Part I

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Writing Group One:
Creating Our Professional Identities

Making Mentoring Visible

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Although many people think of mentoring as a form of teaching, mentoring is actually quite distinctive in its goals, processes, and outcomes. It has currency in the world of the business executive, the professional football coach, the ecumenical leader, the community activist, the physician, and of course, the university administrator. The literature ranges widely from the Cliffs Notes of pop culture, *Coaching and Mentoring for Dummies*, to *The Journal of Higher Education,* which has published thirty-eight articles on this topic in the past twenty years. On the community level, projects and centers, such as the Harvard Mentoring Project, the National Mentoring Center, and The Tao Center of Human Performance and Mentoring exist for the sole purpose of advocating and funding mentoring in various social arenas. In public education, the K-12 level's recognition that mentoring helps retention has resulted in most states in the past fifteen years mandating mentoring programs for beginning teachers (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, Potts 7). Medical schools not only build formal mentoring into the intern's experience, but also evaluate the effectiveness systematically in their professional literature.

Mentoring is a kind of teaching. That fact is acknowledged by practitioners in all segments of society and by teachers and administrators on all educational levels. But what kind? The image that comes to mind is the white professional male shooting hoops with the inner city black teenager or the first-grade teacher bent over a table with a child adding up numbers. College and university recruitment brochures show a professor with a furrowed brow looking through a microscope with an eager and attentive student taking notes, or even two men in surgical garb conferring over a patient in a bed. The small liberal arts colleges show a group of students under a spreading oak focused on a central figure reading from a book. Conspicuous in its absence, though, is an image of two teachers or two professors engaged in conversation. We who teach in the university know that we talk frequently with our colleagues around the meeting table or at the photocopying machine or in the faculty lounge. While mentoring happens in these conversations, however, it is not formal and sustained mentoring. In fact, while mentoring may be formally recognized institutionally on all educational levels, it is generally not compensated in time or payment,

however crucial it may be to professional health and growth and however beneficial it can be to the institution.

A comprehensive review of mentoring in public universities leads one to this conclusion:

> Mentoring between faculty members in such [public] universities is not prevalent. Where it occurs, it is mutually negotiated, primarily between persons of the same sex and between assistant and full professors. Because there are few women full professors, women may be mentored more frequently by men or by associate professors.
> (Sands, Parson, Duane 191)

The Sands study notes that "according to ecological theory, human relationships are developed in the context of person-environment exchanges.... Where mentoring exists, the ecology or climate of the organization as a whole and within constituent units would be such that giving and receiving guidance are embedded in the values and norms of the organization" (179-80).

Mentoring is that invisible yet central place in teaching. It occupies no visible space. The question I ask, then, is why college-level teachers give time and energy to an endeavor that does not make the radar screen on the tenure and promotion portfolio and merits but a sentence or two in annual review evaluations? My experience with mentoring is a story worth telling, I think, if I want to give visibility and a voice to the mentoring that is inherent in all teaching relationships *if they are meaningful*. By reading the literature through my personal experience and reading my own experience through the lens of scholarly thought and writing, I examine the value of a kind of teaching that has been under-documented and undervalued in even the most enlightened of professions. I draw, then, the conclusion that we in the professorate must make the commitment to change the system to support this work of mentoring that is crucial to the survival and success not only of women and minorities but also to the integrity and humanity of the profession as a whole.

The school where I teach, Kennesaw State University, is a public university enrolling over eighteen thousand students in 2005 and employing over one thousand faculty and staff. The university awarded undergraduate degrees to over two thousand students in 2003. We are a teaching rather than a research university, and the institution's commitment to the centrality of teaching in its varied forms is reflected in the category of professional activity: "Teaching, Supervising, and Mentoring." In 1984, two years after my arrival as a new assistant professor, the President created a Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), which today offers programs for faculty development, among them the "Reflective Practice of Teaching" and the "Scholarship of

Teaching and Learning." Faculty assemblies have heard such speakers as Parker Palmer, Lee Schulman, and the late Ernest Boyer. The institution, then, has afforded mentoring a "place" within the system. What has yet to happen, however, is providing the means by which faculty members are afforded both the essential time to mentor and the recognition within the tenure and promotion system to acknowledge and thereby award mentoring. We have the band and the dance floor, but it is empty at the present moment.

My own history with mentoring has been serendipitous, extensive, and profound. I have participated in and led programs sponsored by CETL, and in my fourth year at Kennesaw, I was selected by the President, Betty L. Siegel, to serve as her intern for the year. An attentive and wise mentor, she was a role model for mentoring in professional and interpersonal ways. Even before my year with the President, though, I had two formative years of mentoring with Arthur Dunning, assistant Vice-President for Academic Affairs, one of the first African-American administrators at a University System of Georgia institution. With Art's help, I drafted and revised my first portfolio for third-year review. Within my department, senior women faculty sought to include me in panel presentations and helped me with portfolio preparation for promotion. The mentoring I had early in my career was crucial to my success, and its source is not unusual, according to Shelley Park, who writes in her essay, "Research, Teaching, and Service: Why Shouldn't Women's Work Count?" that "women, as well as men of color, are given more 'opportunities' for service than white men." These groups, she notes, are "sought out by other women or minority members as positive role models" (54). I look at my mentors now— kind and caring people who continue to make distinctive and fine contributions to our profession—and I see that they were the first and lasting role models for me. I wanted to give back what I had been given, so I mentored informally until the early 90s when departments at Kennesaw began to pair new faculty with experienced faculty, and I became a mentor to two new women assistant professors. Since then, both have been tenured and promoted. I am in a position, then, to know that mentoring can redeem more than a day that is going badly—it can change the shape of a career.

Mentoring is indeed "embedded in the values and norms of [my] organization" (Sands, Parson, Duane 180). Yet while my work as a mentor was appreciated, when I was to serve as mentor to ten instructors with Master's degrees hired to teach general education courses in freshman composition and world literature, I was not offered a course release until Fall 2003. These new instructors were fortunate because they had a double support system. The director of composition was their "course content" mentor, a role assigned to this position in many universities. My role, though, was unique in that I not

only had a course release for my work as mentor, but I was also designated by my chair as the faculty mentor. Mentoring had a visible space in my department, and my specified area was that of "socialization" or acculturation, a fitting role in part because I am experienced (and perhaps because I am female). My formal introduction to new faculty was in the department's orientation meeting of fall semester. Since I was on the search committee for six of the new instructors and the other four had been hired the previous year, I had a basis of knowledge from which to design the material I would use. I provided a description of our department's culture and a guide to strategies for teaching and survival with a list of resources not covered in the university orientation materials. To establish that I was a key and accessible resource, I made it clear that my office was open at any time; I wanted to confer with these new colleagues, and I had the time to do so. Within the next two months, I had an hour's meeting with each. What I learned in those meetings, and in subsequent contacts, was surprising and disturbing. As instructors without a terminal degree (the Ph.D.)—hired to teach in a general education program— they were positioned in the department in a way far different from that of the assistant professor Ph.D. hired in a specialty area. They were faced with figuring out what their position would be in an institution that had yet to codify their status and position. The first cohort group of four instructors headed into their third-year reviews with their job descriptions still in flux.

The scheduled (and unscheduled) meetings, which some of the women instructors called their therapy, were revelatory. While the women tended to talk at length on different occasions, the men would stop me in the hall for quick questions or send an e-mail with a query. In almost all instances, though, I discovered that the focus of our discussions was not balancing life and teaching, or research and teaching, or even figuring out the tenure and promotion system. It was how we treat one another every day—in the hall, in the bookstore, in the faculty lounge. While the ostensible reason for my scheduling sustained, individual time with each person was to check on the stability and well being of those new to life in this university, I heard right off that they did not need my help in establishing their goals for institutional service or the extent of their participation in the department meetings. What they needed was a listening ear and a navigational map of the various personalities they worked with daily. While it may be a firm grip on the obvious that work stress is at the top of the list for new faculty, the literature on faculty mentoring faculty—what little there is of it—finds that the stress only intensifies in the next five years. The process, then, means that acculturation to the life of the academy grows in angst. In my conversations with the new instructors, I heard that their work stress took form and had

voice in the quotidian details of their work and outside-of-work lives. Yet central to the discussion with all but one of these faculty was finding their place in the structure of the university, more specifically of the department.

In a perceptive essay on organizational socialization, William Tierney tells some yet-unacknowledged truths. He claims there are modernist and postmodernist perspectives on how organizations structure acculturation. The modernist assumption is that socialization is a "process where people 'acquire' knowledge, . . . and it is little more than a series of planned activities" (5). In opposition is the postmodernist view that culture is not simply "waiting 'out there' to be discovered and 'acquired' by new members. . . . Rather socialization involves a give-and-take where new individuals make sense of an organization through their own unique backgrounds and the current contexts in which the organization resides" (6). Certainly mentoring, as the institution conceives it, propounds the modernist view that new members will be assimilated into the prevailing culture, acquire the means to succeed in that culture, and happily ascend the designated ranks of academia. But what I was hearing from new faculty had less to do with the organization's expectations and more to do with their frustrations and disappointments in finding an identity in the department. They felt "talked at" and overloaded with information in the composition meetings. They expected a community to develop out of their shared enterprises as writing teachers; they wanted to be acknowledged by their colleagues as fellow professionals. In one instance an intelligent and energetic instructor who had worked part time for three years as a faculty member before being hired full time was rebuffed on several occasions by a senior faculty member. She had expected to join the conversation of the department, and she was bemused by her colleague's treatment. While this story has a happy ending—the instructor and another senior faculty member teamed up to do classroom research—stories like these (and their number is not small) often have no place for their telling, and as a result, new faculty experience further disconnection from their colleagues emotionally and intellectually.

The truth is that we as human beings value the social and intellectual exchange we have with fellow workers, and this exchange, when tempered and kind, provides a resource that nourishes us and gives us a perspective when we need it. Collegiality, a concept that crops up over and over in literature about mentoring, in promotion and tenure guidelines, and in jest about the more scrofulous and odd of the professorate, is a real and viable force in our professional lives. Mentoring—in its invisible space—is the place where meaningful exchanges take place that can affect the career of a beginning faculty member. Yet the structure, as it currently exists, does not allow mentoring to have a central and visible place in public universities, even in

those areas that house the humanities. The reasons for the continuing silence and invisibility of this area of teaching are myriad and complex. A compelling argument considers the perspective of gender in framing the issue. Once again I quote from Shelley Park's essay:

> Women (and minority) faculty are more likely to devote time to service activities insofar as they are more likely than white men to perceive the need for change in the policies, procedures, and institutional structure of the university. . . . They may also freely devote time to mentoring their more junior colleagues. . . . In 1989-90, for example, 86 percent of women cited collegiality as professionally important, whereas only 52 percent viewed engaging in research as important. . . . The notion that female faculty should cut back on their teaching and service work in order to devote more time to their research makes sense only if one prioritizes women's individual efforts to advance within the system over women's collective efforts to transform prevailing norms and practices. It thus ignores the fact that faculty women may feel a responsibility to, and a compassion for, both their female colleagues and their female students, in addition to women outside the academy. (59)

My own experience has been that even when an institution endorses mentoring as a valuable kind of teaching, the prevailing culture of the academy fails to acknowledge and reward it in any sustained and identifiable way. As one of the triumvirate of "Teaching, Scholarship, and Service," mentoring, and consequently supervision, which are largely relegated to women faculty, are not acknowledged in the area of service but rather are relegated to sub-categories of teaching. If an institution subscribes to valuing the scholarship of teaching, then research in this area may count, but if scholarship is constricted by discipline, then writing about mentoring will not be considered a legitimate scholarly activity.

My formal position as faculty mentor was terminated after just one semester because of budget constraints. A growing student population and shrinking funds demanded that I return to the general-education classroom. The abrupt ending to my formal mentoring relationship with the instructors, I realize now, did not give me the opportunity to move into what I have been doing while writing this essay—reflection. While I kept in contact with most of them, it was neither systematic nor sustained. I did work closely with three as they wrote first drafts of narratives for their annual review with the department chair, and I gave a workshop for four instructors preparing portfolios for institutional review in their third year. Inherent in the exercise

of these reviews and the creation of a professional portfolio is self-reflection—*through writing*. As reader/editor I posed questions that asked for reflection and re-evaluation. These conversations served to give some closure to our mentoring relationship as well as to their first year in the department. During the summers, I continue to read portfolio narratives for junior colleagues who will be reviewed the following year, and as the department grows, the need grows. I have other projects to work on, but still I am committed to mentoring faculty who ask me for help. This inquiry topic, I realize, bears continual and sustained investigation.

Why, then, do I continue in this work that has no visible place or tangible reward in my workplace? Because I, like many, see my professional identity in mentoring. My agenda is both personal and political since gender does matter. I believe that "one of the primary barriers to success for female faculty is the 'lack of a supportive, even hospitable, climate'" (Park 60). More to the point, I have evidence in more than twenty years of experience in the university that women, when they have been mentored, are advised to give their time to research. Like Park, I think that

> advising women to refuse anything more than minimal teaching and service responsibilities in order to pursue their research arises from a masculine perspective that mirrors sexist attitudes outside the academy. Such advice assumes that . . . teaching, advising, mentoring, and nurturing students . . . are unimportant, uncreative, and unchallenging tasks. (74-75)

How I conceive of myself as a mentor in my particular university environment gives me insight into my own choices and how they resonant in a larger context. I recall a "Mentor Motivation Checklist" in *The Mentor's Guide* that asks for a yes or no answer to these "reasons that mentoring appeals to me":

> I like the feeling of having others seek me out for advice or guidance. I find that helping others learn is personally rewarding. I have specific knowledge that I want to pass on to others. I enjoy collaborative learning. I find working with others who are different from me to be energizing. I look for opportunities to further my own growth. (Zachary 69)

Shouldn't every teacher answer "yes" to all of the above? Wouldn't just about any white-collar worker? Or any conscientious Wal-Mart employee? Political agenda is embedded in every reason, but nowhere is the **structure**—which is determined by those in power—defined or addressed. My belief is that teachers can change the structure—that we have no choice if we want humanity—all of it, including Bartleby—to benefit. Mentors of all sorts

can "facilitate effective learning relationships" and guide and reflect and coach. But I want more than that. I want a structure based on collegiality and fairness, one that does not tolerate unkindness (courtesy is essential in a civilized culture) or injustice. I hold these truths, and as a teacher of literature, I endorse and promote them in my classroom. I intend to extend my classroom and act upon my beliefs. My institution endorses the rhetoric. My immediate administrators gave space and a voice to mentoring, even if it was for just a semester. There is acknowledgement here, where I am, that mentoring as teaching is a worthwhile human endeavor. I quote Parker Palmer who writes that "Mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance, and one of teaching's great rewards is the daily chance it gives us to get back on the dance floor. It is the dance of the spiraling generations, in which the old empower the young with their experience and the young empower the old with new life, reweaving the fabric of the human community as they touch and turn" (25). It is why I became a teacher in the first place: to join the archetypal dance. Finally, I believe that all of us in this profession of teaching have no choice. We must commit to this common cause of our humanity. We must join the dance.

Reflection

My mentoring assignment began about the same time as my involvement in our teacher inquiry community. I was given, for that fall semester, a course reassignment in my department to serve as mentor for six newly hired instructors and four instructors hired the previous year. A year earlier I had petitioned my chair for the reassigned time necessary for this absolutely crucial work of mentoring. In the spirit of the times, budget would not allow it. But this time I had done my homework: during the annual review with my department chair, I presented how little research had been done on faculty mentoring faculty in the university. I proposed a design in practical what–I–would–do terms. So, granted the time I needed, my year began with promise.

I saw my new engagement with teaching as full of potential in the scholarship of teaching arena. Since I had been informally mentoring for over ten years, I figured the luxury of time and endorsement of the institution would afford me the leisure of reflection and the means to document my reflections and my experience. Thus, when I joined this book project's team, my topic was evident from the first: my writing would center on mentoring my instructor colleagues. I would have a chance to define mentoring, query how it differs from classroom teaching and conferencing and, most important to me, find out why I had for so long given my time and energy to an endeavor that had no visible rewards. Here was my perfect laboratory.

But by the time our inquiry community started meeting, I had already encountered many constraints in my efforts to serve as a collegial mentor. Therefore, my first draft revealed my own disillusionment and the anger that was obscuring any analysis I intended. I took very brief notes to the fall workshop of the whole inquiry community. We met first in the large-group setting with directed writing and intensive discussion of our overarching project questions. Then our small writing group read and annotated each other's pieces. George and Debby seemed pretty far along; Carol and I were still sketching, but at least Carol had a clear focus and outline.

Our next writing group get-together was in December. On a dreary and cold day, we met in the late afternoon. I admit that I approached the task with a tired resignation; I had a stack of final exams that I needed to read and return, and my mindset was grim—just get it done, I thought. Instead, I realized connections I had not made before: Debby's and Carol's and George's topics touched on mine in a very real way. Managing one's life, keeping all the balls in the air: this dilemma of Debby's was central in every conversation I had had so far in my mentoring the instructors. Building a community of trust and cooperation in a portfolio classroom—George's goal—was a central concern of instructors who had been teaching for a few years and were now growing into reflective practitioners. Carol too was examining mentoring—how to lead preservice teachers toward productive teaching models. Through our conversation, I had the revelation that my subject—mentoring—was something each member of our group cared about. Two of my colleagues gave me examples of applied mentoring that helped push my thinking. In addition, Debby had done research on mentoring in graduate programs, and she shared that information with me.

It was more than the conjunction of the topics we were writing on that jolted me that gray afternoon, however. It was the process that I saw Debby and George and Carol working through in their drafts and revision. They startled me with their sheer honesty about the conflicts in their teaching settings—different from, yet so similar to my own. Their studied restructuring to clarify their ideas was a sharp contrast to my six (yes, still only six) pages consisting solely of grievances punctuated with anecdotes. My thinly veiled anger at what I saw as injustices in several institutional arenas was neither reflective nor very professional. My group let me talk through my anger, though. They listened to my frustration with the lack of recognition in my workplace for peer mentoring, and this "group therapy" moved me intellectually toward more scholarly investigation. Caught up in the emotion of my politics, I had forgotten my audience. I had forgotten how alienating anger is and how tedious preaching is. My group helped me get the emotion out and then draft beyond it.

Through their questions and stories, I saw that I was reacting, not reflecting, and in reading the models of their writing, I realized I had a long way to go.

I began by tempering my approach. I went back to my research into the topic of mentoring in higher education. Having merely glanced at the scholarship before, I was now looking closely and critically. My results were revelatory.

In the months that followed, and through numerous meetings, I learned to draft, draft, draft. I learned to let go of sentences I adored and paragraphs I prized. I learned to open up to criticism that was directed at my ideas, not at my emotional responses to my situation. I learned that I have to get to the issues and ideas through writing, and then refine them in more drafting. Once revision refined my thinking, I could combine head and heart in prose that flowed and, I hoped, persuaded.

Meanwhile, my writing group's talk about how energizing and productive their work was with their colleagues opened my eyes to my own alienation and helped me focus instead on the possibilities inherent in my own situation. Together we acknowledged that mentoring was nominally recognized though not always compensated. Teaching is a form of mentoring, and conversely mentoring means teaching.

Through the mentoring of my small group, I moved beyond the disappointment and defeat shadowing that early draft of my paper to an enlightened, analytical view of mentoring in teaching. While I thought I had cleared my own political agenda, I had not. I had to examine my own motives for drafting a screed narrating isolated incidents in a department under stress in a time of great growth and shrinking budget. My colleagues helped me to channel my righteous indignation. My group gave me a perspective on the tone of voice in my writing. They wanted me to focus, not on me, but on how the system could be changed, and so my shift in direction resulted in a change in tone and in my truly finding a voice and hope. The hope spurred me to research and to read, and my succeeding drafts moved to a tone of inquiry. As a result, my writing gained a clarity that would give visibility and a voice to my topic.

And so my essay did a complete turn. Mentoring and its place in university culture were now my overriding concerns. I questioned whether mentoring in the university—if it occurred outside the classroom—was validated within the profession. I realized my group was mentoring me by holding up for me that mirror I had so many times held up for my students, one that I was now holding up for my new colleagues whom I was mentoring. As I recorded my group's perspectives, I saw once again the truth of what we tell our students: writing down makes clear what we think. I set up a series of questions for myself, beginning with "In a mentoring process, can feedback from a sympathetic colleague provide the shift in perspective necessary for clear seeing and clear thinking?"

Reflection had grown into a series of questions that I wanted to address. Only then did I move forward to articulate my own dilemma as one within the teaching profession: how to make visible the mentoring that is inherent in all teaching

relationships **if they are meaningful**. *This space is yet to be named; we call it the "interpersonal" area. It doesn't carry the rant and rhetoric of politics because its outpost is the heart. That's what I came to write about, because I now had a hopeful reason to write. I had an audience who cared. I had compassionate human faces in my mind when I researched and wrote and revised.*

Our regular meetings ran more than a year. In fact, we continued meeting into a second fall, four months after other groups had finished their first round of revisions: we were the late bloomers, the long marchers. I look back over that year and a half working with George and Debby and Carol, and I see how their experiences had engaged me, and at the risk of being sentimental, how our conversations lifted my spirits and took me back to a place of vision and hope, away from the cynicism that had slowly crept into my view of my profession.

We are all afraid to show what we write in early stages. The more we draft and show, however, the easier it becomes to strip away the unnecessary and to refine. And once that final revision is before a writing group, the pride is a community one That's the graduation dance, the best one of all.

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