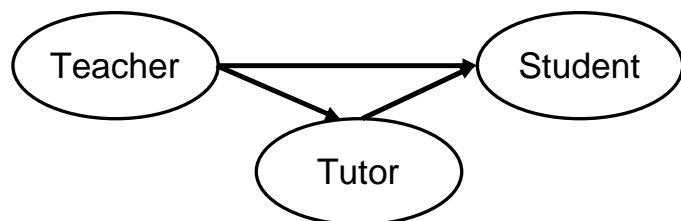


## Proximal Mentoring

Dissertation Defense  
Ms Gunn  
November 14, 2008

- 50% non-completion in doctoral programs
  - Dorn & Papalewis, 1997
- Admissions to doctoral programs growing
- Support by faculty for students
  - Hagar, 2003; Bean, Readence, Barone, & Sylvester, 2004; Palincsar & Brown, 1998
- Support by students for students
  - Tutoring
    - Dorn & Papalewis, 1997
  - Social Peer Mentoring
    - Dorn & Papalewis, 1997
  - Apprenticeship
    - Legitimate Peripheral Participation - Lave & Wenger, 1991

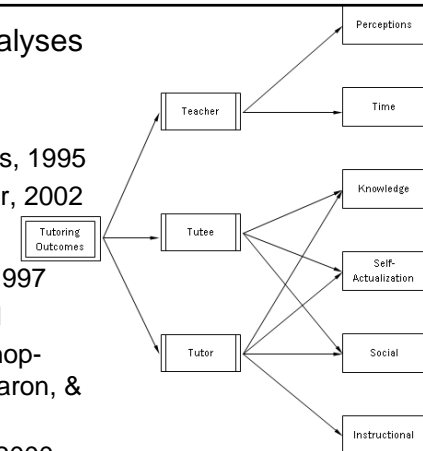
## Introduction



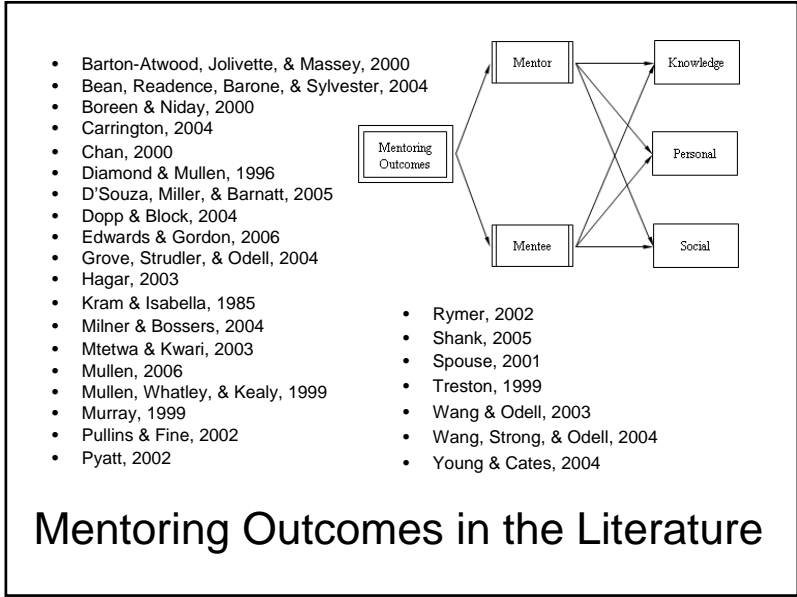
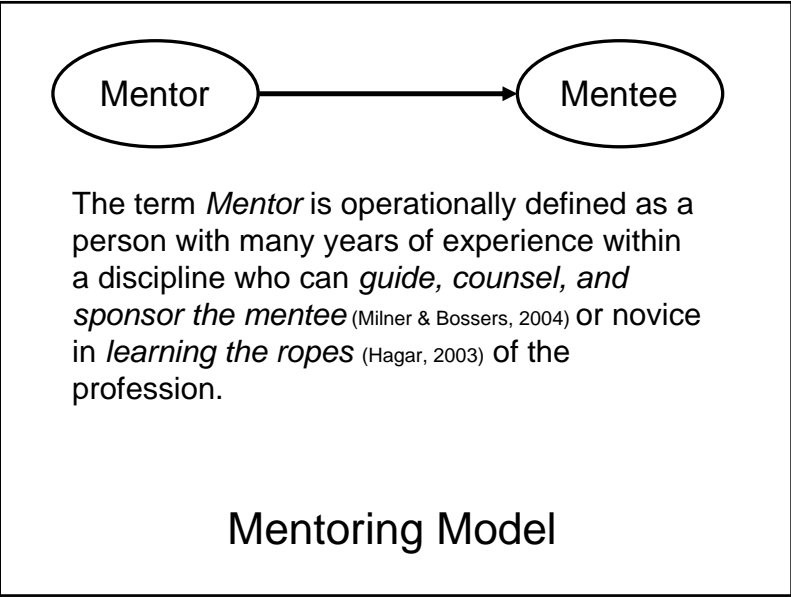
The term *Tutor* is operationally defined as “the process by which a competent pupil, with minimal training and with a teacher’s guidance, helps one or more students . . . learn a particular skill or concept” (Thomas, 1993, p. 1).

## Teaching Model

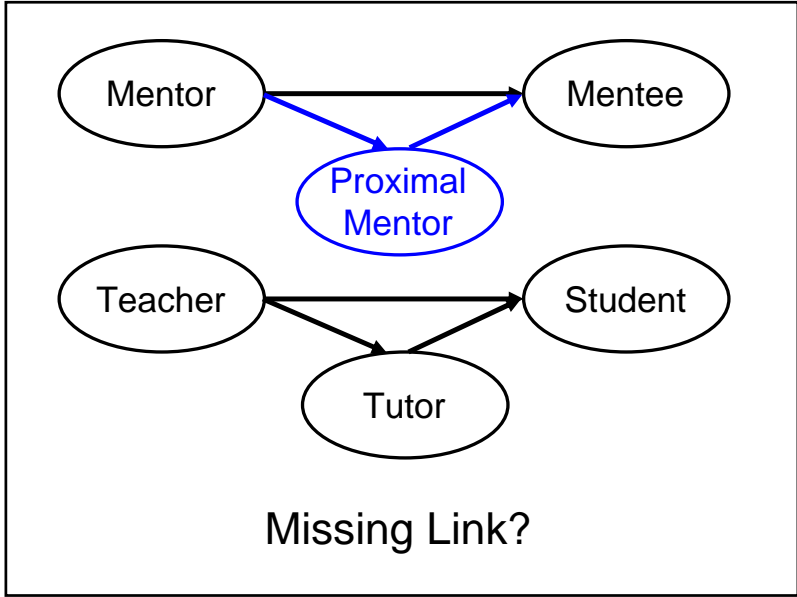
- Tutoring Meta-analyses
  - Topping, 1995
  - Kalkowski, 1995
  - Magin & Churches, 1995
  - Townsend & Mohr, 2002
- Peer Tutoring
  - Brenno & Teaff, 1997
  - Greenwood, 2001
  - Gut, Farmer, Bishop-Goforth, Hives, Aaron, & Jackson, 2004
  - Thrope & Wood, 2000



## Tutoring Outcomes in the Literature



- The current mentoring paradigm relies on self-report to elucidate the benefits of mentoring to the mentor.
  - Mentors may be receiving benefits from the mentoring process that they do not acknowledge or perceive.
  - It may be that the mentor is so focused on the success of the mentee, any benefits to themselves are over (or under) looked
    - Pullins & Fine, 2002
- Reports of Mentor Benefits**



- A Proximal Mentor (PM) would be someone who is slightly more advanced, or knowledgeable, than the novice learner and who is vested in the novice's learning needs.
- A PM is not a peer in the traditional sense.
- A PM can be older, younger, or the same age as the novice learner.
- A PM can hold the same job title or position as the novice learner.
- What separates the PM from the novice learner is recent knowledge or experience in the discipline.

### Proximal Mentor (PM)

- Investigate adding the construct of *Proximal Mentoring* as a unique way for students to develop continuing expertise while providing an additional level of support to the educational process based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978, 1987).

### Purpose

- Obtain the perceptions of *Proximal Mentoring* from **all the participants** in order to clarify and define the role of the *Proximal Mentor*.

### Goal

1. What are the perceptions of the course professor regarding the role of the proximal mentor?
2. What are the perceptions of the mentees regarding the role of the proximal mentor?
3. How do the mentors come to negotiate, define, and express the proximal mentoring role?
4. What outcomes will be obtained by the proximal mentors after having participated in proximal mentoring?

### Research Questions

- Vygotsky's Theory of Learning and Development (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978, 1987)
  - Two central ideas:
    - Reciprocal relationship of thinking and speech
    - Internalization of higher psychological functions (social to intrapsychological)
  - Development is
    - “progressive unfolding of meaning inherent in language through the interaction of speech and thought” (Bruner, 1987, p. 11)

## Theoretical Framework

- Actual Developmental Level (ADL)
  - Mental development **retrospectively**
    - What the learner can do independently
    - Determined after the learning takes place
- Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)
  - Mental development **prospectively**
    - Functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturing
    - What the learner can do with assistance
- Process is recursive and progressive

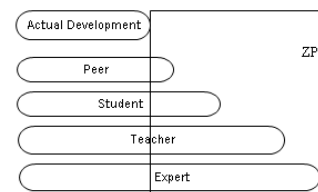
## Vygotsky's Developmental Levels

- In order to examine learning, Vygotsky (1962) reflected on the social aspect of education:
  - Language is the common denominator in all social interactions.
  - Without language (a symbol system of some sort) active, conscious, self-directed learning could not happen.
- Understanding the relationship between language in use and thinking is crucial for understanding higher mental functions.

## Learning is Social

- ZPD in adult learning
  - Instruction becomes a collaborative mentoring process
    - Collaboration
    - Instruction
    - Dialogic discourse

### Idealized\* ZPD



\*Situated in context.

More research is necessary to determine the actuality of the ZPD

## Extending the ZPD to Adult Ed

- Qualitative Cross-Case Study
  - Case 1 – 2<sup>nd</sup> semester doc students / EPY Master’s students
  - Case 2 – 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> year doc students / 1<sup>st</sup> semester doc students
- Why Case Study?
  - Proximal Mentoring is an educational innovation that could “affect and perhaps even improve” educational practices (Merriam, 1998, p. 41)

**Design**

Differences	Case 1	Case 2
PM Experience	1 <sup>st</sup> time PMs	2 <sup>nd</sup> time PMs
Time with PMs	8 weeks	14 weeks
Assessments	3 tests of multiple choice and short answer essay 1 group presentation	Final culminating paper
Content	Read 1 chapter per class meeting	3-5 Empirical articles per week plus 1 page critique on each article
Nature of Course	Lecture	Seminar
Level of mentees	Master’s students	Novice Doctoral Students

**Structural Differences**

Spring 2006	Fall 2006
Master’s Adolescent Development Course	Doctoral History & Philosophy of Educational Psychology Course
1 Professor	1 Professor
17 Master’s Students	18 first-semester Doctoral Students
3 Second-semester doctoral students (two of whom were students in the pilot study)	2 third-year (PMs in the pilot study) and 1 second-year (student-mentee in the pilot study) doctoral students

**Participants**

Data Collection Type	Frequency	
	Spring	Fall
Meet with professor	4	1
Mentor-only meetings	3	1
Pre- and Post-survey	2	2
Classroom Observations	3	2
Interviews	5	1
Online Discussion Questions	12	14
Focus Group	1	

**Data Collection**

- Conventional taxonomy and tabular formats were used (Spradley, 1980; Miles & Huberman, 1994)
  - Domain analysis – the search for patterns
    - Semantic relationships are identified
  - Taxonomic – categorization
    - Organize the data by central themes

### Data Analysis & Display

- Trustworthiness (issues of validity/verification)
  - (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002)
    - Credibility (internal validity)
      - Triangulation
      - Prolonged engagement
    - Transferability (external validity)
      - Rich, thick description
    - Dependability (reliability)
      - Audit review of data
    - Confirmability (objectivity)
      - Constant comparative

### Trustworthiness

- Introductory interview with professor & PMs
- Introduction to students in course
  - Collect pre-survey info
  - Divide students into PM groups
    - Stratified random sampling
- Weekly PM online discussion questions
- Observe:
  - Classes, groups, PM meetings, PM meetings with professor
- Concluding post-survey info
- Focus Group (spring PMs and pilot study PMs)

### Procedure

- Common: Achievement for all involved
- Fall Professor
  - Good papers were “as good as I have ever gotten”
  - More students could be classified as “doing well” in the course even though “I don’t think they were, on the whole, any smarter”
  - There were “fewer horrible papers”
    - Lack of understanding not the issue
    - Students admitted to not doing the reading

### Common - Fall Professor

- Spring Professor
  - On student tests from previous classes:
    - “I can actually remember thinking: ‘They are not taking this seriously.’ or ‘maybe they are in a rush and they are just kind of sketchy responses’.”
  - On student tests with PMs:
    - “These were very well expressed and thorough. I guess that is just a good descriptor, they were so thorough. That became more the exception. This time it was the rule that it was thorough.”
    - “The evidence that they had planned, organized their responses, supported their examples, made very strong arguments -- so I was really pleased”

### Common - Spring Professor

- Divergent: Enrichment
  - Personal (spring)
  - Research (fall)
- Divergent: Role
  - Extension (spring)
  - Partnership (fall)

### Cross-Case - Professor

- Common:
  - Role of tutor
  - Perceptions of graduate program
  - Variability of individual responses
    - Class format, working in groups, choice in PM
- Divergent:
  - Research study (Spring)
  - Perceptions of knowledge (Fall)
  - Fear PMs will replace professor (Fall)

### Cross-Case - Student

- Occurred in first 10 minutes of PM meeting
  - Spring negotiated PM meeting time
  - Fall negotiated for suspending PM meetings
  - Both groups agreed to do weekly online questionnaire

### Cross-Case – PM Negotiation

- PMs in both cases defined
  - a peer as an equal;
  - a mentor as one who has additional experience, wisdom, or knowledge who guides you through.
- They defined a tutor as one who teaches specific content.
- As with the student mentees, the PMs did **NOT** see their role as a tutor.

### Cross-Case – PM Definition

- Common
  - Lead, Advise, Respond
- Divergent
  - Contact & Research (Fall)
  - Depth of involvement (Fall)
  - Outside-of-class contact (Fall)

### Cross-Case – PM Expression

- Common
  - Groups
  - Learning
- Divergent
  - Depth of Experience
    - Answer lecture questions (Spring)
    - Theoretical stance (Fall)
    - Interaction with student mentees outside of class (Fall)
    - Involvement in research projects (Fall)

### Cross-Case – PM Reward

- This research introduced the construct of *Proximal Mentoring* within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as an opportunity for the PMs to re-experience course materials at a more in-depth level while providing mentoring guidance and assistance to novice students in the course.

### Summary Statement

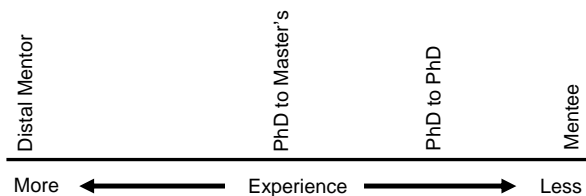
- Role of PM **NOT** seen as tutoring by any of the participants
- Role of PM seen as **NOT QUITE** mentoring in the traditional sense

### NOT Tutoring

- Spring –role was more teacher acting as a more experienced other within the ZPD of their student mentees
- Fall –role was more mentor providing program guidance, advice, and collaboration for the student-mentee acting as a more experienced other within the ZPD of their student mentees.

### PMs in the ZPD

- Research into mentoring as a continuum to extend the Mentor – Mentee qualifications and relationships



### Mentoring Continuum

- Professor's role in implementation of PMs
  - Insight into differences between teaching and mentoring
    - **Both** professor saw their role with the PMs as teachers
    - **Neither** professor saw their role with the PMs as mentoring
  - Reflection of professor on their role as mentor vs teacher
    - Would a professor shifting from teaching role to more a role of mentor help to reduce non-completion rate of future doc students?

### Future Research - Professor

- Is there a relationship between a person's view of knowledge and their ability to accept peer assistance in learning?
- Would an explanation of PM role change perceptions of expertise level of PM?
- Will students who received PM assistance complete doctoral studies at a rate better than the nationwide 50%?

### Future Research - Students

- What is the impact of prior knowledge on the PMs ability to act independently within the course?
- What is the most productive way of gaining the acceptance of students for the addition of PMs?
- What is the impact of future implementations of the *Proximal Mentoring* construct if all parties understand the role of the PM in the classroom?

### Future Research – PM Construct

- Study of the long-term benefits for PMs as well as for students who were *Proximal Mentored* to include investigation of:
  - completion of programs of study
  - increased knowledge of the subject matter
  - increased ability to interact in collegial and collaborative ways
  - long-term relationships with the student-mentees and the professors

### Future Research – PM Rewards

- Levels, grades, and/or years
- New teachers
- As another step in the transformation of novices to experts
- Ability of doctoral programs reduce the rate of non-completion

### Potential Significance

