite for a mentor in the work environment is evermore present, but the availability of the mentors has also been limited, and the predominant gender was represented by men, patriarchal figures. Mentoring is moreover "a relationship between an older, more experienced adult and an unrelated, younger protégé – a relationship in which the adult provides ongoing guidance,

instruction and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the protégé. ” (Rhodes, 2009).

Mentoring is seen as furthermore “a dynamic reciprocal relationship in a work environment between an advanced career incumbent (mentor) and a beginner (protégé) aimed at promoting the career development of both” (Johnson, 2015). The duties of a mentor include advising, nurturing and providing of a role model to follow, for the mentee, which is in need for recognition and confirmation. So, we can say that career and psychosocial function represent two distinct aspects of the mentor's role and the third could be role modelling. The mentor, a role model, who has the benevolence and ability to offer academic, professional and personal development paired with caring and nurture was somehow inaccessible, in the post-communist years, for students. Additionally “Such mentoring or coaching favours imposed objectives, based on perceived objective reality, and may use personality profiles and learning styles inventories because they assume a set of fixed qualities. A typical subjectivist understanding of reality would be revealed in mentoring or coaching where the personal and social world of the client is acknowledged as the basis of the developmental process. Such mentoring or coaching recognizes the socially constructed nature of reality. ” (Brockbank, McGil, 2006).

A Romanian up-coming woman teacher who wants to be a future mentor and access leadership positions within the institution finds herself in a stage of unconscious incompetence or wrong intuition, according to Maslow's pyramid, because she does not comprehend the ways to accomplish the goal of mentoring and does not automatically identify the insufficiency. She might rebut the value of her ability and she has no intuition of the mentorship potential. It lacked her as a student and now she will deprive other of its benefits. She must be familiar with her own lack of ability, and the importance of the new skill, before she wants to move on. The extent of time a teacher spends in this phase depends on the power of the motivation to become proficient in her ability. You are in the conscious incompetence phase when you do not realize the ways to accomplish your goal; you identify the shortage, as a teacher, as well as the importance of a new ability in dealing with that shortage. It is permitted to show mistakes in this phase as a part of the learning development. And that is it, but is it? The limitation is clear; you are on your own, and the path conveyed in front of you is foggy. Likewise “Cross-gender mentoring relationships face numerous challenges—both in reality and in the perceptions of those relationships by others. These challenges include the absence of role-modelling, intimacy concerns; gender stereotyping that limits individual growth, public scrutiny of the relationship, and possible peer resentment.” (Ragins, Kram, 2007).

After research, you find that there is a way to access information through partnerships abroad that allows one to learn to ropes of the mentorship programme and perform it during teaching. Now you find yourself, as a teacher wanting to become a mentor, in the conscious competence phase when you recognize the ways to accomplish your goal. Nevertheless, performing the ability demands attention and alertness. One needs to take baby steps, and display profound aware participation in implementing the new ability. The final and most important phase is the unconscious competence phase when a teacher has been applying the mentoring for so long that becomes instinctive and intrinsic and can be executed effortlessly alongside other assignment and be passed out to others in need.

**A Short Timeline of Women Mentors in Education**

- ✓ 2,700 BC The first woman ever to be mentioned in history by her profession and by her name was Merit Ptah; she was a physician in Egypt.
- ✓ 1088 Italy: The University of Bologna becomes the first university in West that permits women to study, to get a degree and to lecture.
- ✓ 1237 Italy: Bettisia Gozzadini receives a law degree from the University of Bologna and later she starts teaching Law at the same University of Bologna. She is believed to be the first woman permitted to teach at a university.
- ✓ 1312 Novella d'Andrea  follows the steps of Gozzadini and teaches Law at the University of Bologna.
- ✓ 1484-1527 Spain, Luisa de Medrano: is also a teacher at the University of Salamanca.
- ✓ 1657 The earliest high school in Romanian was established in Fagaras,  by Lorátffy Zsuzsanna.
- ✓ 1678 Elena Piscopia is the first woman in Romanian to gain a Ph.D.
- ✓ 1694 Constantin Brâncoveanu, Prince of Walachia, founded the Princely Academy in Bucharest and we can say that the history of higher education began at the end of the 17th century.
- ✓ 1865 Romania: The educational reform granted all Romanians access to education, which, at least formally, gave also females the right to attend school from elementary education to the university.
- ✓ 1879 Ana Botta, The first female student in the history of Romanian university education.
- ✓ 1882 Romania: Universities open to women.

The short timeline shows a unkind reality, regarding the evolution of education in our country; if back in 1088, Italy becomes the country that permits women to study, to get a degree and most importantly, to lecture, the situation in the Easter societies, especially in our country, is dramatically different: only just in 1865 that Romania granted females the right to attend school from elementary education to university. This might be the reason limitations still exist, for women, in mentoring. As women started to enter in fields that were before conquered by men, they face exceptional  trials. They are deprived of female leadership mentors to support and monitor them on the route to success within an institution and must learn to work in a masculine-oriented setting. As women reach the elevation of success, they shape the road for others to follow, by partaking in mentoring programs, shifting administrative arrangements, and apprising company remunerations to make the work setting advantageous for them. High-potential women progress gradually than their masculine colleagues, in terms of both profession development and remuneration. Organizations that disregard this dangerous issue risk delaying their participants in inviting, increasing, and holding the best aspirants. If the system does not reorganise to permit women to advance, it will be overdue as women fight for the same spots in the workspace. In addition, "Cross-gender relationships can be more difficult to manage than same-gender relationships." (Ragins, Kram, 2007). This is a waste, because, while men mentors obtain better career results with female protégés, the psychosocial relationship is void or null, as gender composition in mentoring is of uttermost importance, again. Besides "The positive links of career support and the negative links of psychosocial support consistently arose for women

with female mentors, inconsistently for women with male mentors, and overall not for men with male or female mentors. " (Ragins, Kram, 2007).

Although it seems things begin to change, and women are ground-breaking their ways through universities and governments, and they are aiding other women to come on board of the leadership positions there is still a long way to go before women can embrace identical leadership positions. Data show that additional women are taking over governmental offices and managerial roles in institutions and these numbers continue to ascent. Moreover "I portend that women are in large part responsible for mentoring away the glass ceiling. Several authors in this text support this notion and suggest that critical reflection and building one's confidence can construct and maintain empowering definitions of self. In their own unique manner, each author confirmed that mentorship early on can help build the confidence, which is necessary for navigating the challenging spaces of the academy. " (Marina, 2015).

### Constrains

Women teachers/mentors are often jugged by appearance, by the hair colour, are downgraded in their work by some male peer teachers and male students; because of this, a woman teacher has to face more difficulties in attaining a leadership position or merely being viewed a prospective mentor in her classroom. We often hear: Clearly "Women in senior level positions who have the status and the power can enable their female protégés to succeed with all the benefits that an "ideal" mentorship relationship can. Unfortunately, in reality, women experience what is referred to as an "accumulative disadvantage" where over the years, opportunities for women to work with a role model decreases as she climbs the career ladder; whereas this outcome affects men to a lesser degree because men network continuously and together with role models as they climb their career ladder." (Marina, 2015). Noe (1988) found that definitely "mentors in cross-gender relationships reported that their protégés used the relationships more effectively than did mentors with same-gender protégés. In particular, male mentors with male protégés reported less effective use of the mentoring relationship by their protégés than did female mentors with female protégés or mentors in cross-gender relationships. What is clear is that the gender composition of the mentoring dyad is critical to several aspects of the relationship. " (Powell, 1999). An efficient mentoring programme depends both on the mentor / teacher's knowledge and experience, gender issues and also on the availability of the protégé and his/her willingness to be mentored, his needs, on, and above all, on the love and human element, which should climb at the intensity that mothers / fathers and children feel. Mentoring should favour the connotation student-faculty, student-teacher, and teacher-faculty relations, as well as school-community centred clarifications. Since universities are ingenious mediators of socialization, demographic variations and university abandon demand the need to deliberate and endorse didactic fairness. Accordingly, the university as a public organisation may select to classify students as either operative or unsuccessful depending on their skill adequacy, which make students generally displease the pedagogical silencing at every level of education. Consequently, as a joint obligation and all-embracing goal, mentoring and civilian coaching help shape the public by establishing connexions. Nevertheless, "Mentoring is a complex, personal, and interpersonal process that has long been around but not always done and understood in schools. In fact, teachers work alone, for the most part, and find it difficult to locate and follow a mentor. Hence, how can teaching become a more collective, active, and innovative process if teachers don't work together and

mentor one another?" (Cooper, McCray, 2015). It is a fine example of how mentoring and higher education atmosphere authorise didactic impartiality. Higher education nowadays shoulder diversity and this is definitely something that should be valued and esteemed because accepting dissimilarity can affect a protégé's performance, action, thought in relation to teachers, mentors and school environment. Concentrating on existing times and global struggle, mentoring can make presence dynamic provided that the mentee or student, receives sustenance and empathetic handling in a friendly environment that boosts and improves additional prospects.

There are four phases and four Cs of the mentoring relationship: the first is the initiation phase also called furthermore "an informal relationship that evolves over time outside formal mentoring structures of the organisation." (Clarke, 2018); the second is the cultivation phase, where developmental, professional and psychosocial proportions of mentoring take place; separation phase: can be physical or intellectual; and the last one is the redefinition phase – a form of friendship as an outcome of the prior years. When it comes down to the procedure of mentoring the process begins with the so called comfort talks or conversations meant to focus on the mentee's trust and self-confidence which can often reveal more about their status then productivity. Additionally " Natural mentoring occurs through friendship, teaching, collegiality, etc. Planned mentoring occurs through structured programs in which mentors and participants are selected and matched through formal processes. The key is the mentor's ability to understand and accept what the partner is experiencing. " (Towns, 2006).

Mentors use this information within the conversation to acquire more about their students' internal representation in relation to their learning and teaching, and the psychological state or anxiousness they might display. A comfort conversation can also unveil how they make efforts to sustain relationships with mentors or colleagues, challenges or inquiries about future career goals, timetable management, the need for empowering such as activity and mentoring period of time. During such encounters, both, face to face and on-line, mentors will often make use of the human element, empathise with the protégé/ student, finding new ways of boosting self-confidence, self-efficacy and nurture them. Mentors become a friend, a bridge in a new and sometimes intimidating situation. Above and beyond "For effective reflective learning, intentional dialogue that occurs in a mentoring or coaching session is necessary. Naturally occurring dialogue may reflect the power differences in a situation and this can inhibit learning. So the mentor whose dialogue with a client takes the form of a monologue about how things should be done, with which the client is obliged to agree, is unlikely to promote reflective learning for improvement or transformation! " (Brockbank, McGil, 2006). Such conversations are likely to happen in the early days of mentoring program when building a relationship is the essential thing and goal, making the work environment a priority. Comfort conversations are centred both on the new mentee and the teacher's emotional benefit within the circumstance of their future career and purpose. In case of mental strain that can happen during the daily or weekly encounters, there is a need for regular physical pause or e- mentoring, when the physical encounter is not possible.

Technical conversations are the easiest talks a mentor can share with his/ her mentees, all they have to do is answer for ordinary, everyday information such as or procedures or ongoing processes. All teachers mentors need specific information, which is often readily available if you take your time and do some research. This type of conversation will include: schedules for assessment, resources and where to locate this resources, report problems, deadlines, professional evaluation, conduct, organization of

policies, and other university of faculty policies and procedures. Preparation or organisation of conversations are progressive and cooperative enterprise that the parties involved decide upon. Mentors who work with students/ mentees or protégé, guide, inquire, contest, offer alternatives, explore and seek solutions to the demands of practice. Students that want to embark on the road of teaching will observe their mentors during the teaching process and will be asked to design, depending on the speciality, units of work, chapters, new strategies, drawn from media resources and self-assessing their student learning and evaluate the outcome of something they have seen the mentor doing and have tried themselves. In this train of thoughts, the focus of preparation or organization of conversations, is strictly linked to the teacher/ mentor 's work in the classroom, which should always be student-centred, and focused on student new needs of learning. Meditative and logical conversations inspire mentees to consider the versatile characteristics of their practice and outcome of the four Cs in guiding their future career plans and actions.

Mentors can assist future mentors achieve a sense of belonging, of interacting and being aware of the huge responsibility of the mentee position. A mentee is a future mentor himself, because studies have shown that people who received mentoring are likely to become mentors and mentor, in their turn. The mentee has the moral obligation of documenting and recording particular subject matter that can be discussed subsequently. The indicant provides a verifiable element for the up-coming mentors to investigate, inquire and analyse what occurred with what they designate to happen in the session. Together, the mentee - the future mentor, and the mentor can study the entailment for emerging actions and build from a contemplative speech communication towards a designing one. Additionally "Reflective dialogue engages the learner's realities and subjective experience, giving space for the learner to consider and reconsider, without haste. In addition, intentional dialogue supports the perturbation or disturbance that may occur when existing assumptions are challenged and deals with the emotional material flow from such challenges." (Brockbank, McGil, 2006).

An experienced mentor must distinguish between different types of speech communication because it represents an ongoing flow from the most unequivocal and least stimulating, technical conversations, to the more exigent and hard-to-please conversations, which have a contemplative or logical focal point. Mentors discover that it is normal to take steps in building the reflective (and possibly affectional) relationship, doubled with a gentle firmness as the protégé becomes more self-assured and is full of confidence and expectations in the relationship. The degree to which the protégé will be prepared to participate in more demanding, questioning, tête-à-têtes encounters will be influenced by the degree to which their self-reliance and sagacity has settled. Becoming part of such a dialogue at the establishment of a mentoring liaison is possible to be unfertile and may distance the mentee. Being aware of the eminence of specialised tête-à-têtes discussions, and studying and thinking about it, will help to distinguish how thriving each exchange of ideas is. Mentors will discovery that they essentially have to use experienced inquiring methods to make clear and review the data to prolong diverse views that may offer new visions, which will guide what the mentee /student / protégé does next. It is imperative to use a multiplicity of approaches to certificate seminar room proceedings. Scrutinising diverse approaches of indication will highlight and augment unforeseen sides that will supplement the mentee's philosophy.

Mentors might refer to the four Cs of the mentoring program as stratagems they and the mentees will go through:

1. clarifying method, which is of uttermost importance because it displays the teacher / mentor's involvement in the student's needs, paying close attentions to it;
2. consulting method, in which the mentor actually reacts to the necessities of the protégé to bring forth the human element, through unequivocal reinforcement;
3. collaborating method, during this stage, both parties find answers and work out issues about decision making facts. The feeling that arises in this method is one of equality between mentor and mentee, of strengthening the affective and professional bound between an experience colleague and an incumbent one.
4. coaching method, here the teacher needs to clear the way and construct an environment for the up-coming mentor, authorizing him/her through detection, inquiry, professional dialogue, and future career goals. Subsequently "Evolutionary mentoring and coaching, executive coaching or life coaching offers clients a chance to identify the prevailing discourse and challenge it, through reflective dialogue." (Brockbank, McGil, 2006).

The four Cs, help clear up the different expectations for assistance in this conversation, the mentee deciding whether the mentor teacher fits best as an adviser, co-operator or instructor. The mentor, in turn, will make use of her/his own education and expertise to assist their associates in the process of clarifying the learning goals, reckoning successfulness indicators to evidence the strength of mentoring session they have chosen to produce. Above all, "As neural systems become more specialised into adulthood and expertise becomes embedded, there is some reduction in neural plasticity, and a substantial weakening and pruning of unused neurons and connections as the brain ages." (Fehring, Rodrigues, 2016). Preparation or organization of conversations will be a must and will proceed throughout the mentoring program, with focusing exclusively on the mentee/ student/ protégé's occupational and professional, educational needs. Obviously, there are constrains related to several aspects of the mentoring process, time and space representing two crucial cornerstones of the program's efficiency; mentors might not have the possibility of finding the necessary time to provide for the protégé. Noticeably "Teaching, mentoring and coaching techniques that promote the formation of these new neural networks and limit the atrophy of other beneficial networks will provide the basis for a robust professional development learning architecture. " (Fehring, Rodrigues, 2016). In mentoring the up-coming mentors, teachers use meditative and logical conversations to have a clear perception and brainstorm into practice session by examining grounds related to a particular domain. Such indicant can uncover conspicuous information about the basic cognitive process that occurred within the mentoring procedure. Undoubtedly "Learning in the adult brain relies on multiple cognitive and neural systems, the experience of which generates continuing changes in brain structure and function. Memory formation is at the core of learning and is dependent upon this range of independent neural networks that form and reform in the brain." (Fehring, Rodrigues, 2016).

We retain an androcentric belief that women accessible as mentors or even as role models are incompetent, dissimilar to what a man can do if he were in the same position. The impediments involve, first of all, the gender, then come labels and origin, doubled by distrust and regrettably this hindrances have made women underrepresented in management places, in educational or corporate background. The privations that teacher mentors and women must commonly overcome, in the present day, are professional isolation, disapproval and decline of their assignments, reduced interacting and collective visions. Noticeably "It is clear that, as a gendered organizational process,

mentoring affects women in leadership by embodying unequal access to leadership opportunities and power, transmitting gender behaviour and norms, and perpetuating preferences for masculine power." (O'Connor, 2010). One of the restrictions is represented by the forced, incompatible and unfortunate bond between the mentor-mentee, which can be damaging for the whole progression, disturbing the results, the relation, and the educational setting, with unfortunate prominence. As far as boundaries are apprehensive we debate the circumstance that mentoring is overwhelming, intense, taking time and space for all involved, it can be misleading if the procedure is not calculated. The hopes the involved parties have might not coincide, because of the dissimilar characters, temperaments and genders. Indeed "However, engagement mentoring sustains a state of equilibrium and maintains the status quo, suppressing the possibility of transformative learning for the individual and the organization." (Brockbank, McGil, 2006).

### Conclusions

The mentor's values and idealized norms can have considerable influence on how mentees see themselves and the profession. Mentees have various emotional responses to their mentors, aberration, awe, fear, and idealization. Experiences with mentors can be impactful and remembered for many years. Mentoring interactions are helping interactions naturally fixed on achievement. The principal self-motivated of the mentoring affiliation is the assistance offered to the protégé by the teacher, while the fixed functions presented to protégés by mentors vary, mentoring grips any or all three decisive constituents: sensitive and psychosocial support, traditional support with profession and professional development, and model. In fact, "Conventional wisdom denotes that mentors have seniority over the one being mentored. Yet, many of the most effective mentors do not have seniority. Many leaders are realizing that knowledge is not a one – way street. It is a benefit to all involved to share expertise. There is a current thought that reverse mentoring may bridge the gaps among generations." (Towns, 2006). The abusive use of the existing mentors and the compact number of women mentors, or even absence of, embody one of the restrictions and trials, as well. Women are lessened in faculties and mentoring plans, and this is a test to consider for all. The victory of any mentoring platform is founded upon the affiliation amongst mentor - mentee and how clever mentors are in polishing the assets of the protégés. Mentoring ability involves the normal and careful use of caring, knowledge, methodological skills, feelings, principles, consideration and communication in daily preparation for the advantage of the mentee and the educational community served. A teacher mentor is beyond an educational advice-giver, she is definitely a leading light who produces power or bravery, a comrade who perceives and emboldens our concealed gifts. Sometimes, this converted teacher is known as a tutor, a mentor. Mentor teachers often give accountability for the company of a cheerful, creative collaboration when working with lively, activating mentees. As teacher mentors contour relations for their protégées, they, in all likelihood, do that for themselves, too, also forging professional prospects and educational prominence for their counsellors. Through keen, gifted mentees, women mentors attain revitalisation otherwise they would become overdue in lethargic scholastic occupations. In addition, "Functionalist mentoring or coaching focuses on efficiency and equilibrium, assuming an objective real world, aiming at improved performance and, in order to maintain the status quo, tends to supress challenge and questioning. The necessity of maintaining equilibrium leads mentors or coaches to socialize their clients, ensuring that existing

values and norms are preserved, thereby 'guaranteeing' career advancement." (Brockbank, McGil, 2006).

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