Doing, Knowing and Being:

Bringing Athena out of the shadow to illuminate the mentoring archetype and to guide practice

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Julian Fulvius Lippi
Bachelor of Arts, LaTrobe University 1974
Graduate Diploma of Management, RMIT University 1991
Master of Business, RMIT University 1993

School of Management
Business Portfolio
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, this work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work that has been carried out since the official commencement of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Julian F. Lippi

Date:
Acknowledgements

Many people have given me help in my research journey. Of some of them I am very much aware, others touched me but fleetingly and yet others, I am sure, have contributed in ways that I am not conscious of at this time. I know I wouldn’t be where I am without your generosity and I thank you all profoundly.

My wife Sue Downes should have known better, but she supported and encouraged me from the start, believing that I would be successful even when I was well and truly ‘stuck’ and when the going got rough. Sue was more tolerant than I could have expected her to be when my research made high demands of her in our personal and business relationship. I appreciate that she was very understanding in the final stages of writing the thesis.

Associate Professor Carlene Boucher supervised and guided me through the process, helping me deal with administrative, scholastic and personal dimensions. Without her keeping me on a ‘loose lead’ this work not be what it is.

Professor Nita Cherry helped me to start my intensive personal and professional journey many years ago, walked beside me for much of the time and was still there helping and guiding at the end.

Associate Professor Rosalie Holian took over the reins at a critical point and helped me to find my way again when I’d temporarily lost Carlene’s guidance.

I would also like to acknowledge the very special contribution of three dear friends: Pamela Fitzpatrick for her enthusiastic belief in my ability as well as support and practical help with questions and suggestions, proof reading and helping me to manage the software; James Ford whose accurate diagnosis helped to keep me sane and for the ‘coffee and a bun’ chats over the past several years; and Deborah Mann who has cheered me on from the sidelines as well as taking over some of my work at critical times to allow me to have the space to think and write.
# Table of Contents

Declaration.................................................................................................................................................. i  

Acknowledgements.................................................................................................................................... ii

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................................... iii

Table of Diagrams ................................................................................................................................... vi

Abstract................................................................................................................................................... 1

Prologue.................................................................................................................................................... 5

Chapter 1 Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 10

Chapter 2—My engagement with the research: rationale and methodology27

Introduction................................................................................................................................................. 27

Developing an approach .............................................................................................................................30

Confronting the Hydra: Getting to grips with methodology .................................................................33

Philosophical paradigms underpinning choice of methodology .............................................................36

Locating my methodology and designing my method ............................................................................46

The use of the interactive holistic research approach in my research.................................................50

Sustaining rigour in my work ...................................................................................................................66

Analysis of the data................................................................................................................................71

Ethics ..........................................................................................................................................................75

Chapter 3—Mentoring ‘then’: a context for the research ................................................................. 77

Introduction................................................................................................................................................. 77

Mentoring as an ancient practice...............................................................................................................77

Mentoring as seen through myth and archetype ...................................................................................82

Archetypical images embedded in notions of mentoring ........................................................................85

The story of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice ....................................................................................................100

Chapter 4—When words fail: attempting to define mentoring

‘now’..........................................................................................................................................................106

Introduction.................................................................................................................................................106

Modern images and concepts of mentoring ..........................................................................................106
Interest in the value of mentoring ................................................................. 108

‘Arranged’ mentoring .................................................................................. 117

The literature and me.................................................................................... 121

Chapter 5—Contemporary accounts of mentoring: Stories from the data of others .............................................................. 123

Introduction .................................................................................................. 123

Story One ..................................................................................................... 124

Story Two .................................................................................................... 131

Story Three .................................................................................................. 138

Story Four .................................................................................................... 147

Story Five .................................................................................................... 153

Story Six ....................................................................................................... 158

Story Seven .................................................................................................. 162

Story Eight ................................................................................................... 171

Story Nine .................................................................................................... 177

Story Ten: The one that was almost left behind ........................................... 188

Chapter 6—Making sense of things ............................................................ 192

Introduction .................................................................................................. 192

Reflection on my reflections—what the stories suggest mentors do .......... 192

All models are wrong, some models are useful ........................................... 194

Back to the stories: What they say about what mentors are like ................ 209

Chapter 7—Stories from my own experience ............................................ 214

Things my father taught me ........................................................................ 214

What I learned at school ............................................................................ 220

University ................................................................................................... 225

The transition to the world of work ............................................................. 231

The Sorcerer’s Apprentice: Take 2 .............................................................. 233

Things I didn’t teach my son ....................................................................... 239

Reflections on my own stories: first take .................................................. 248

Chapter 8—Reflections on my reflections: expanding the dimensions of Athenic mentoring .................................................. 258

Introduction .................................................................................................. 258

A visit to the literature: some help from a Jungian perspective ................. 265
Table of Diagrams

Diagram 1: An Abductive Process of Logic ................................................................. 40
Diagram 2: Types of Qualitative Research ............................................................... 42
Diagram 3: The Research Continuum ..................................................................... 43
Diagram 4: Graphic Overview of Qualitative Research Types ............................... 45
Diagram 6: Graphic Overview of Qualitative Research Types with Interactive Holistic Research 50
Diagram 7: The Action Research Cycle ................................................................. 61
Diagram 8: Contextual Locating ............................................................................... 64
Diagram 9: Typical Doing Components for Mentee and Mentor ............................ 193
Diagram 10: The Mentoring Continuum ............................................................... 195
Diagram 11: Specialist Mentoring .......................................................................... 198
Diagram 12: Levels of Diagnosis and Learning .................................................... 200
Diagram 13: The Learning Spectrum ..................................................................... 201
Diagram 14: Levels of Diagnosis and Learning Outlined by Cherry (1995) with Archetypes Added ................................................................. 280
Diagram 15: Relationship of Doing, Knowing and Being to the Levels of Diagnosis and Learning Outlined by Cherry (1995): a Model of Mentoring Encounter ............... 282
Diagram 16: Relationship of the Elements a Person Brings to a Learning Situation That May Become Mentoring .............................................................. 290
Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the construct of mentoring and its transformative power in the development of the self. The concept of *Athenic mentoring* is offered and framed, in Jungian (Jung 1958;1996;2002) terms as an archetypical encounter between two people that can facilitate a significant transformative shift (*metanoia*) in the development of the personal and professional self. These shifts are initially at the level of ‘being’ but influence the more visible dimensions of ‘doing’ and ‘knowing’. ‘Doing’ and ‘knowing’ can be articulated in terms of practice knowledge and skills (Schön 1987a). ‘Being’ is framed in both Jungian (Jung 1958;1996;2002) and Rogerian (Rogers 1973;1996) terms as engagement of the authentic, grounded and integrated self, in ways that may be largely and initially unconscious, but that can be taken up in conscious awareness and are ultimately reflected in overt, observable behaviours.

Cunningham’s (1988) framework of holistic interactive research was chosen as a method that allowed the researcher to draw on, as well as to reflect upon, his own experience in order to generate data. Written narrative and oral story-telling (Reason & Hawkins 1988) have been fundamental to the creation and analysis of data. Indeed, the process of writing has been an important source of self-understanding, revelation and integration for the author. The power of archetypal story-telling – most obvious in the ancient stories of human challenge, development and triumph, such as that of Athena(Mentor), in the Greek tradition – is acknowledged and explored from this perspective. In this respect the researcher has followed Megginson’s
(2000) advice that research into mentoring deserves and demands ‘vivid stories’.

The research approach also reflects Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) suggestion that by staying close to the data (‘grounding’ theory in the data) before a deep immersion in the literature, the researcher will be more open to the insights that the data might reveal.

The starting point for the research was the researcher’s observation that, in the context of being a ‘hired mentor’ in an organisational setting, ‘turning points’ occurred that could be characterised as significant, transformational shifts in the energy and perspective of the person being mentored. While these shifts were reflected in important changes in work, choices and outward behaviour and practice, it was not obvious when or how the shifts had occurred. The initial research questions were framed as: what does the mentor do that leads to this turning point? and, can this be identified so that mentors can improve their chance of achieving it in practice?

Later, the research journey itself led to a broader and richer framing of the research questions as a deeper exploration of the level at which transformative development of the self plays out and the implications of that for mentoring itself. The initial research question eventually was reframed as: How does the mentor need to be?

Major sources of data were stories of ten people who have been in mentoring relationships (either as mentor, mentee, or both). The researcher’s own experience was also a significant source of the data.
In its presentation, the thesis attempts to ‘track’ and make transparent the ways in which listening to and writing down the stories of others, the researcher’s own stories, engaging with the literature and writing reflective notes iterated with the construction of this particular conceptualisation of mentoring in ‘Athenic’ terms.

Both contemporary Western literature (the majority of it American) and translations of Homer’s (1980; 1998) accounts of Athena as mentor were used initially to explore the nature of mentoring. Later, the Jungian (Jung 1958;1992;1996;2002) and post-Jungian (Hillman 1975;1996) literature on the notion of the archetypes; Buber’s (1996) conception of relationship as ‘I-Thou’; and Rogers’ (1996) evocation of ‘becoming a person’ all helped to describe more richly the dynamics of Athenic mentoring – both in terms of the nature of transformative personal change and the dynamics of the relationship that facilitates it.

A major outcome of this research is the differentiation of Athenic mentoring (which facilitates the transformation of a person’s ‘being’) from mentoring that helps to develop what a person ‘knows’ or ‘does’. This differentiation will hopefully contribute to our understanding of the mentoring process, but at the most pragmatic level, will make it easier to navigate the complex and poorly ‘mapped’ contemporary literature.

It is concluded that Athenic mentoring might not be, fully or even partly, recognised until well after it occurs, and that because it involves the pyschodynamic and largely unconscious interplay of one person’s dominant
archetypes with those of another, it is not something that can be easily orchestrated or arranged. This challenges contemporary notions (Burke & McKeen 1989; Murray & Owen 1991; Cunningham 1993; Hay 1995) that mentoring can be packaged, ‘commodified’ and paid for in a similar way to coaching and counselling.

As a stimulus for further work, it is suggested that the role of mentor can be understood as completing or starting aspects of the development of self that have not been initiated or concluded in the parenting relationship; and the possibility for being a mentor or a mentee continues throughout life, or for at least as long as there remains the possibility that a ‘Dream’ (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson & McKee 1978; Levinson & Levinson 1996) can be fulfilled.
Prologue

After a time of decay comes the turning point. The powerful light that has been banished returns. There is movement, but it is not brought about by force....The movement is natural, arising spontaneously. For this reason the transformation of the old becomes easy.

Fu – Return (The Turning Point) Hexagram 24 of the I Ching
(Baynes 1967, p.97)

Four years before starting my research I had an experience that at the time I found profoundly disturbing, confusing and inexplicable. It all began when I sat down in Bronwyn’s (a pseudonym) office after facilitating a workshop with her staff on some structural changes she had wanted to make to her unit. She had just been given ‘both barrels’ by her very angry General Manager – who had been told by an anonymous someone that the workshop was less than satisfactory. The General Manager told Bronwyn, ‘Something’s wrong out there. Fix it!’ He had blamed Bronwyn and now she blamed me, ‘You shouldn’t have pushed so hard. You should have stopped earlier. I wish we hadn’t done this. It was too much to ask.’ She seemed really panicky and destabilised. At one stage she apologised for ‘dumping’ and then immediately enveloped us both in a torrent of blame, fear, regret and insecurity.

Bronwyn then asked me what I thought we should do about her upset staff and my advice was to sit tight and do nothing until we had more data. Although feeling very stressed, I was trying to remain true to the model of change I had been following (Lewin 1946; Schein 1988).

To unfreeze a system means to create a motivation and readiness to change. Potential clients must feel some pain or some disequilibrium somewhere motivating them to seek help, and they must be able to accept help. In human systems where we are talking of changing perceptions, attitudes and behaviours, such pain or
disequilibrium usually involves the *unlearning* of something, not only the learning of something new (Schein 1988, p.94).

Bronwyn was certainly in pain and disequilibrium. Before leaving I arranged a further meeting to discuss where we might go next. On the day of our appointment I found a message on my answering machine saying, ‘It’s Bronwyn. I have to cancel the meeting. You can call me if you want.’ Curt and to the point, she sounded as if she really didn’t want me returning her call.

What I could hear on the answering machine made me quite anxious. I played the tape over a few times trying to listen for every nuance that might give me some clue as to how I should respond to her. I knew that I had to talk with her, encourage her to speak and let her know I was interested and listening, at the very least. When I called her back Bronwyn’s thrust was that there was no need to talk about what had happened; sweep it under the carpet! ‘Just give me a report focusing on all the positive things which came out of the workshop.’ I pointed out that we had generated a lot of data and that we should process it and formulate some plans and so get some real value out of the exercise. Bronwyn just didn’t want to know. As far as she was concerned, things were back on the rails. Everyone was fine. There wasn’t a problem any more – end of story!

I was finding our conversation very stressful and it seemed obvious to me that Bronwyn was very anxious as well. Although part of me wanted to stop the conversation and avoid the conflict another part knew that we had to continue. I pointed out that, as far as I was concerned, the problem had not gone away and that if we weren’t going to at least try to address it I would
have to withdraw from the project. She kept talking and I kept trying to convince her to work with me to unravel the data that we had generated.

Our conversation continued erratically, sputtering like the damp fuse of a firecracker, towards what I thought would be a final explosion. It was difficult for both of us, made more difficult because it was taking place on the telephone. I stuck with the task because I felt that this was the only shot I was going to get. I tried to draw on every trick that I could remember from my own experience and from the books I had read and the study I had done. I listened, I used feedback, I summarised, I enquired, I reframed and I diagnosed (as best I could). I concentrated on remaining ‘problem centred’ (Margerison 1988, p.54) and I tried to bring Bronwyn’s focus onto dealing with what might be the real problem. Despite everything I attempted throughout our discussion, Bronwyn remained in avoidance mode; squirming, twisting and turning, and apparently not wanting to face the anger, mistrust and blame that her staff were directing at her.

I can distinctly remember that, at some point, I just stopped trying to be the ‘professional’ and ‘fix’ the problem. I gave up all pretence of being wise or ‘experienced’ and simply said, ‘Are you happy in your job?’ After a pause she shot back, ‘You’re going to get me fired.’ When I asked her again she said she wasn’t going to answer. I didn’t ask any more ‘pointed’ questions, but just asked her about her job more generally. She started to talk about the issues at work, slowly moving to other things that were concerning her. She seemed especially discomfited by having to drop her young son off at the creche every morning and then pick him up again in the evening when she
was too exhausted to pay him the attention she felt he deserved. She was also concerned that she was not spending enough ‘quality time’ with her daughter. She talked about how sometimes work just cut across her arrangements and that, too often, she had to organise last minute child minding. I just listened, acknowledging what I was hearing. As she spoke I became aware that I was feeling a bit ‘sad’ and ‘flat’ and after a while the conversation ‘fizzled out’.

Two weeks later, Bronwyn called me to invite me to lunch and when we met she told me that she was leaving her job as a manager. She had finally engaged with and confronted what she previously wouldn’t admit to herself – that she hated her job and that it was not worth her while doing it. There was more to life than money and status. She looked and sounded so happy that day.

It was there that the questions began. So what had happened? What had helped her to change her life so radically?

Bronwyn had been stuck in a critical life dilemma; she was bogged down in the ‘swamp’ (Schön 1987a) with the knowledge that she hated her job and what it was doing to her and her family. She was faced with a ‘wicked dilemma’ (Cherry 2003) – if she stayed, she lost in a life-sense; if she left her job, she lost status, face, income and the time and effort she had invested in reaching the ‘lofty heights’ of her career.

At the same time I was struggling with a dilemma of my own. I had made a radical career shift in becoming self-employed and although I was glad I had
done that I was finding the work very difficult. I often had to draw on intellectual and emotional resources that did not come easily to me. Often, I felt like a fraud, acting as a ‘wise professional’ on the outside, but, on the inside, feeling as though I would be found out and found wanting at any moment. The moment of calm when I stopped trying to ‘make things right’ for Bronwyn and just reached out to her as a person, as ‘me,’ struck me as being quite different from most of what I was doing.

Although I did not know it at the time – and, indeed, for some time later – this encounter epitomised what this thesis is about.
Chapter 1 Introduction

But now the daughter of Zeus drew near them; this was no other than Athene, but she had the form and voice of Mentor (Homer 1980, p.270).

In this chapter I will begin by describing where I finished – the concept of Athenic mentoring that grew out of this work – but I will also describe where I began and the rationale for starting the journey at all. I will share my first encounters with the literature, as I tried to make that start and how that influenced my subsequent research journey. Finally, I provide an overview of the thesis and an explanation of the format I have used.

**Beginning at the end**

This is the story of my own Odyssey, but unlike the twenty years of peregrination of Odysseus my journey lasted only seven years! The mythical hero fought and struggled his way back home with the goddess Athena by his side at critical times. This thesis reflects a personal and difficult journey towards a place of understanding, rather than a physical place. But like Odysseus even when I had reached the shores of home, I did not realise it until I recognised Athena coming out of the fog as it lifted.

Through undertaking this work I have come to the conclusion that what I now call [Athenic mentoring](#) is a very complex process, where the participants are working in the soft and messy ground of the ‘swamp’ (Schön 1987a), consciously or unconsciously grappling with professional and
personal issues for which there is usually no quick or easy resolution – and that require deep personal transformation of the person concerned if they are to grow rather than stagnate or regress.

Engaging with these issues – ones that Cherry (2003) has framed as ‘wicked problems’ or ‘juicy developmental opportunities’ – is no easy task. If, as I contend, the transformative shift required involves both unconscious as well as conscious elements, it and the things which help it to happen (like mentoring) might only be understood in retrospect, after a period of integration and practice at an entirely different level. This might account, at least in part, for the fact that mentoring has been variously described as involving ‘magic’ (Daloz 1986; Murray & Owen 1991), ‘chemistry’ (Zey 1984; Antal 1993) and ‘soul’ (Kobor-Escobar 2000; Moss 2001) in the modern era, or as ‘fog’ in ancient myth (Homer 1980).

Archetypes (Jung 1958;1978;1992;1996;2002) have been offered as one way of describing the way humans deal with complex, recurring human dilemmas and practice issues. In this thesis I have engaged with the mentoring archetype as elaborated in the ancient and mythical tale of The Odyssey (Homer 1980) as a way of interpreting and understanding the phenomenon of mentoring. These myths offer rich descriptions, as the modern literature does, of the methodological (‘doing’) and epistemological

---

1 After Athena the Greek goddess who in Homer's Odyssey took the form of Mentor to guide Odysseus' son in his transition from youth to adulthood. See Chapter 3.

2 While authors and researchers have attempted to make distinctions between the notions of coaching and mentoring it has been my experience that the words are used interchangeably. For example, I have found that what is coaching to one person another will label as mentoring, and vice versa. In Chapter 4 I will explore attempts at defining and conceptualising mentoring, but as a general rule when I
(‘knowing’) elements of the phenomenon, but the mentoring archetype as expressed in the Homeric myths of *The Odyssey* also gives indications of the ontological (‘being’) elements of mentoring which may not appear as clearly in the modern research and practice literature on mentoring. The elements of ‘doing’, ‘knowing’ and ‘being’ are also explored in the thesis through *The Iliad* and the tale of *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*, as well as through the stories that mentors and mentees\(^3\) tell about themselves and their experiences, which I have accessed through structured conversations and story writing.

Mentors in the mould of the goddess Athena don’t ‘do’ mentoring on or to others. They also know that they cannot change another at a fundamental and deep level (when they are working in the swamp) by simply telling them how they should ‘do’ something, what they should ‘know’ or, most critically, how they should ‘be’. Like the goddess Athena, progenitor of the elusive art of mentoring, they bring themselves fully and authentically to the relationship and are present through the struggles of those they are helping – taking on whichever of the many roles, whether sponsor, guide, supporter, challenger or witness, is most useful to their mentee. In this way they assist the ‘other’ to not just take in information, but to engage at the deepest levels of learning which can result in metanoia – a fundamental shift or change. This word literally means ‘transcendence (“meta”— above or beyond as in “metaphysics”) of mind (“noia” from the root “nous”, of mind)’ (Senge 1990, use the words ‘mentor’ or ‘mentoring’ they can be taken to include ‘coach’ and ‘coaching’.

\(^3\) A number of terms are used, often interchangeably, for the ‘other’ in the relationship with the mentor. The most common is protégé, sometimes even in its feminine form of protégée, but many authors and researchers eschew its use because of issues of the power imbalances and inequality it may embody. Except
p.13). In Jungian terms, learning and transformation of this depth will almost certainly involve engaging with the shadow archetype – those parts of self that have not been integrated or ‘owned’ as a functional source of energy and which constitute serious blockages to the development of the personal and professional ‘self’. Using a different language and metaphor Levinson et al. (1978) and Levinson and Levinson (1996) tap into something of the same order when they suggest that connecting with, articulating and enacting the ‘Dream’ are the most important functions of the mentoring relationship.

In its primordial form the Dream is a vague sense of self-in-world, an imagined possibility of one’s adult life that generates excitement and vitality. Though its origins are in childhood, it is a distinctly adult phenomenon: it takes clearer shape and is gradually integrated within (or, often, excluded from) the adult life structure over the course of early adulthood.

...A life based upon a Dream has a special, vital quality; any other is at best a compromise and at worst a defeat. A dream that does not develop, or that has no place in one’s life, may simply die.

...A full, complex mentorial relationship supports the evolution of the Dream (Levinson & Levinson 1996, pp.238-9).

**Finding a point of departure**

When I began my research journey nothing was further from my mind than the ideas I have just described. My original intention was to identify and describe the turning point or breakthrough that I had observed and experienced on some occasions in what I then called mentoring relationships. These were mostly relationships in which I had been hired by an organisation to mentor a member of their staff usually a senior manager or a team leader at the ‘middle’ level of the organisation.

where it might lead to confusion because a different word is used by another author, I will use mentee(s).
The turning points were characterised by a significant shift not just in the person’s practice but also in themselves as a person. I couldn’t put my finger on what exactly had changed, when, or how, but something was noticeably different in these cases. I was intrigued by this and by the possibility that the things that lead to a ‘turning point’ could be discoverable, describable, transferable and learnable. My starting questions were: what does the mentor do that leads to this turning point? And, can this be identified so that mentors can improve their chance of achieving it in practice?

So at the very start of my journey I was firmly focused on what is ‘doable’ and ‘knowable’ that might then be learned, replicated and disseminated to improve the practice of mentors.

And why did I want to do this? What was my underlying need or concern? Firstly, I wanted to improve my own practice and so improve my ‘hit rate,’ so to speak, in relation to people I mentored and secondly, I thought I might be able to assist in improving the practice of other people who were being asked to mentor in the context of formal programs inside organisations. I thought mentoring could be ‘packaged’ and that if I could come up with a better ‘package’ it could be helpful to myself, other mentors or would-be mentors and organisations.

I had for a number of years been working with people both individually and in small groups, most often using an action learning frame (Revans 1980), to assist them with their development as managers and leaders. When I began to develop an interest in this project, formal mentoring programs were
beginning to be explored by organisations in Australia as ways of developing their people. I found that my own practice as a ‘hired mentor’ was on occasions yielding some very positive and sometimes apparently transformational changes for the people with whom I was working, but I did not know why I was achieving those results sometimes and not achieving them at other times. It says something about my mental model at the time that I even thought of mentoring in terms of ‘achievement’ and something that I ‘did’. I was puzzled because many positive outcomes appeared to occur spontaneously and intuitively rather than being based on a foundation of knowledge and understanding. And what was actually happening was different from case to case, at least to casual observation.

As a result, I conjectured at that time that I might be acting on the basis of ‘tacit knowledge’ (Polanyi 1967;1974; Schön 1987b) and I was hoping that, through my research, I could better understand, at a conscious level, what happens in the mentoring relationship and make my tacit knowledge explicit.

Mentoring is a management development strategy commonly used in organisations and, according to Storey (1992) by the early 1990’s had become particularly used by organisations attempting to encourage members of minority groups into managerial and other non-traditional roles.

Much of the writing about mentoring that I was exposed to when I began my research concentrated on describing the implementation of mentoring programs (Nankervis, Compton & McCarthy 1993) or on identifying the uses
of mentoring in organisations (Storey 1992). For reasons that I will describe later in this chapter, I quickly realised that the literature was not clear on one fundamental point: the nature of mentoring itself. From what I had thought of as relatively simple questions, I found myself in a sea of conceptual confusion, with no shoreline in sight. I was ‘lost’ before I had even properly started, with little idea of where and how to start. Eventually I realised that my questions about how to ‘do’ it were not going to be answered until I was able to clarify what the mentoring relationship was. My research journey is about how I came to understand and ‘frame’ the nature of the mentoring relationship and to identify the ways in which the mentoring relationship is different from other relationships.

I believed at the start that this study would – and I still believe it will – be of practical value to individuals and organisations interested in developing the capability of leaders and managers in organisations. A reading of Enterprising Nation (1995) – or Karpin Report⁴ – highlighted for me the pressing need for more effective training and development of Australian managers at all levels. The Karpin taskforce had spent three years consulting stakeholders and undertaking research into how Australian leaders and managers were trained. Its report presented a number of solutions for the problems facing business leaders, managers, educators and policy makers in developing improved managerial competency at all levels of enterprise. In acknowledging the limitations of classroom based development programs and the need for alternative,
practice-based approaches to the development of management and leadership capability the Karpin Report made me think that gaining a better understanding of how mentoring works could be a useful contribution in that larger context.

As things turned out my thinking has shifted to an even larger context – that of life itself, and the development of the whole person, not just the practitioner.

As a novice researcher in this field (previously I had researched organisational change management), I did what I thought would be a helpful thing and consulted the literature. Instead of helping, however, this step almost derailed the whole enterprise before it had begun. I found the literature incredibly confusing. Many people were writing about mentoring and some were researching the area, but there did not seem to be common agreement on a definition of mentoring. My apparently straightforward question now became very complicated and rather more fundamental. What is mentoring? And how is it different from coaching, teaching, counselling or therapy?

It was some time before I found writers who seemed to share my confusion, and before I found them, I had almost abandoned the literature preferring, as I explain in Chapter 2, to let my research data and my own experience be my guide. I did, however, return to the literature and it is perhaps helpful at

---

4 David Karpin was the person charged with the responsibility of conducting a review into the training and development of Australian managers.
this point to share something of the way the problem of defining mentoring has been acknowledged in the literature over the past three decades.

My own sense of being in a thick conceptual ‘fog’ was neatly captured in Merriam’s (1983) critical review of the then current literature concluding that:

The phenomenon of mentoring is not clearly conceptualized, leading to confusion as to just what is being measured or offered as an ingredient in success. Mentoring appears to mean one thing to developmental psychologists, another thing to business people, and a third thing to those in academic settings (Merriam 1983, p.169).

Writing at about the same time, Daloz (1983) also highlighted the confusion in the field regarding a definitional framework.

With each thrust of research and application the term mentor has taken on different meanings. It has come to denote everything from a person who helps one establish a career to someone who teaches us about life, from an ordinary classroom teacher doing what he or she has always done, to a developmental guide who may function without specific subject matter at all (Daloz 1983, p.24).

An issue with which Gladstone (1988) also engaged.

It has been difficult to define mentoring because it is informal as pairing, as variable as the organization in which mentors and protégés find themselves, and as idiosyncratic as the people involved (Gladstone 1988, p.10).

In a commentary on the literature about mentoring in recent times, Clawson (1996) observes that:

Many people tried to define mentoring while it was popular during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The term became so widely used that its meaning in many conversations and papers became diffuse and difficult to recognize. For some it was teaching; for others coaching; for others counselling (Clawson 1996, p.12).

Hay (1995), writing about mentoring programs in organisations remarks:

Although I have referred to traditional mentoring as if it is a distinct and well-known approach, the real situation is far more complicated. The range of activities called
‘mentoring’ is very wide—ask someone what mentoring is and they may say:

• Showing people the ropes—and helping them to climb them
• Passing on knowledge and/or skills, formally and informally
• Looking after people
• Acting as a sounding board
• Helping people to put learning into practice
• Being a role model
• Being a guide
• Being a champion
• Talking to people about their careers
• Counselling
• Coaching
(Hay 1995, p.30).

And more recently Martin (1997, p.28) asked again what constitutes ‘true mentoring’. Matters are further complicated by the contemporary suggestion that mentoring can be done through the telephone, e-mail and the web (Clawson 1996; MacGregor 2000; Berry 2001; Brown & Dexter 2002; Byrne & Keefe 2002; Guy 2002; Lockyer, Patterson, Rowland & Hearne 2002; Ambrose 2003; Hamilton & Scandura 2003). The idea that mentoring does not need to involve some, or even any, face to face contact challenges the widespread notion that mentoring can only happen when individuals have an extended opportunity to be together – although it should be noted that there are writers (Phillips-Jones 1982; Hay 1995) who contend that mentoring can occur in the context of a brief encounter.

In common with many of the people I spoke with during the course of this research, some authors find it simpler to say what mentoring is not before attempting to tackle what it is.

Mentoring is not necessarily the forced pairing found in formally structured mentoring programmes. It is not the integration of women into top management positions. It is not misused Greek mythology. It is not a subtle indoctrination process. It is not a promotional tool. In fact, it is not self-directed at all.

Mentoring is an unselfish process. It is altruistic. It is interpersonal. It is a voluntary pairing of two individuals for mutual personal and corporate gain (Appelbaum, Ritchie & Shapiro 1994, p.70).

19
This framing of mentoring engaged me because it is both pragmatic and value-based. Seigel, Mosca and Karim (1999) are simply pragmatic in suggesting that:

The term “mentor” as it is currently used in the literature refers to a senior professional person who takes an interest in the sponsorship of a more junior professional. Frequently, these individuals are in the same organization (Seigel, Mosca & Karim 1999, p.30).

These definitions are consistent with earlier conceptualisations, such as Jacobi’s (1991, p.513) suggestion that mentoring relationships are helping relationships that are usually focused on achievement and include any or all of: emotional and psychological support; direct help with career and professional development; and role modelling. These relationships are reciprocal and personal. Mentors are more experienced, have greater influence and have higher achievement than their protégés.

However, the debate continues and Samier (2000) notes that in some cases, attempts at more finely based definition have resulted not in greater clarity but a blurring that renders mentoring indistinguishable from other helping relationships.

A number of other frequently referenced authors have developed schemes of mentoring styles or varieties, many of which separate the complex dimensions into separate roles to the point where mentoring becomes indistinguishable from a broad range of other supportive relationships or connections (Samier 2000, p.86).

Among them is Phillips-Jones (1982) who outlined six types of mentor: traditional, supportive boss, organisational sponsor, professional, patron and ‘invisible godparent’ – this last being the mentor you have when you don’t know that you have a mentor, the person who helps a protégé without them knowing it. She also includes as mentors the ‘secondary helpers’ who
are helpful to protégés in particular ways or at certain times often in what might be described as one-off situations. These may be peers, coworkers, neighbours, lovers and others who listen and help to generate ideas and can, in some cases, develop into primary mentors. Schein (1978) similarly includes ‘mentors’ who do not necessarily have a relationship with their mentees in his grouping of leader, sponsor, protector, agent or ‘opener of doors’, talent developer, teacher, coach and role model.

Zey (1984, p.8) elaborated a ‘hierarchy of mentoring’ beginning with teaching, moving through psychological counselling/personal support and organisational intervention to the highest level of sponsoring. Zey maintains that activity in any one of these spheres constitutes mentoring. Another model that constructs mentoring as a range of supportive relationships is Gray’s (1986) Mentor-Protégé Relationship Model, with its continuum incorporating prescriptive, persuasive and collaborative, and confirmative mentoring.

The approach of developing conceptual models that incorporate a range of ‘levels’ of mentoring contrasts with those who, over the years, have placed it at the higher end of a range of helping relationships, like Hunt and Michael (1983) and Kram (1985b) who characterised mentoring as the acme of the developmental relationships individuals have with family members, supervisors, peers/coworkers, subordinates and friends. Shapiro, Hasletine and Rowe (1978, p.55) also placed it at one end of a continuum of advisory/support roles in a ‘patron system’ of ‘protectors, benefactors, sponsors, champions, advocates, supporters and advisors’.
Interestingly, some writers have abandoned the use of the word altogether.
Semeniuk and Worrall (2000) suggest that because of its wide range of meanings it is no longer a useful word in the educational context and Megginson (2000) says that nothing has changed for him since his earlier statement that:

...[t]he definitive definition of mentoring is a chimera not worth pursuing, or rather, to pursue it is merely an exercise in power (“I want all you others to embrace my definition”) (Megginson & Clutterbuck 1995, p.30).

The problem is that observational studies of mentoring practice are rather thin on the ground. The only observation-based study that I am aware of is Kram (1985b) and I would contend that the vast bulk of published research in this area relies heavily not on observation, but on self reporting via interview, survey, questionnaire or a similar technique.

After more than thirty years of research and writing on the subject, it seems that we are left with very individual understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon and very little definitional agreement. This, in turn, affects the way research about the phenomenon is constructed. When she wrote, ‘Clearly, how mentoring is defined determines the extent of mentoring found,’ Merriam (1983, p.165) summed up the situation neatly, in my view.

After my own research journey, I am prepared to suggest that the way a researcher or writer frames mentoring will be significantly influenced by their own archetypical and deeply held experience of mentoring. I make this suggestion on the basis of my conceptual exploration of the unconscious archetypical dimensions of mentoring (referred to at the start of this chapter), but also on the basis of my experience of listening to stories of
mentoring, writing down those stories and, finally, writing my own stories of mentoring. Conceptualising mentoring in these terms, and from the base of lived experience, causes me to place it, along with parenting, in the category of almost ‘universal’ experiences that are very hard to write about with detachment.

Whether my position in this is accepted or not given the state of our ‘knowledge’ about mentoring at this point I would suggest, at the very least, that it would be very helpful if researchers made every attempt to surface their underlying assumptions and mental models (Senge 1990) so that their descriptions of phenomena might be better understood and interpreted.

**Living the question**

I want to beseech you ... to be patient towards all that is unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue.

Do not now seek the answers which cannot be given to you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now.

Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, evolve some distant day into the answer.  
(Rainer Maria Rilke, 1954, Letters to a young poet in Hayward 1997, no page numbers)

I had begun my research journey with the ‘simple’ assumption that mentoring consists of two people talking about things that matter to at least one of them, and that the other has some knowledge about it. I made the further assumption that I could somehow throw light on the intriguing ‘turning points’ that had triggered my interest in the whole topic. Faced with
the confusion that my early forays into the literature triggered, I had to find a way to be able to ‘live with’ and to learn from a much richer set of questions and ideas.

These questions and ideas became focused on an exploration of the level at which transformative development of the self plays out and the implications of that for mentoring. The initial research question eventually was reframed as: How does the mentor need to be? But getting to that point took a lot of time and happened well after I had engaged with methodology.

In Chapter Two, I present in detail the methodology that became the ‘stout vessel’ of my journey. I need to make it clear, though, that the only way that I could find to present the journey of ‘living the questions’ was to tell it as story. By that I mean literally telling the stories of others’ experience of being mentored (Chapter 5) and of my own experience (Chapter 7). But I also mean it in another sense. This thesis is actually a ‘story’ and its constructions or format tries to replicate the sequence of my thinking and experience. That process has been challenging, but in the end it was the only way that I could handle the material. So it is important to convey the ‘navigation chart’ of the journey.

Chapter 2 describes how I developed my research strategy and the methodology that I used for creating and reflecting on the data. It tries to explain why it was so important for me to become an ‘action researcher’ in the first person (Reason & Bradbury 2001a), where the subject of my action
research was the research method itself. This thesis has been literally built up from successive layers of reflection and reflection on reflection.

Chapter 3 describes my retreat from the challenge of making sense of the contemporary literature into the enticing account of the mythological world of Odysseus, Athena and Mentor, and the magical world of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice. This chapter helps to explain the beginnings of my engagements with the archetypical dimension of mentoring.

Chapter 4 moves back into the contemporary literature – and this is a distortion of the actual sequence of my journey. In reality, I visited the literature in a very systematic way long after I had written up the stories of others’ experience of mentoring (Chapter 7). However, for the benefit of the reader, it seemed more helpful to include the review of contemporary mentoring literature earlier rather than later as it provides a sense of the complexity and conceptual ‘disorder’ that characterises it.

Chapters 5 and 7, as indicated, contain stories, accompanied by my first efforts at reflection on them. In staying with the intention of being transparent about the journey of my construction of Athenic mentoring I have followed each of those story chapters with a chapter (Chapters 6 and 8, respectively) that tries to map how my thinking was developed, enriched by reflection on the stories and further visits to the contemporary mentoring literature, to the Jungian and post-Jungian literature and to the developmental perspective of Rogers (1996) and Levinson et al. (1978).
Chapter 9 concludes with a meta-analysis that tries to bring together all the strands of thinking to offer my conclusions and to suggest further avenues for inquiry.
Chapter 2—My engagement with the research: rationale and methodology

It is only natural that as societies change around the world, so must the disciplines that attempt to understand them (Walsh 2003, p.1).

Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined the way I came to frame and reframe the central questions of the inquiry. In this chapter, I describe the way I engaged with the issues of research design and application. I will try to tell the whole story, as it evolved, of my way of being a researcher.

The research literature suggests that the approach chosen by a researcher is dependent on a number of issues, including the overall aim of the research, the nature of the research questions, the paradigm or basic set of beliefs which guide the researcher’s actions (Morgan 1983; Guba 1990), the amount of control the researcher wishes to exercise, the level of intervention by the researcher, and the time and resources available (Brewer & Hunter 1989).

It is also influenced powerfully by the researcher’s interest in the topic and the way the researcher perceives it and its place in their world. This process is shaped by the knowledge the researcher already possesses, the values or beliefs they hold and the assumptions they make (Kuhn 1962). When combined with the study of human subjects, these elements form a rich soup that has both the potential to nourish and inform the quest for more
knowledge as well as to form indigestible lumps which may impede the development of new knowledge. I believe that it is important for the researcher to recognise this paradox and to make every attempt to be as transparent as possible in explaining their choice of methodology and how they have applied it so that others might more easily assess their work, its flaws and its contributions.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is quite common to become stuck at least once – and probably several times – during the preparation of a thesis. For me, getting to grips with methodology and being able to construct the methodology chapter was a major source of ‘stuckness’. It took a good deal of effort over a long period of time for me to become unstuck, but in the process I came to understand not only more about the various aspects of the different methodological choices and their appropriateness under different sets of circumstances, but, more significantly, why it was important for me to have a sound and transparent methodology.

A number of things helped me to move away from the ‘stuckness’ I experienced but finding the way forward was mostly accomplished by taking what might be described as a ‘Zen’ approach – by stopping the ‘doing’ and just ‘being’ for a while (Glassman & Fields 1996) – by reflecting on the stuckness itself and probing as best I could the issues which seemed to me to be so complex.

During this period of uncertainty, the main issues and questions that were recurring for me were these:
• Have I really been able to find a research method that fits well with my topic?

• Is it a method that interests and engages me?

• Do I really understand the ‘big’ research questions and issues?

• What if my methodology changes as I engage more with the data generated?

• What if the data disappoints and isn’t as rich as I’d hoped for?

• What counts as data?

• What counts as rigour?

• What if I can’t do this?

Those and questions very much like them would continue to confront me as I progressed my work. Having been able to answer them sufficiently to get ‘unstuck’ I continue to engage with them, to the extent that sometimes I think they have taken on more importance than the research questions themselves. For me now, developing and testing an appropriate methodology is like weaving the backing fabric of a fine hand-woven carpet. The weaver has to take the time to set up the loom correctly and painstakingly – the cords must be placed in position accurately and carefully, and stretched to the correct tension. It is only then that the work of the warp and weft of fine thread and colours can begin to be laid down. If there is a flaw in the underlay then it will be reflected in the finished work and its value will be diminished. I’m told that when they are buying fine carpets the astute
buyers resist the temptation to be dazzled by the patterns and colours, and look at the back of the carpet to determine its quality and value. So too with methodology – if it does not give a tight and strongly woven backing to the work, despite initial appearances the thesis begins to unravel over time.

In this chapter, I attempt to give a usefully accurate account of the process through which I tackled the development of my methodology so that I would have a strong backing for the weaving of the patterns of my research and analysis. I believe that giving a description of this nature is useful since the process not only helped me find a way to engage with the issues and write this chapter (and perhaps the entire thesis), but it also provides an example of how a postgraduate student whose practice is outside the Academy (and by comparison with academics lacks sophisticated and extensive previous knowledge of research constructs) is able to get to grips with issues such as these in practice.

**Developing an approach**

It would have been possible, although much more difficult for me, to give a purely abstract account of the process of coming to terms with ontology, epistemology and methodology; written with the cold eye of hindsight and with all the ‘lumpiness’ of the struggle of sense-making smoothed out and glossed over. Instead, I have chosen to describe my struggle, and struggle it was, because it occurred to me some way into the process of my research that having to make sense of things the hard way is in itself instructive. As I worked on developing my approach, the kinds of questions which cropped up, and the sequence in which they appeared, felt messy, all over the place.
and uncontrolled, not the ordered and logical sequences that may be found in a text book. As I talked to other candidates and academic social researchers, I eventually realised this is quite a common experience.

Morgan (1983) points out that the choice of research method assumes the creation of assumptions about and answers to the question: ‘What is being studied?’ He compares choosing a research method to the act of choosing the sporting equipment we might take with us when we go to play a sport. If we have decided to play tennis then we select the equipment fit for the purpose – tennis racquets. Our framing of the game determines not only the equipment (the tools of trade), but also the rules we will abide by, the context and location of the game, how many people will be involved and the relationship between those people. Our framing also determines the kinds of skills – and, perhaps, even the temperament – required of the player for them to be successful at playing the game. More fundamentally, at some point, all those of us who are playing have decided that the game is tennis and not croquet or badminton.

In retrospect, it is clear to me that a great deal of my initial stuckness came from not consciously knowing what game I wanted to play, how participative I wanted the game to be, as well as from the sneaking suspicion that I didn’t have the skills to play the game in any case and that my lack of skill would be revealed the moment I went out to bat – or swim, or pole-vault, or bounce the ball or whatever!
As indicated in the previous chapter, at the start of the project I was curious about the ‘turning point’ that I had noticed in the context of being what I thought of as a ‘hired mentor’ in organisations. The ‘turning point’ was characterised by a major shift in the person: not just in their practice but in themselves as a person. My questions were deceptively simple: What does the mentor do that leads to this ‘turning point’? And can this be identified so that mentors can improve their chance of achieving it in practice? I have already described my early approaches to the literature and the confusion I experienced. I found that my apparently simple questions were actually much more complex than I had realised. Even a satisfactory definition of mentoring eluded me.

I had only a fuzzy definition of mentoring in my mind and this despite the fact that, for a number of years, I was often engaged as a mentor as part of my professional practice as a consultant. Basically, I thought of mentoring as two people talking together about things that mattered to at least one of them and that the other one had some knowledge about. This is not a particularly sophisticated definition, but it was my starting point.

After a few false starts – during which I delved into the literature as I tried to define mentoring more precisely and found that it just generated more uncertainty for me – I decided that it might be most productive to let my understanding of the mentoring process emerge from the research itself. As a temporary measure to define the field of play at least roughly and to help me begin my inquiry, I focused on two definitions from the literature that seemed most helpful to me as starting points. One was Storey’s (1992)
definition that mentoring is a technique that assists individuals to reflect on their own behaviour and through reflection, develop or change their practice. The other was Mumford’s definition of mentoring as ‘… a protected relationship in which experimentation, exchange and learning can occur, and skills, knowledge and insight can be developed…’ (Mumford 1993, p.103).

While it helped me greatly to hold on to these definitions, the ‘boat’ that contained my original questions was in danger of being swamped by a tsunami of other questions. Questions such as: What is it? How does it work? Do different people need different approaches? Who can do it? Is mentoring something that can be ‘organised’ or is it something that works best if it grows spontaneously and naturally? Can you ‘sell’ mentoring to an organisation or a person? Or do they ‘buy’ it if and when they are ready? Is mentoring different from counselling, coaching and supervising? If it is, how is it different? Why does mentoring work very effectively in some cases, but not in others?

Clearly, I was going to need a strong research vessel to carry me through this sea.

**Confronting the Hydra: Getting to grips with methodology**

When I look back, my initial attempts at engaging with this sophisticated and complex area of the research process were both naïve and simplistic to say the least. As a practitioner rather than an academic I saw the task as a
simple one made rather more complex by the requirement that I be ‘scholarly’ in my approach to it.

I propose to elaborate my journey through the process of engagement with methodology in more detail than might otherwise be appropriate as I now believe that coming to grips with the methodology was an intrinsic part of my research. It was an initially frustrating task that sharpened my ability to think, to make links and arguments and to begin to understand connections and thematic consequences. As such it provided me with the opportunity to hone skills that I would need to draw on extensively as I laboured with the data generated by my research.

Casting back to Morgan’s (1983) metaphor mentioned earlier in this chapter, I felt that I had chosen the game by articulating my focus and interest as a researcher, but I still wasn’t quite sure how involved I wanted to be. For example, it was not yet clear to me if I was going to be a player, a spectator (or both), an observer watching, recording and analysing from outside the fray or a participant observer actively being part of the generating, recording and analysing of the data – undertaking research not on people, but with them (Reason 1988a; Heron 1996). If I stayed at arm’s length and dealt with my research as if it were a spectator sport, I would need to read and learn about the game, its rules of engagement and so forth. But essentially I would watch others playing it, listen to others describe it and read their accounts of it. If I became involved myself, then I would need to find a way to research my own experiences and the experiences of those with whom I worked ‘one-on-one’.
I would like to say ‘after much consideration’ but in reality there now seems to have been more flip-flopping about than focused consideration, I decided that I should get a better result if I were to try to be both a player and a spectator. However, the methodological challenges in getting involved myself seemed rather daunting. That part of me that has had some training in the ‘natural sciences’ maintains that striving for objectivity is critical to good research. If I started to research my own experience, how could I be objective? Would my data ‘count’ as real data? What were my data and when did I start generating them? Who else might know or care about what I thought or experienced?

As I attempted to engage with these questions, it became clearer to me that if I were to exclude myself from the research process then a rich lode of data would be quarantined from my work and not available for consideration by myself or by others. I needed to acknowledge that I was an integral part of the process and act accordingly. After all, most if not all of the starting questions were my questions, arising from my experience and not someone else’s. And they would go on being my questions, even while being explored with and enriched by the experience of others. Taking myself and my data out of the equation and attempting to behave as an ‘outsider’ rather than accepting that I was an ‘insider’ (Pike, Headland & Harris 1990; Bartunek & Louis 1996; Fishman & McCarthy 2000) became less and less feasible for me. At the same time, I did want to put my own experience and curiosity into context, to hear and see how others deal with these issues, discover new issues and new ways of framing old ones. To enrich my research I needed to be both an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’ (Pike, Headland & Harris 1990;
Bartunek & Louis 1996; Fishman & McCarthy 2000). My challenge was to find a research method that would allow me to do both.

**Philosophical paradigms underpinning choice of methodology**

In common, I suspect, with many practitioner postgraduate students – and compared with people doing postgraduate work in an academic context – being confronted by the contemporary literature on research methodology in the social sciences was a major shock for me. I experienced the literature as bewildering in its terminology, staggering in terms of the number of alternatives and possibilities being offered and confusing in its lack, in my terms, of clear signposts and agreed taxonomies.

In order to make sense of what seemed to be a myriad of methodological options and to gain an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, it helped me to first consider their ontological and epistemological status. The way researchers approach research depends on the assumptions they make about the nature of reality – ontology. For example, is there an objective ‘truth’ out there to be found external and independent of the individual or do individuals interpret the social world and so create their own ‘realities’? The underpinning assumptions that researchers have about ontology and epistemology are intimately bound together and have a direct impact on their choice of methodology and the way they attempt to engage with their research questions. These assumptions can also powerfully influence the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched as well as issues related to objectivity, researcher bias and validity of data and/or results (Blaikie 1993).
Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.108) maintain that the basic beliefs underpinning inquiry paradigms may be revealed when the inquirer or researcher answers three fundamental questions which are interconnected, so that the answer given to one question constrains how the others are answered. The first of their questions is the ontological question: what assumptions are being made about the form and nature of the world of ‘things’ and experiences (What is the nature of reality?). The second is the epistemological question: what is the nature of the relationship between the knower (or the would-be knower) and what can be known? And the third is the methodological question: how can the inquirer (would-be knower) find out whatever he or she believes can be known?

Although these questions may be answered in any order, their connectedness remains solid and constant. The answer to any one influences the answers to the other two.

Traditionally, in Western thought, two competing views on the nature of ‘reality’ underpin the philosophical debate in the social sciences: positivism and interpretivism. Positivists argue that causal relationships between phenomena exist independently of the observer, and that these can be discovered objectively by a process of hypothesis development and controlled, replicable experimentation to prove or disprove the hypothesis (Jones 1985). Researchers making observations in a positivist framework need to take an objective, neutral and value-free approach lest they contaminate their inquiry with their opinions and values. On the other hand interpretivists assert that meaning and knowledge about the world are
socially constructed, as is the human experience itself. For interpretivists, research is undertaken to understand how people interpret the world, either as participants, as observers or both. These two perspectives each give us very different ways of understanding the world and elucidating meaning (Susman 1983).

Positivist researchers seek out causal relationships by the application of what is known as scientific method – the development of a hypothesis and the conducting of a controlled experiment to validate that hypothesis. Applying this approach in a social context is dependent on a belief that there are natural laws or principles that shape the ‘way things are’ and that research can focus down and converge on the ‘truth’ – a reality that is ‘out there’ to be found (Guba & Lincoln 1994; Denzin & Lincoln 1998). The epistemology of a positivist approach assumes that the researcher and what is being researched are quite separate and independent, and that the researcher should not influence, or be influenced by, the research. Although this epistemology drives (successfully) a great deal of work in the natural sciences, even in that arena physical scientists themselves have contributed to what might be described as the Achilles heel of the positivist stance. The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle and the Bohr Complementarity Principle have challenged the ideal (some might go so far as to say the mythology) in the so-called ‘hard’ sciences that the inquirer, by using proper methodology, does not influence the phenomena being observed and vice versa (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Denzin & Lincoln 1998). Indeed, the understanding of contemporary physicists causes us to revisit the classical Western separation of the world
into something objective and real ‘out there’ and something human and subjective ‘in here’.

However, the positivist framework is still often presented as an ideal epistemology beyond the realm of the natural sciences. This ideal poses severe limitations for researchers like me who wish to investigate human understanding of human experience. Complex sets of interactions between humans happen within set contexts and time periods and for research under these circumstances there is no chance of going back and doing it all again. As Blaikie aptly and economically puts it, ‘History never really repeats itself’ (1993, p.18). When working with humans, attempting to generate the same results, at another time, even with the same people in a similar context, has proven very difficult, as the history of psychological research attests. Observation, description and perhaps some limited explanation might be possible, but reliably establishing causal relationships is much harder – hence the common practice experimenting with rats and pigeons instead of people in psychology laboratories all over the world.

As well, when one is researching social phenomena there is a well-documented interaction, sometimes subtle sometimes not so subtle, that occurs between the researcher and the researched (Riley, Schouten & Cahill 2003). Under such circumstances, control of an experiment to the degree required by those who operate in the positivist framework, is not able to be maintained. Some would say that for social researchers to even begin to try and intimate that control is possible in these circumstances moves us towards the realm of the absurd (Meyer, Goes & Brooks 1995).
The interpretivist ‘world view’ differs significantly from that of the positivist (Burrell & Morgan 1979). A key task for the researcher operating in this paradigm is to discover how the social actors create the meaning that guides and shapes their behaviour, and that helps them to make sense of their actions and the actions of others (Berger & Luckmann 1966; Burns 1994).

In order to gain insight into the socially constructed reality of the actors, interpretivist researchers must seek to understand the actor’s reality as they themselves perceive it and so go to the task of identifying and describing it as it is constructed by the actors (Berger & Luckmann 1966).

The process of logic used by interpretivists is an abductive one that does not begin by constructing one’s own theories or taking others’ theories and then testing them. Rather, it identifies and describes the theories and constructs of reality that the actors hold and use. The process can be encapsulated as shown in Diagram 1 below.

**Diagram 1: An Abductive Process of Logic (adapted from Blaikie 1993 p.177)**
It seemed clear to me as I studied the scholarly literature about research that I was working with a phenomenon that would be hard to see through a positivist lens, and that in fact my deep interest lay in the abductive process that Blaikie (1993) describes. I was, in fact, beginning with a concept in everyday usage that certainly provides a basis for a whole range of social interactions, both in the workplace and beyond it. My curiosity was in the accounts which social actors, myself included, would give of those interactions. And my wish was to construct a rich description and possible explanations that would enable me to answer at least some of the fascinating questions I was accumulating.

**The methodological question: How can the inquirer (would-be knower) find out what they believe can be known?**

Earlier I made the comment that there is a bewildering array of methodological options available to any researcher as they set out on their journey of discovery. Once decisions have been made about ontology and epistemology, in my view, the task doesn't get any easier. There still remains the dilemma of establishing which methods will be most helpful for generating and capturing data, data analysis and sense-making, generating explanations that might lead to conclusions and theory building. The following table (Diagram 2 below) developed by Tesch (1995) highlights just how complex the task of the would-be researcher is. The range of choices is almost overwhelming.
| action research | focus group research |
| case study      | grounded theory     |
| clinical research| hemmeneutics        |
| cognitive anthropology| heuristic research |
| collaborative inquiry| holistic ethnography|
| content analysis | imaginal psychology |
| dialogical research| intensive research |
| conversation analysis| interpretive evaluation |
| Delphi study    | interpretive interactionism |
| descriptive research| interpretive human studies |
| direct research | life history study |
| discourse analysis| naturalistic inquiry |
| document study  | oral history        |
| ecological psychology| panel research |
| educational connoisseurship and criticism| participatory research |
| educational ethnography| phenomenography |
| ethnographic content analysis| phenomenology |
| ethnography | qualitative evaluation |
| ethnography of communication| structural ethnography |
| ethnomethodology| symbolic interactionism |
| ethnosience     | transcendental realism |
| experiential psychology| transformative research |
| field study     |                     |

And while not wishing to detract from Tesch’s scholarship, there are, without doubt, some in the field who would argue that she missed at least a couple of options!

As Tesch (1995) herself observed, the problem with this list is not only its length but also the fact that some of the terms are synonymous or overlapping and that not all are on the same conceptual level. For example, some terms are used to describe the perspective of the researcher (‘naturalistic’, ‘interpretive’, ‘experiential’ and ‘clinical’); and some reflect the tradition of the field in which they are based (‘ethnography’, ‘phenomenology’, ‘symbolic interactionism’ and ‘ethnomethodology’). Other terms relate to the research approach used (‘discourse analysis’, ‘case study’).
and ‘action research’) and some to the type of data collected and the research location (‘document study’, ‘participant observation’, ‘field research’ and ‘oral history’).

In order to make easier the task facing the researcher in selecting a method, Tesch starts by identifying four major types of qualitative research that she represents on a continuum:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The research interest is in …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the characteristics of language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the discovery of regularities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the comprehension of the meaning of text/action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

*Diagram 3: The Research Continuum (Tesch 1995, p.59)*

Where the research interest is the *characteristics of language*, the researcher is paying attention to the specific words and phrases used to describe the experience and ideas of those who generated the data. The researcher could be interested in how language operates as a means of communication using techniques such as content analysis, discourse analysis and ethnography of communication. The researcher could also be interested in viewing language as a manifestation of the very culture in which it is used as the communication instrument. The methods used here are ethnoscientific, symbolic interactionism, ethnmethodology and structural ethnography.

At other times, researchers are interested in *discovering and describing regularities or patterns* in the data and exploring how they might be connected. Approaches that might be used then include transcendental
realism, ethnographic content analysis, event structure analysis, ecological psychology, grounded theory, phenomenography, qualitative evaluation, action research, collaborative research, critical/emancipatory research, holistic ethnography, educational ethnography and naturalistic enquiry.

Research that attempts to comprehend deeper meaning in the text or actions under study might use interpretative methods such as hermeneutics and phenomenology.

Research that is based on reflection uses intuitive processes or approaches that could resemble those used by artists. Educational connoisseurship, reflective phenomenography and heuristic research are methods by which the researcher seeks impressions and images which will stimulate others to create meaning for themselves (Eisner 1981). Tesch’s use of the term ‘reflection’ is very particular to her framework, since there are other methods in her framework – such as action research – that would claim to use reflection as a key element of the research work (Reason & Bradbury 2001a).

Tesch attempts a categorisation of these methods using a series of cognitive maps that she then builds into an overview of types of qualitative research which is reproduced in Diagram 4 below.
The research interest is in …

- the characteristics of language
  - as communication
  - content
  - content analysis
  - process
  - discourse analysis
  - ethnography of communication

- the discovery of regularities
  - identification (and categorization) of elements, and exploration of their connections
  - transcendental realism
  - event structural analysis
  - grounded theory
  - ethnoanalytic content analysis
  - ecological psychology
  - phenomenography

- the comprehension of the meaning of text/action
  - discerning of themes (commonalities and uniquenesses)
  - phenomenology
  - reflection
  - educational connoisseurship
  - reflective phenomenology
  - heuristic research

Diagram 4: Graphic Overview of Qualitative Research Types (Tesch 1995, p.72)

While Tesch has created an orderly picture, it is important to note that the orderliness has a certain fluidity to it and that in the real world of qualitative research there is a flow or leakage across the boundaries she has used to create the map.
Locating my methodology and designing my method

As I indicated earlier in this chapter, having decided that my own data were relevant but that I also wanted the benefit of the experiences and views of others, my challenge was to find or adapt a methodology that would allow me to do both of these things.

Tesch’s comprehensive cognitive map helped in that for the first time I had a succinct ‘snapshot’ which gave me a clear overview of the methodological ‘jigsaw’. Tesch’s (1995) metaphor of the various parts of her cognitive map being a ‘painter’s palette’ helped too. I understood that she had delineated the basic colours. I also understood the principles she outlined for mixing the basic colours to create a wide range of new and varied colours and shades. Her advice to the researcher about not being trapped by others’ definitions of their own research methods (colours) and to be prepared to mix their own shade was also very welcome.

But mixing the colours to create my own very special and unique methodology was a time consuming and often times frustrating experience. And despite the advice about mixing your own shades, there were many times when I found myself trying very hard to ‘shoe horn’ my germinating ideas about an appropriate methodology into one of the convenient niches presented on Tesch’s map. But like a pair of shoes that are too tight, the methodologies all too soon ‘pinched’ and felt not quite right for my journey.

I continued to explore ideas about what might or might not work but at times became quite despondent and depressed about the progress I seemed
to be making (or not making). However, a breakthrough came with my discovery of the work of Cunningham (1988) who describes a suite of methods which he called *interactive holistic research* (see Diagram 5 below).

In *interactive holistic research* Cunningham has done exactly what Tesch describes as mixing your own shades. He has linked four key and well-established methods for developing theory from practice: experiential research; dialogic research; action research; and, collaborative research – and has added a fifth element, that of ‘contextual locating’, a process by which one:

...feeds into and off the context within which one operates. So in this research there are people working in the field, writing about it, discussing it at conferences, etc. ... Hence there is an iterative, to-and-fro process which provides the basis for testing and evolving theory (Cunningham, 1988, p.166).

![Diagram 5: Testing and Evolving Theory – Interactive Holistic Research (Cunningham 1988, p.166)](image)

This approach appealed to me greatly, especially since contextual locating facilitates the linking and weaving together of insight developed in other
ways (Cunningham 1988). It seemed to me that it would be ‘tight’ enough to enable me to put rigour around my research journey, but flexible enough to allow me to engage constructively with all available channels of learning and experience. The other attraction of this approach is that the methods have as a key plank of their construction the interaction and cooperation of people as part of the research, whether it be through the smallest of groups – dyads (Bion 1959; Auster 1984) – or much larger and more complex and dynamic group systems.

The use of multiple methods is advocated by Babbie (1989) as a way of improving the reliability of the research as well as providing confirmation of data and improving rigour (Van Maanen, Dabbs & Faulkner 1982; Bouma 1993; Baker 1994; Strauss & Corbin 1994; Marshall & Rossman 1995). And my research has certainly been built through multiple channels. It has been stimulated by ideas that have been derived from my own experience as well as through talking with and learning from others. To have left ‘me’ out of the ‘game’ (Morgan 1983) would have been to ignore my role as a practitioner in data gathering, selection, analysis and theory generation. I was part of the research and the research was part of me, and the methodology of interactive holistic research and its key underpinning method – contextual locating – provided me with a vehicle that would allow my own experience to play a central and legitimate role in the research process.

In terms of Tesch’s (1995) cognitive map, I believe that interactive holistic research would be placed in the category of the comprehension of the meaning of text/action. It enables the researcher to explore the experience of
others and to directly relate it to their own experience in a systematic way, as well as doing the opposite: exploring their own experience and relating it to the experience of others.

However, it can also be argued that interactive holistic research is concerned with the discerning of themes in the data, the commonalities and uniquenesses (Tesch 1995) and so it could be situated quite comfortably next to phenomenology on the cognitive map. So I would suggest that if interactive holistic research were to be included in the cognitive map, the modified map would look like Diagram 6 below.
The research interest is in …

The characteristics of language as communication content analysis

The discovery of regularities as culture

Identification (and categorization) of elements, and exploration of their connections

Transcendental realism

Event structural analysis

Grounded theory

The comprehension of the meaning of text/action

Discerning of themes (commonalities and uniquenesses)

Phenomenology

Interactive holistic research

Reflection

Educational connoisseurship

Reflective phenomenology

Heuristic research

Diagram 6: Graphic Overview of Qualitative Research Types with Interactive Holistic Research

The use of the interactive holistic research approach in my research

As mentioned earlier, Burrell and Morgan (1979) maintain that researchers need to adopt ways of studying phenomena that are in line with the nature of the phenomena being researched. The focus of Cunningham’s research
was in the development of managers through self managed learning and so it has a strong consonance with my area of interest.

Interactive holistic research is built on the power of five methods: collaborative research; dialogic research; experiential research; action research and, contextual locating. Accepting that conversations are an intrinsic part of mentoring and that conversations are also at the core of four of the five of Cunningham’s methods, the choice of interactive holistic research as the methodology seemed to me to meet the criterion of Burrell and Morgan (1979). But ‘the proof of the pudding is in the eating’ and it was in practice that that I was to find out just how strong a methodological backing Cunningham’s model would prove for the weaving together of the data and their analysis.

In the following section I outline more fully each of the elements of interactive holistic research as described by Cunningham (1988); how what I did fits with the methodology; and what data were created by following this research approach. I take each of the five elements in turn.

**Collaborative research**

The underpinning principle of collaborative research is the gathering together of a group of people to investigate a topic or an issue with the researcher allowing the group to determine the process of research activity.

Cunningham makes a distinction between two types of collaborative research, calling them Type I and Type II. The first involves researchers examining their own experience in the group of which they are part. The
second approach involves people coming together to focus on experience that may be their own or someone else’s, but that has occurred outside the group.

For a key part of my data generation and analysis, I used a Type II approach bringing together two reference groups to consider data that I presented to them and to generate data based on the experiences of the members of the groups. The concept behind the reference group is that of the focus group: the bringing together for the research of a collection of participants who have a shared focus (Templeton 1987) as one of the ways of collecting data for a research project (Morgan 1991). Both reference groups consisted of people who had first hand knowledge of mentoring as mentors and/or as mentees. Some also had experience in setting up and managing mentoring programs in organisational contexts and evaluating the effectiveness of these programs.

Being mindful that a group conversation is quite different dynamically to a private one-on-one situation, I was very aware that data generated in the reference groups could be different from that generated individually – potentially either richer or more constrained and ‘thin’. Nevertheless I was struck by the fact that those who participated in the reference groups reported that their dialogue with others had enriched their own understanding of mentoring. This gave me confidence that the participants were not modifying or colouring (Steyaert & Bouwen 1994) what they were saying in the groups for either their own or others’ benefit.
My purpose in bringing the first reference group together was to explore with them their experience of mentoring – it was, very basically, a way of generating data through dialogue (Bohm 1989; Senge 1990; Ellinor & Gerard 1998). There were five people in the first reference group, all with experience as both mentors and mentees as well as with corporate programs. Their backgrounds were human resources, consulting, and senior line management.

My intention was to provide them with opportunities to talk together about mentoring from their own perspectives and experiences and to capture the conversations of the group for analysis. For five meetings over a period of around two years, I participated as a member of the group and kept my interventions and comments as a researcher to a minimum – allowing the group to talk about whatever it wanted in whatever way it wanted, with me interacting as much as possible as just another group member.

In line with my ethics approval process, I had sought permission from the participants to tape-record our meetings, and then the essence of what was said was captured using a technique akin to ‘mind-mapping’ (Buzan & Buzan 1996) where I would listen to the tape and capture the conversation by chunking relevant comments in thematic clusters, using coloured pens and large pieces of paper rather than transcribing the meetings verbatim. Once the meeting conversation was captured in this manner, a typed version was e-mailed to members of the group for their comments and verification.
Reference Group 2

The second reference group was assembled on a single occasion to review and place into the context of their own experience the stories that I had developed from my own and others’ experiences of mentoring. As well as having appropriate experience with mentoring others and/or having been in mentoring relationships themselves, a number of the members of this group were experienced researchers with very sound grounding in the capture, presentation and analysis of qualitative data. Eight people took part in this group.

My intention with this group was to use it to provide experienced reactions to the stories I had written from the data I had gathered from others’ and my own experience – to submit my material to the rigour of validation or challenge against the experience and knowledge of the members of the group. This approach is in line with Kvale’s concept of ‘communicative validity’ (1995, p.30) in which dialogue about the phenomena being researched leads to sense-making by the participants at the time of the dialogue occurring or later on. As well as providing analysis of and comment on the data as represented in the stories I had written, the process also generated another layer of data as the reference group interacted with the text of my work, with each other in dialogue and with each other’s experience base.

In advance of meeting, the group was provided with stories to react to and analyse, as well as a series of ‘trigger’ questions (see Appendix 1) to help them in engaging with the material. With this reference group I acted as a
facilitator only to start and end the process – it was not necessary to guide the group as it managed its own process well throughout the meeting. A tape-recording of the conversation was made and was transcribed professionally. The transcript was then e-mailed to participants so that they would be able to verify and comment on it.

**Dialogic research**

This method is focused on a two-person interaction that uses dialogue (Bohm 1989; Senge 1990; Ellinor & Gerard 1998), as its name implies, as a way of ‘finding out’. The research undertaken in this way took the form of deliberately planned, in-depth, tape-recorded interviews. Eleven people with experience as mentors, mentees or both were interviewed and the tape recordings transcribed professionally. Transcripts were sent to participants so that they would be able to verify and comment on them. Participants were selected from people I knew, or who were referred to me when I asked and who were prepared to be interviewed for the project. One participant took part as a result of a conversation at a conference (in a bathroom) with their partner!

In-depth interviews have been defined as ‘a conversation between researcher and informant focussing on the informant’s perceptions of self, life and experience, and expressed in his or her own words’ (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander 1991, p.87). By using in-depth interviewing (a form of structured conversation) a researcher is exposed to the personal experiences and interpretations of others. Unlike questionnaires, structured conversations preserve the language that people use when they talk about a
subject. They also help the researcher gain insights into others’ experiences and how and why their particular perspective has developed (Kvale 1996). Using in-depth interviewing allowed me to create ‘meaning’ with the participants in real time (King 1994).

The form of in-depth interviewing that I used was not tightly controlled and highly structured, but more free-flowing and ‘dialogic’ (Bohm 1989; Senge 1990; Ellinor & Gerard 1998) to allow the participants the flexibility of telling their own stories in their own time, emphasising or not, particular aspects as they saw fit. This is not to say that there was no structure at all to these conversations.

It should be noted that the series of questions that I devised for the interviews was not meant to yield the only answers that would be considered in my analysis – the questions were always meant to be thought-starters that would yield at least a minimum set of data while encouraging and stimulating the participant to offer whatever they thought might be relevant material. A list of the interview trigger questions is at Appendix 2.

I found that in all the conversations, the individuals seemed to cover all the areas I had planned to be covered with little or no prompting. Of course, each person engaged with the topic in their own way and not necessarily in the order that I had laid out my questions, but by checking off topic areas as they spoke with me, I was able to ensure that my areas of interest were covered.
The interviews were eventually developed into a set of stories and those stories are presented in Chapter 5.

**Experiential research**

Cunningham is quite clear about what he means by experiential research. For him it is personal rather than dialogic research where experience is shared with others. It is ‘...research which uses as its focus the direct experience of the person/researcher. The researcher is thus the “subject”’ (Cunningham 1988, p.164). He argues that this type of research is an essential feature of human science activity and that researchers should learn to be effective researchers of their own experience.

The basic requirement, in my view, of experiential research is for one to experience one’s own experiencing; to be aware of one’s own awareness and conscious of one’s consciousness (Cunningham 1988, p.174).

He argues that experiential research ‘is not old-fashioned introspectionism, as it is based on experience and not on armchair theorizing or limited projection’ (Cunningham 1988, p.165). Experiential research of this type is made even more useful by linking it to other methods, but is increasingly being recognised as having scholarly value in its own right (see, for example, Brew 2001).

Experiential research is necessarily captured through personal narrative and story telling. The research value of ‘talk’ and of ‘writing’ has been described by Heron (1988), Cunningham (1988), Morgan (1983) and Reason and Hawkins (1988). Morgan (1983) emphasises the need for researchers to go on talking for as long as is necessary, until useful meanings can no longer
be created. He also underscores the value of recycling of records, memories and conversations, coming back to them with the wisdom of further experience and learning and gaining new understanding from the reconnection whether it is by re-reading or face to face retelling of the stories.

Reason and Hawkins (1988) note that the same can be said of writing in the research context: through the discipline of writing the meaning of experience is not just communicated, it is actually discovered and/or created. The meaning is released and made manifest via the medium. As Mitroff and Kilmann observe, ‘The question is not, “Is story-telling science”, but “Can science learn to tell good stories?”’ (Mitroff & Kilmann 1978, p.93). This suggests that all researchers, regardless of standpoint or discipline, need to be able to tell good stories so that their ideas might be ‘heard’.

I drew on my own experience during this research by journalling, note-taking and then reflecting on what I had written. In this way I was able to capture my reflections on my own behaviour in various situations: working with clients; working with people who don’t pay me; my own experience of mentoring; my experience of learning; my experience of supervision – both of being supervised and of supervising others; my experience of engaging with the research; my observation of others being mentored; my experience of submitting my work for critique; and so forth. Because of the ethics guidelines under which this research was conducted, I was able to access only those journal notes that relate directly to what I was doing and saying, thinking and feeling in particular situations – even though those behaviours
and experiences might have been triggered by what others were doing – or by what was being done to them.

I also drew on my own previous life experience. I have delved into my experience of being mentored and not being mentored as a child, teenager and young adult. Chapter 7 contains the stories of that experience.

**Action research**

Most ideas about action research are grounded in the work of Lewin (1948), Friere (1972), Revans (1980) and Torbert (1981). Rapoport has offered us one of the most succinct definitions of action research:

> Action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework (Rapoport 1970, p.499).

To this, Susman and Evered (1978) have added a third goal – that of developing the competency of people facing problems to be able to help themselves and become self-sufficient in the future.

Most usually an action researcher acts ‘with’ someone, or a group of others, and is involved directly in the action that has the potential to change the practice and situation of both the other(s) and the researcher. However, more recently the case has been made most eloquently for action research to be possible in the unilateral and unique world of the researcher acting alone (Reason & Bradbury 2001a).

Some would argue that this is better described as individual action learning and is too far removed from the original intent of action research – which
was to be deeply rooted in the concerns of groups, communities and whole societies with the goal of creating deep system change.

However, for Reason (2001a) and his colleagues, the more fundamental point is that action research involves the testing and developing of ideas in action, and that that process should be recognised as scholarship even when conducted by an individual acting alone. In instances of practice development, it is very likely, in any event, that the whole cycle will involve intensive dialogue and interaction with others, which is why it fits into Cunningham’s suite of practices.

An essential feature of action research is the cyclical developing and testing of ideas (ultimately ‘theories’) in and through taking action, via iterative cycles of planning, enactment and review of the action through systematic reflection (Smith 1992). A diagram of the action research cycle showing these iterative cycles is set out in Diagram 7 below.
Diagram 7: The Action Research Cycle—adapted from Cherry (1995, p.42)

I had originally thought that action research on my own practice would be a major source of data in this research. But I eventually came to the conclusion that while I could ‘practise’ being a coach, it was problematic, given the way I came to frame my understanding of mentoring whether I could ‘practise’ Athenic mentoring in the same deliberate way. The practice, as well as the research dilemma, of engaging consciously with unconscious material is described in Chapters 8 and 9.
In the overall research process, the major use I made of action research was to focus on my practice as a researcher, not as a mentor or as a coach. Particularly helpful to me was the focus of action research on consistent and deep reflection on the research journey itself. In the spirit of action research I have tried to be as transparent as possible in my account of the way I moved between the creation of data, reflection on that data, accessing the literature, the framing and reframing of my conceptualisation of mentoring, and the development of my construction of Athenic mentoring.

**Contextual locating**

...[I]n this research there are people working in the field, writing about it, discussing it at conferences, etc. The theory developed in the other four modes will in part come out of this wider context and also feed into it (Cunningham 1988, p.166).

Contextual locating provides the last threads to be woven into the backing fabric of my methodology, giving it the strength to support and elaborate the rich and colourful patterns of the data. Cunningham (1988) makes the point that while it is an essential component of the research process as he sees it, contextual locating is not appropriate for ‘one-shot’ researchers doing quick studies. While someone with little background in a particular area can get some limited value from using contextual locating, it provides the greatest benefit to researchers who are immersed in the field because ‘one has to be in the field for some years before a genuinely interactive process can emerge’ (Cunningham 1988, p.169). My practice as a consultant and mentor has steeped me in experience in the field and, even without my knowing of the contextual locating approach prior to engaging in this research, I find that I have engaged in all of its elements to a greater or lesser degree for more than a decade now.
I presented a session at an ATM Conference. A practitioner with whom I had previously spoken, and whose work I had read, came to my session. Afterwards we chatted in the bar about linkages between his work and mine and he referred to some writers who had influenced him. As a result of this conversation, I went away and read some of the books and papers to which he had referred. I talked over some of the ideas from these with colleagues and tested some interpretations of mine on course members with whom I was working. And so it goes on (Cunningham 1988, p.168).

This story demonstrates to me how the contextual locating approach links doing, thinking, reading, writing and talking over an extended period of time. From my own experience I could present an almost identical story of what took place at a conference where I made a presentation on mentoring. During the conference I had conversations with people which led to me doing some reading, more talking with others, having some follow-up conversations via e-mail with the people from the conference, making some sense of things and then talking/reading some more, and so forth in a cyclical process which ran for the best part of a year.

The centrality of the researcher and their sense-making process in the research is shown in Cunningham’s map of the process of contextual locating (see Diagram 8 below).
As well as the conference experience I have described, I was a member of four practice groups for most of the time that I was undertaking the research. One of the practice groups consisted of 16 consultants whose common interest was mentoring and coaching individuals in an organisation. The second group, much smaller with 5 participants, had a professional interest in coaching small groups working on business problems and issues. A third group never met face to face as it consisted of mentors working on a program for a global information technology company. For three years I also participated in a group whose aim was to develop themselves as providers of mentoring.

The broad aim of all these practice groups was to share experiences and issues, and to help the participants develop and hone their practice. The first two of these groups met regularly at intervals of about six weeks. In the third group contact was maintained via e-mail with telephone conferences.
around every two months. The fourth group’s meetings were formal, but were not as frequent as those of the other groups.

By participating in the practice groups I could be exposed to multiple accounts of the ‘same’ experience – that of mentoring – at the same time. While helpful to me personally and professionally in many ways, in the context of my research the practice groups were an excellent forum for testing my emerging ‘theories’ about the nature of mentoring.

Because of the nature of these groups and the way they operated it was not appropriate to tape-record the sessions. Data were captured from notes I made in my personal journal and I have accessed them in the same way as before, drawing a strong line between what was triggered for me by the conversation and what was the data that belonged to others.

As my research progressed, I also found myself increasingly being called on as an ‘expert’ in the field to give presentations to groups of people about mentoring. In some cases the gatherings consisted of people in organisations who were about to enter a mentoring relationship; and in others there were people who wanted to know more about mentoring before deciding whether to introduce a formal program into their organisation. The numbers involved in these sessions were between 10 and 30. Again, I found that these were wonderful forums in which my thinking was implicitly tested, challenged and enriched.

In this way I was following the approach of first, second and third position research outlined by Reason and Marshall (2001, p.413) by ‘filling [my] life
with self reflective practice’ (first person – research for me), setting up cooperative inquiry groups (second person – research for us) and attempting to develop processes of inquiry that have an impact in communities (third person – research for them).

**Sustaining rigour in my work**

A continuing challenge for researchers who use non-positivist methodologies is finding a way to sustain the degree of rigour that is appropriate to truly scholarly work. In the methods I have selected, immersed in experience, action, dialogue and collaboration, these challenges are particularly pronounced. I certainly could not stand outside the data coming to me from my collaboration with others as if I had some cloak that insulated me from their impact. In the moment of making contact with the data and experience of others, those data were interpreted by me and filtered by my own perspectives. I, in turn, was influenced by that understanding and interpretation of the data of others. I generated other data through my own lived experience and via reflection on that experience. Whatever the process, I believe that I was inextricably linked to the data and could not disassociate myself from them as if I were a clinically uninterested bystander.

So what are the criteria that would make it possible for such engagement to count as scholarly effort? Brew (2001) in an intensive discussion on the nature of contemporary research has suggested that there are three hallmarks of scholarly research activity: looking again, relevance and unbending intent.
Looking again

Brew is very clear in her contention that the researcher must consistently ‘look again’.

The German phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1973) said that when you think you know, you should look again. Looking again is a way of minimizing self-deception. It means we are always in the process of coming to know. There is always the journey, never the destination. In looking again, we do not take our impressions as “true” or “the way things are”. We continually go round the experiential research cycle, progressively deepening our understanding. This is my first guideline: look again (Brew 2001, p.58).

The idea of looking again is fundamental to the action research cycle referred to earlier (see Diagram 7 above). In that process, experience is continually recycled; earlier data are revisited in the light of new data and experience; new action is crafted in the light of what has gone before; and all experiences are systematically reviewed and evaluated.

Reason and Bradbury’s (Reason & Bradbury 2001a) recent formulation of action research as consisting of three fields or levels of inquiry – first, second and third person – is interesting in this context. Inquiry, a way of ‘looking again’, is sustained through the continual and rigorous application of powerful questions which create options for action, help to make sense of experience and formulate ideas or theories as to how and why things work. I contend that this formulation of three levels of inquiry dovetails very neatly with Cunningham’s suite of methods, since experiential research requires the application of first person inquiry (What is the nature of my experience? What is the impact of what I do? What are the drivers?); collaborative and dialogic research require second person inquiry (What are we doing? How do we impact on each other? How are we different?); and action research and
contextual locating require all three (third person inquiry involving the
connection of ideas and reflection even when the parties do not meet – the
idea of ‘global conversation’).

The rigour required for scholarly effort is to both sustain the process of
‘looking again’ and to make it transparent. Cherry (1995) makes the point
that this level of rigour is in line with Jones’ (1992) notion of the ‘critically
reflective researcher’, with Reason’s (1988b) concept of ‘critical subjectivity’
and ‘critical knowing’, with Zuber-Skerritt’s (1992) ‘critical attitude’ and with
Heron’s (1988) ‘bracketing’.

Reason has suggested that:

…critical subjectivity is a quality of awareness in which we do not suppress our
primary subjective experience, nor do we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed and
swept along by it; rather we raise it to consciousness and we use it as part of the
inquiry process (Reason 1988b, p.12).

Cherry (1995) has also described the delicate balancing act involved in fully
knowing the individuality of the meaning or sense one makes of one’s own
and others’ data, and being able to stand aside from, or bracket, that
individuality and put it in some larger or different perspective which places a
different meaning on the data – and the further paradox involved in
recognising or owning ‘self’ and distancing from self in order to develop
meaning. Heron has observed that it is possible to do this but to:

…take an idea down into experience, whether to notice what it distorts or what it
omits is a tricky business … Making the experiential test (of a conclusion or idea
born out of reflection or experience) involves them (the researcher) in a change of
being. They become different; the idea is no longer just grasped by them
intellectually–they have lived through it, they know it conaturally, as the
philosophers say. They have worn it as the garment of their doing … (Heron 1988,
p.50).
The second of Brew’s criteria for scholarly effort is that of relevance. She suggests, somewhat surprisingly at first glance, that ‘everything is relevant’ (Brew 2001, p.59) and that looking again from different viewpoints can often establish connections that were previously not clear or obscured. She contends that neither the content nor the structure, nor the product of research can be narrowly decided in advance.

Acting on the assumption that everything is relevant means having an openness to new insights from wherever they come, and it relies on scrupulous honesty in recording material. Feeling stuck or confused are viewed as opportunities for moving on in the research, not for closure and avoidance (Brew 2001, p.60).

I cannot describe how relieved and energised I was when I read those words. As I have indicated earlier, not knowing what counts and what doesn’t count as data was a dilemma throughout my research, leading to ‘stuckness’ and a deep need to escape and avoid engagement. I began to make more solid progress in my work as I grew to appreciate that part of the challenge for qualitative researchers was welcoming the idea that everything might be relevant, and that the periods of stuckness are potentially the ones that will lead to a breakthrough in making sense of the data. After all, if everything is comfortable all of the time chances are that there is not too much happening that is new or different.

Brew’s third guideline is that of unbending intent, a phrase she borrows from the mystical writing of Casteñeda (1968). This quality is not only about diligence, but also about carrying on in the face of feeling lost – and feeling lost is likely to be the result of ‘looking again’ and treating everything as relevant. Submerged in personal material, unable to see how it fits with scholarly effort, what makes the process research rather than something
else is the rigour of ‘hanging in there’, not shrinking from the difficulties, taking the time to stand back and reflect and, perhaps, to see a different perspective. Her research process is thus part of what she calls the:

...[I]ndividual’s process of becoming ... Learning to discriminate pathological manifestations of our own material as reflected in our own lives, in the lives of others and in the academic community leads us to understand the world in which we live in new ways.... [D]elving into our own subjectivity usually means getting more than we bargained for. Unbending intent means carrying on even when the going gets rough. – By the application, with “unbending intent”, of the principle to “look again” and by treating everything as if it were relevant, we are lead to examine the deepest assumptions behind what we are doing (Brew 2001, pp.60–61).

Brew’s comments reminded me of Morgan’s much earlier statement that in research we make and remake ourselves as human beings (Morgan 1983, p.373).

A major difficulty for me with Brew’s advice was that reading it was not sufficient. For it to be useful to me, I had to incorporate it into my practice as a researcher and doing this became an iterative learning cycle of trying and failing/succeeding for a while, then forgetting and sliding back into old habits, then trying again, and so on. Learning to live with and to value the stuckness that can come from ‘not knowing’ is a challenge that continued to confront me throughout my research journey. But each time I engaged with the idea that ‘not knowing’ was an integral part of the research process I became a little more relaxed and adept at being open to the opportunities this state presented. Over time my research practice changed from regularly berating and lacerating myself for being stuck and not doing anything to being able to sit with the stuckness and seek the opportunities it may have been presenting. This was largely because I began to recognise and reflect on times when being stuck had helped rather than hindered the process; for
example, by slowing the pace down so that I could have the opportunity to reflect deeply and stay open to the possibilities in the data rather than grasping for the first workable solution or conclusion that presented itself.

**Analysis of the data**

Reason and Hawkins (1988) argue that there are:

...two paths of inquiry: from experience through explanation to general theory; and from experience through expression to myth and archetype. Thus we create between them a space for dialogue and for a dialectical development, so that a theme may be illuminated by a story or a theory may clarify a myth. Indeed, some of the most illuminating researchers have used both paths ... (as in) ... Freud's use of the Oedipal myth... (Reason & Hawkins 1988, p.85).

The first path is one well-trodden by social researchers (Deising 1972) in the development of theory from experience, the foundation of all modes of inquiry. It has even been argued that forms of inquiry not based on experiential knowing are inadequate (Heron 1981). The second path is the one that I find myself on, though one ‘... less well explicated and with fewer signposts left by previous travellers’ (Reason & Hawkins 1988, p.84). I count myself fortunate to have stumbled upon it in my wanderings.

At this point, I would like to quote extensively from Cherry’s (1995) commentary on the work of Reason and Hawkins (1988)

Reason and Hawkins (1988) in *Story-telling as Inquiry* suggest that through expression, the meaning of experience is not simply communicated but is discovered and/or created. As a result, the medium and the meaning are essentially interpenetrating – it is foolish to ask the meaning of a story or painting as separate from the work in itself. And sometimes the meaning is released and made manifest by the medium, as expressed by Michelangelo in his statement that he did not create his sculptures, only released them from the stone (Reason & Hawkins 1988, p.81).
They also observe that the expression of experiences in Western culture is often seen as belonging to the realm of the creative arts, to the production of the beautiful or entertaining, rather than to the world of science. However, they suggest that psychotherapy – which in the Freudian school grew in part out of the scientific medical tradition – very soon had to incorporate story telling – both in the process of therapy and in its product (the therapeutic case-study).

They observe that in hermeneutics, this does not mean that any story qualifies as science but that science consists of taking stories seriously (Cherry 1995, pp.95-96).

Reason and Hawkins suggest that in personal story-telling there is a progression through levels or stages of story development from basic description to metaphor to archetype. It is at the metaphorical and archetypal levels that are created the meanings and the patterns of experience that are difficult to express in any other way. They argue that over time personal stories can become incorporated into the collective folklore, becoming fairytales or myths. The myth of Mentor (outlined later in Chapter 3) would fall into this category, for example. And while the inquirer may follow the direction of this path ‘...from experience through metaphor and story towards myth and archetype’ (Reason & Hawkins 1988, p.85) the reverse can also happen with meaning ‘breaking through’ from the archetypical level into individual experience and stories (Hillman 1975; von Franz 1996).

Reason and Hawkins (1988) emphasise that it is important to establish a method of inquiry that not only seeks explanation, but embodies expression as well; that does not prematurely seek to explain; that involves individuals and groups to find the images and metaphors that reflect their experience and that capture its essence before trying to find a way of explaining that experience. During this research I have attempted to be open to and to listen to the stories of others and as best I can to preserve their integrity when I
have retold them. I have tried to ensure that I treat the stories and those telling them as ‘Thou’ and not ‘It’, as Buber (1996) might put it, so that meaning might come out of them rather than meaning being imposed onto them. Whether I have been successful or not is for others to judge, but I have tried to be guided by the twin demands of Janesick’s (1994) contention that the value of case studies rests in their unique nature not in their replicability, and Stake’s (1994) warning that in multi-case study research the tendency has been to focus on the similarities of the cases, almost totally ignoring what makes each of them unique as well as their individual complexities.

As suggested in Chapter 3, mentoring, along with story-telling, is an especially powerful way through which knowledge is created and shared over generations. It was this observation that led Megginson (2000) to argue, specifically in relation to research into mentoring, that we need to use a method that enables us to tell ‘vivid stories’.

In making the case for story-telling as research, he asks whether our experience and our stories about that experience exist as separate entities.

The ontological question is about our view of the world itself. Is it one where we can talk about experience and stuff-out-there separate from the stories that we can tell about it? (Megginson 2000, p.259).

Megginson argues that we can’t make this separation and ‘that all we can have is the stories that we tell’ and goes on to cite Weick’s (1995) response to the question: ‘What is necessary to make sense of the world?’

Something that preserves plausibility and coherence, something that is reasonable and memorable, something that embodies past experience and expectations,
something that resonates with other people, something that can be constructed retrospectively but also can be used prospectively, something that captures both feeling and thought, something that allows for embellishment to fit current oddities, something that is fun to construct. In short what is necessary in sensemaking is a good story (Weick 1995, p.61).

I believe that in my execution I have been faithful to the tenets put forward by Weick above and my hope is that the good stories I have been fortunate to hear as well as the stories I tell add some understanding for those with an interest in gaining a deeper understanding of mentoring.

Chapter 5 contains the stories I wrote after interviewing and talking with the people who were generous enough to share with me their experiences of mentoring and being mentored. At the end of each story I present, I have offered my ‘real time’ reflections on reading each story some months later. Taken cumulatively rather than individually, these ‘real time’ reflections help to make transparent the way in which the stories influenced my eventual framing of Athenic mentoring.

In Chapter 6, I try to share in a coherent way my reflections on my reflection on those stories, and to make transparent how the stories and my revisiting of the literature were shaping my thinking.

Chapter 7 is the story of my own stories from childhood to the present time. Writing these stories certainly triggered for me the emotional and intellectual connections with the archetypes of human experience that Hillman (1975) wrote about. It was the making of these connections that brought into my consciousness the elements or dimensions that inform and enrich the conceptualisation of Athenic mentoring that I offer. Again, in this chapter, I
have involved the ‘real time’ reflections triggered by the reading of my own stories months after they were written.

Like Chapter 6, Chapter 8 is a reflection on reflection revealing the way my thinking developed.

Chapter 9 outlines the ‘meta-analysis’ that draws together the insights I have gained from the entire work. It also offers my suggestions for other lines of inquiry and thinking.

**Ethics**

As I proceeded with my research I became more and more aware of a number of potential ethical dilemmas created by writing stories about life experience – both my own and that of others. I ‘managed’ these by working within the University’s normal guidelines for ethical engagement in research with human ‘subjects’. All participants were asked to sign the prescribed Informed Consent Form (see Appendix 3) and were given a Plain Language Statement (see Appendix 4) that outlined my research and obligations in relation to the data they would share with me.

However, I feel that I need to make clear that these same guidelines created other dilemmas for me in that they effectively excluded me from accessing and reporting directly some of the most powerful experiences that influenced my research and sense-making. While these are excluded from the text of this thesis, it is likely that many readers will perceive their ‘echoes’ or ‘resonance’ in the subtext of my work. I would argue that this is appropriate given my contention that some – even a very large part – of what we learn
and experience in the context of mentoring is beyond consciousness and, perhaps ultimately, may be beyond words.
Chapter 3—Mentoring ‘then’: a context for the research

...[W]here are the Maya Aristotles who discovered the Zero and taught how to build the wonderful pyramids in Yucatán? How are their intellectual and technical contributions taken into account in our discourses and narratives? Orlando Fals Borda in an e-mail to Peter Reason cited in (Reason & Bradbury 2001b, p.3).

Introduction

At the time I didn’t quite know why I was so attracted to representations of mentoring in myth and fairytale. I suspect, with the wisdom of hindsight, that I found it a relief compared with my encounter with the contemporary literature. In any case, my initial interest was in going to the source of the word ‘mentor’ that was mentioned in so much of the literature. And so I found myself reading about the goddess Athena in Homer’s mythical poems *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*. It was this Homeric literature that gave me my first inkling of the archetypical character of mentoring and, finally, led me to the term *Athenic mentoring* to describe the construct of mentoring I developed.

Mentoring as an ancient practice

While the precise origins of mentoring can never be known, it could be argued that its genesis and history are closely aligned with the development and use of language by human beings. Language is not used just to communicate with others in the moment, but to enhance, retain and transmit an accumulating pool of knowledge and wisdom into the future to secure an individual’s well being and that of their descendants.
The conversion of ideas into symbols, both oral and physical, that have a commonly understood meaning has permitted and facilitated the transmission of knowledge not only between individuals and groups of individuals, but also across the barrier of time. This transmission of knowledge and wisdom from one generation to another forms the basis of what many would understand to be part of the traditional process of mentoring (Merriam 1983).

Mentoring in a contemporary context is very often represented as what is happening when an older and wiser person takes a younger, less experienced person under his or her wing and offers that person guidance, protection and access to their accumulated insight and wisdom (Levinson et al. 1978; Fagan & Walter 1982; Zey 1984; Murray & Owen 1991; Ragins 1997). But what of mentoring in times past? What form might it have taken then?

It is well known that in many, if not all, tribal societies there was often a specific time when boys and girls would pass into manhood and womanhood via an appropriate and often elaborate ritual process of initiation. During this time of ritual the initiands would often be separated from their family and from the order of their day to day lives, and instructed by other adults in the mysterious and unknown ways of initiated adulthood. In many cases the initiation process would have incorporated some form of test or ordeal, resulting in an obvious transformation of the initiand in a physical and metaphysical as well as a knowledge sense. Circumcision, scarring of the face or other body areas, the boring of the lower lip for the insertion of a lip-
plug, piercing of ears or noses, knocking out of teeth, dressing in a particular way or painting the body are just a few of the well-known methods that have been, and in some cases are still being used to mark the transition to adulthood (Eliade 1958). Frequently there would be not just a physical change but a metaphysical change. The initiates are now different beings and there is no going back to what they were previously.

...[W]hen he comes back from the forest he will be another; he will no longer be the child he was... he will have undergone a series of initiatory ordeals which compel him to confront fear, suffering and torture, but which compel him above all to assume a new mode of being, that which is proper to an adult—namely, that which is conditioned by the almost simultaneous revelation of the sacred, of death and of sexuality (Eliade 1960, pp.195–96).

Clawson (1996) maintains that by the Middle Ages guild masters were indeed mentors in that not only were they responsible for the professional aspects of apprentices’ development, but also held significant sway over their behaviour and what they did away from work. A view also held by Samier (2000, p.92) who goes so far as to suggest that ‘the master had a comprehensive responsibility for all aspects of the apprentice’s life, including moral and religious training.’

While the processes would have differed, together with the age of the initiands and the knowledge shared with them, some ritual of transition to adulthood has been common throughout history, and vestiges of those rites remain in contemporary life, be they the ‘formals’ which are now so commonly held at Australian high schools or the quinces that are so important for teenaged girls on the threshold of womanhood in Mexico.
Crossing the boundary between childhood and adulthood; initiation into some aspect of knowledge; the learning of specific skills that are associated with adulthood or with a specialised craft such as ‘healer’, ‘hunter’ or ‘priest’; the development of a different sense of ‘self’; formal and informal systems of indenture and apprenticeship leading to the mastery of a craft – all these have been argued to be earlier manifestations of what is now known as mentoring (Buber 2002).

While it is easy to focus on the most obvious aspects of the transition of the initiand or learner (particularly the external symbols and trappings of passage), I am interested in the concomitant transformation of the individual at the interior level of self – the change that occurs that leads individuals to seeing themselves in a different light or feeling that they now ‘belong’ to a different group.

There was a time, there were times, when there neither was nor needed to be any specific calling of educator or teacher. There was a master, a philosopher or a coppersmith, whose journeymen and apprentices lived with him and learned, by being allowed to share in it, what he had to teach them of his handwork or brainwork. But they also learned, without either their or his being concerned with it, they learned, without noticing that they did, the mystery of personal life: They received the spirit (Buber 2002, pp.89–90).

**Ancient practice, modern context**

So how does ritual and ancient practice have bearing on the mentoring of professionals in today’s business world? In an organisational context it has been argued (Swap, Leonard, Shields & Abrams 2001) that while knowledge about core organisational capabilities is able to be explicitly and formally transferred, the great pool of knowledge that is rich in tacit dimensions (Polanyi 1967; Polanyi & Prosch 1975; Schön 1987b) is transferred
informally (Antal 1993) through processes of *socialisation* and *internalisation* which focus on mentoring and storytelling. This process of mentoring and storytelling, I suggest, shares many characteristics with older rituals and methods of knowledge transfer and personal transformation through initiation, apprenticeship and scholarship.

*Socialisation* in an organisational context has been described by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) as the transfer of tacit knowledge from one set of individuals to another, while *internalisation* is described as the transfer of the explicit knowledge of a group to the tacit knowledge in an individual. Tacit knowledge – that which I know but cannot necessarily say (Polanyi 1967) – is often gained through experience (Schön 1987b), and also vicariously through the rich descriptions of personal experience which others share with us through their stories (Swap et al. 2001).

While the details of many of the older rituals of initiation have been lost or are not readily accessible because of their ‘secret’ nature, the transition from ‘apprentice’ to ‘journeyman’ to ‘master’ in the trades and similar journeys in domains of scholarship, such as music or art, are better known. At their core is the experience of intensive and sustained practice, as well as a rich culture of story telling, the demonstration of great and artful practice by master practitioners (Schön 1987a) and, interestingly, close involvement at a personal or relationship level (Buber 2002).

As indicated above, it can be argued that the modern practice of mentoring has its roots in ancient practices that are now largely lost in time. But it
would seem the practice of mentoring has withstood the erosion or erasure that usually come with time. Clawson (1996) argues that mentoring is an enduring phenomenon surviving major paradigm shifts throughout history and also suggests that its survival and documentation over the millennia (for example the relationships between Moses and Aaron and Joshua documented in the Bible) indicate that mentoring satisfies an intrinsic need for connection between generations.

**Mentoring as seen through myth and archetype**

By exploring the origins and meaning of the word *mentor* we might better understand how the process might have evolved over the centuries and why it has been so enduring. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993) tells us that *mentor* means an experienced and trusted counsellor and suggests that the name was chosen for its etymological significance, its root *(men-)* having a base meaning of ‘remember, think, counsel’.

The word *Mentor* first appears in written form in Homer’s *The Odyssey* (Homer 1980). Reason and Hawkins (1988), Eliade (1998) and Jung (1958; 2002) suggest that myths endure not only because they are often ‘ripping yarns’, but also because they encapsulate wisdom that transcends their origin, time, location and culture.

Myth tells only of that which really happened, which manifested itself completely. The actors in myths are Supernatural Beings. They are known primarily by what they did in the transcendent times of the “beginnings.” …[I]t is as a result of the intervention of Supernatural Beings that man is what he is today, a mortal, sexed, and cultural being (Eliade 1998, p.6).
Central to all myths are the archetypes represented by the central characters and situations elaborated in them. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993) defines archetype as:

The original pattern or model from which copies are made; In Jungian psychoanalysis, a primordial mental concept inherited by all from the collective unconscious; A pervasive or recurrent idea or symbol in legend, etc.

The notion of archetype that I am using in this work is derived from that of Jung (2002) who postulated that archetypes are elements of the human psyche – which itself ‘is part of the inmost mystery of life’ (Jung 1992, p.35). Aspects of the archetypes are expressed in myths and fairytales, but Jung (1992, p.5) cautions that there is ‘a considerable difference between the archetype and the historical formula that has evolved’ as a result of the *concept* of the archetype being articulated at the conscious level and then handed down and elaborated over time.

Archetypes are the containers that hold the essential structure of a universal idea, but their interpretation occurs via the personal and the particular – the unique lived experience of the person interpreting the archetype. As Jung describes it:

\[\text{[t]he archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear (Jung 2002, p.5).}\]

He also makes it clear that archetypes are hypothetical and irrepresentable models somewhat like ‘pattern of behaviour’ as used in biology. Jung would argue that we all hold the *mother archetype* deep within our psyche and that we recognise elements of it in the concept or symbol of the Great Mother which has been articulated in the field of comparative religion (Jung 1992).
So the *mother archetype* holds the symbol or idea of mother, but the meaning or understanding of mother comes from each person’s unique experience of being mothered. In this way within the universality of the concept of mother is embodied the unique individual experience of mother.

In Jung’s view the psyche is not contemporary, but holds the unconscious wisdom that has been accumulating over the eons – the ‘history of mankind’ (Griffin 1989, p.42).

Its ancestry goes back many millions of years. Individual consciousness is only the flower and fruit of a season, sprung from a perennial rhizome beneath the earth; and it would find itself in better accordance with the truth if it took the existence of the rhizome into its calculations. For the root matter is the mother of all things (Jung 1996, p.xxiv).

As indicated earlier, the transformation of an individual through a ritual that enables the transfer of wisdom, as well as some physical and metaphysical change, has been very common in human societies through the ages. It might also be argued that this transformation is a (if not *the*) key, function of mentoring in a modern context, and that it is this that has ensured the preservation of the practice. Exploring mythical expressions of archetypes associated with the developing or transfer of wisdom as well as personal growth – the transformation from unknowing to knowing and the developing of ‘self’ – provides a useful starting point for our understanding of mentoring. And if, as was argued earlier in Chapter 2, meaning can ‘break through’ (Hillman 1975; Reason & Hawkins 1988; von Franz 1996) from archetypes into the stories people tell when they describe their experiences – then these archetypical images might illuminate the stories people told in this research into mentoring.
Archetypical images embedded in notions of mentoring

I would argue that there are two central archetypical images that can be associated with mentoring: that of the wise and trusted friend, and that of the learner or initiand.

Many researchers and writers refer to the story of Mentor – sometimes accurately (Roche 1979; Kram 1985b; Sands, Parson & Duane 1991; Antal 1993; Cunningham & Eberle 1993; Appelbaum, Ritchie & Shapiro 1994; Bennetts 1995; Vincent & Seymour 1995; Hadden 1997; Colwell 1998; Beech & Brockbank 1999; Samier 2000; Aldisert 2001); and at other times less accurately (Wilson & Elman 1990; Chao, Walz & Gardner 1992; Hay 1995; Colwell 1998). In perusing the literature it would be easy to conclude that the words ‘mentoring’ and ‘mentor’ have come to us from the story of the faithful retainer of Homer’s epic poem The Odyssey.

The association made most frequently is that Mentor was an old and trusted friend of Odysseus and that when Odysseus left his home in Ithaca to fight in the Trojan War, he placed the care of his estates and his family – particularly his son Telemachus – in the capable hands of Mentor. It is commonly noted that Telemachus was Mentor’s protégé and so benefited directly from being exposed to his wisdom and care over the many years that his father Odysseus was away from home fighting in the Trojan wars. For many writers, the genesis of the word and the practice of mentoring are as simple as this. However when the story of Mentor is examined more closely, a richer and more complex picture emerges.
The concept of the archetype

We know nothing of Homer as a person except for some information about when he might have written and where he might have lived, but Greek scholars generally agree that around the seventh century BC he wrote down the epic poem through which Mentor enters our language and knowledge base. The saga of *The Odyssey* tells of Odysseus’ twenty years of wanderings, his homecoming and his triumph over the troublesome suitors who have been relentlessly pursuing his wife Penelope in his absence. Whether Homer was its originator, or simply the scribe who committed it to the written word, is a point of contention among classical scholars. What is known is that *The Odyssey* was not written to be read in private, but to be performed in public by rhapsodes – epic singers and narrators – for audiences that were only just becoming literate.

The poem is rich in metaphor and subtexts and explores basic human themes such as love, politics, war, justice, hope, revenge, despair, murder, adultery, conspiracy, greed, honour and loyalty. The epic would have taken many hours across some days to be declaimed or performed, and as its story was woven it would have provided audiences with plenty to talk about and consider.

*Mentor, the foster parent*

It is not clear from *The Odyssey* what happened between the older and wiser Mentor and young Telemachus during the ten years that Odysseus fought in the Trojan War and the ten subsequent years of wandering and tragedy that
befell him, but it can be assumed that Mentor largely did what he had been entrusted to do.

...[Mentor] a friend of his noble father in other times. When Odysseus sailed, he had left all his household in Mentor’s care, biding him guard everything securely and respect the wishes of old Laertes (Homer 1980, p.17).

Although having to be mindful of the wishes of Odysseus’ father, Mentor would have been the defacto head of the royal household, looking after the estates and the family to the best of his ability and ensuring that Telemachus was given an appropriate education and upbringing. This was not an uncommon situation during that period, with many boys being placed in the care of foster fathers during times of conflict.

What becomes clear, on closer examination of the epic, is that much of the ‘mentoring’ that has been so commonly and widely attributed to Mentor occurs after this time. It happens when Telemachus is no longer a boy, but on the cusp of manhood, a young man in his early twenties.

Whether it was because Mentor was incapable or because he was not allowed the opportunity, the mentoring of Telemachus happens through the intervention of the powerful and wise goddess Athena (also frequently referred to as Athene and Pallas Athena) a fact that is highlighted infrequently in the literature (Bennetts 1995; Kobor-Escobar 2000).

Athena, the most Greek of Greek goddesses, probably embodies aspects and characteristics of an ancient and pre-Greek divinity (Kinsley 1989 p.141).

This goddess at a few critical times in the poem takes on the form of the old man Mentor to give advice, encouragement and guidance to Telemachus and
so help him to make the transition from the simple life of his youth to the much more complex world of manhood with its overt and covert codes, roles, duties, notions of honour, valour and politics.

In order better to understand the ‘mentoring’ which Telemachus received from Athena in the guise of Mentor, a little more context may be useful. While he has been away, and presumed dead by many, including his own son, Odysseus’ home has been taken over by a herd of carousing suitors of evil intent who are hoping to persuade Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, to marry one of them. The suitors have been making a nuisance of themselves for quite some time and to stall them in their pursuit of her and her wealth, Penelope has developed an intricate strategy. She will only marry after finishing her weaving of a burial shroud for Odysseus’ father Laertes. As it happens, she has had some mentoring of her own from Athena, who has taught her how to weave and for three years, now, Penelope has been weaving by day and unpicking by night. In the household, there is no one who can get rid of the pushy and rowdy suitors. No single person has the strength, stature and fortitude to confront them. Mentor and a few old friends of the family are exactly that, old.

Although Telemachus, in his early twenties, is old enough to take responsibility for rescuing Penelope from her predicament, he doesn’t have the connections – the networks, the respect of enough people (the political clout, some might say) – and, more significantly, the confidence in himself, the fighting courage and the strategic skills to be able to see off the interlopers. He is young, energetic and inexperienced, and his greatest wish
is that his strong and valiant father would return to save the day. Although he has never known him, Telemachus stands in awe of his father and is yet to develop the confidence and competence he needs to navigate in his world as an adult in his own right.

**Let the mentoring begin!**

Athena is one of the great Olympian divinities and the patron and guardian of Athens. Her name in Greek is *A Thea*, ‘the goddess’ (Shearer 1996, p.42) and that would seem to indicate that Athens was named after her and not vice versa (Baring & Cashford 1993). Throughout the poem Athena takes on a different form (often that of a bird) when she appears to talk with Telemachus – although there are a number of instances where she appears to him as herself. Her initial intervention is in the guise of Mentes – another old friend of the family – and through him she gives Telemachus hope that Odysseus is ‘not dead but alive’ (Homer 1980, p.5). She also suggests to Telemachus that perhaps instead of wishing that his father were there to banish the suitors, he should actually do something about it himself.

> I urge you to think of ways to banish the suitors from your house. Listen now, and take heed of what I say (Homer 1980, p.7).

She doesn’t say ‘your father’s house,’ but gives Telemachus his rightful inheritance as the next King of Ithaca, advising him also to take charge of matters and send his mother away before setting off to search for his father.

---

5 Telemachus has reached the age where he could be the King. Whether his father is dead or not has no bearing on this as can be seen in Odysseus’ rising to kingship while his father Laertes still lives.
by visiting Nestor and Menelaus. Telemachus is struck by more than her words.

Friend, all you say shows concern for me; a father might speak to his son, and these are words I shall not forget (Homer 1980, p.8).

She then takes on the form of a bird and soars up and away, leaving Telemachus with a sense that he has been party to something special, but not quite sure of what it was. Despite that, he seems to have gained a different sense of himself and he confronts the suitors, telling them to get out of his house. Though perplexed by his newfound fearlessness, they do not comply and carry on carousing. Telemachus retires to his room where all night he reflects on ‘the journey counselled him by Athene’ (Homer 1980, p.11).

A little later in the story Mentor tries to incite the people to rise up and get rid of the suitors, but he only succeeds in being ridiculed as being an impotent old fool. This is the first and only time that we see the real Mentor in action. In every subsequent intervention it is Athena who takes the form of Mentor and gives Telemachus words of encouragement, helps him to formulate strategies for action, offers support, and instils in him the conviction and courage to act bravely and decisively on his journey to find his father.

As a consequence of Athena’s interventions and assistance, Telemachus over time is transformed and, much to the delight of his grandfather Laertes,

---

6 In this way Athena gets Telemachus to ‘network’ with powerful associates of his father. These two wise rulers also take on mentoring roles in their relations with Telemachus.
against great odds he eventually fights side by side with his father to cast out the suitors from the family home. 'Dear gods, what a day this is for me! What happiness when my son and my grandson are vying for the prize of valour!' (Homer 1980, p.297).

**Athena’s pedigree: Who was that masked woman?**

Athena, daughter of Zeus, is often referred to in the classics, in the myths and stories, and even on the decorative pottery of the time (Bell 1991; Baring & Cashford 1993). She has an impressive portfolio of attributes. She is the goddess of wisdom in both war and peace, of the arts, literature and crafts such as stonemasonry, building and carpentry (she’s the architect of the Trojan horse), as well as weaving and tapestry. She embodies what Covey (1997) expresses when he advises us to ‘[b]egin with the end in mind’ (p.97). Athena teaches ‘all kinds of handicrafts whose success depends upon holding in the mind an image of the end’ (Baring & Cashford 1993, p.338). Her wisdom is, in other words, both visionary and future-focused as well as being practical.

We are told that Athena invented agricultural implements such as the plough and the rake, along with the bridle, the chariot, the trumpet and the flute, and even numbers and navigation (Bell 1991). While often depicted as helmeted or bearing weapons (such as a long spear and a goat skin *aegis* – literally, a shield – Athena was not an aggressor, but rather a fierce and formidable defender of those she selected as her heroes. She is ‘known as Guardian in Boeotia’ (Homer 1998, p.57) and in other images wears a mantle with a fringe of snakes, or a braid of snakes in her hair, while
grasping a serpent firmly in her left hand (Baring & Cashford 1993) and a shield featuring the severed head of Medusa, the Queen of the Gorgons (whose hair also consists of snakes). On at least one piece of pottery these images are combined (Baring & Cashford 1993).

Athena’s *aegis* is more than a shield for herself, embodying the idea of shielding others and offering a protective mantle. Athena’s *aegis* carries on it symbols of great power and protection to frighten away aggressors: the Gorgon’s head is a symbol of ferocity and frightening death, since Medusa turned men to stone with her gaze; while the snakes around its edge are symbols of both death as well as protection and healing. And Athena’s power has very deep and primordial roots:

In the course of the Bronze Age the old myth of the hunter grew into the myth of the warrior-hero and came to overshadow the myth of the goddess, which was gradually relegated to the unconscious psyche of humanity. Yet we can find the lost primordial myth scattered throughout the symbolic images, myths and fairy-tales of every civilization, frequently unrecognized, often unconnected with each other, but always present (Baring & Cashford 1993, p.40).

Regarded as the first goddess of the age of patriarchy (Baring & Cashford 1993; Shearer 1996), Athena has qualities that allow her to bridge the matriarchal/patriarchal divide. In the matriarchal/patriarchal dichotomy that is Athena, we see the powerful resurgence of the ancient myth of the warrior (patriarchal) melded with the even more ancient, and some would say more powerful, myth of the mother goddess (matriarchal). The snakes associated with Athena are a link to the Earth Mother goddess who first appears as a snake in the Neolithic era (Baring & Cashford 1993). The serpent image is a very ancient one indeed, associated with death as well as life and healing – as evidenced by its appearance in the *caduceus* (the
symbol of two snakes intertwined around a staff, of life and death, which is now used as the symbol of medicine). The serpent is also associated with the staff of the swift footed Greek god Hermes (Baring & Cashford 1993), the messenger and guide of souls, whose name gives us the scholars’ word *hermeneutic* and who is the god of Alchemy.

Jung (1996; 2002) postulates that archetypes possess universality that transcends culture. In the *Museo de Antropología* in Mexico City I have stood in awe beneath the powerful monolithic representation of Coatlicue – the Aztec Mother goddess, deity of life and death, goddess of earth and fire, mother of the stars of the southern sky, mother of all the gods and fount of all things. She is enormous and powerful, with taloned feet, a skirt of writhing rattlesnakes, a necklace of hearts and severed hands partially hiding her pendulous breasts, blood serpents spurting from her severed throat (Miller & Taube 1993). She also has a massive death’s head at her waist holding her robe together. While not as attractive to behold, the symbolism of a fierce, fecund protector embodied in the statue of Coatlicue is well matched to the symbolism associated with the goddess Athena.

In an interesting parallel to the legend of Athena’s birth which has her springing from Zeus’ head, fully developed and in full battle regalia, Coatlicue gave birth to Huitzilopochtli the awesomely powerful Aztec god of war who is said to have sprung from her loins fully armed.

So here we behold two very powerful goddesses a world apart, separated by great distance, time and culture, combining the deep *mother archetype* (Jung
1992) with its connotations of nurturing, wisdom, suffering, sensuality, protection, fecundity and birth, with the warrior characteristics of valour, honour, fearsome power, sacrifice, death, perhaps even justice. While I am not aware of Coatlicue being associated with a capacity to mentor it is interesting to note that the image of the strong protector/mother archetype exists so powerfully across these two unconnected cultures and while it is beyond the scope of this research it raises the possibility that images and symbols of the mother archetype across cultures embody or give rise to something similar to the concept of the mentor archetype.

Athena's mentoring of adults

To get a more complete idea of Athena and the impact she had as a mentor, it is instructive to briefly explore another of Homer’s works, The Iliad. In this companion poem to the Odyssey we can see Athena’s interventions with fully developed adults during the Trojan War and get a better appreciation of the underpinning qualities of the mentor archetype that have been raised from the unconscious to be expressed in the image of Athena.

Athena often walks by the side of her chosen heroes, but in any event is almost always in close proximity when she’s needed. Otto (1979) describes her as ‘the goddess of nearness’ (p.54). She first appears in The Iliad when Achilles is confronted by a great dilemma and needs to draw on his self-discipline and not act in line with raw emotion. Does he draw his sword and kill his opponent Agamemnon who wishes to steal his companion from him or does he ‘hold his rage in check and give it time’ (Homer 1998, p.6). In the split second of hesitation and reflection occasioned by his conflict, Athena
appears. Invisible to all others, Athena comes up behind Achilles and gets his attention by grabbing him by the hair. She has come to stop him killing his foe, if he will listen. And so she firmly tells him to break off the combat and instead lash his opponent with words, promising him a reward if he does. Her last word to him is ‘obey’. She is only seen by Achilles and her stabilising influence only felt by him as he overcomes his base instinct to kill first and face the consequences later.

Later when, its spirit broken, the army is abandoning Helen and turning for home, Hera sends Athena to talk them around to staying and fighting on. Instead of trying to influence the soldiers directly, Athena appears to Odysseus and asks him a number of questions, before making the suggestion that he go amongst his men and engage them in dialogue. Odysseus then sets about convincing his men to stand and fight. Later Athena stands beside Odysseus, her voice booming to bring his men to order so that he may be heard. So with Athena’s support Odysseus calms the panicky soldiers and persuades them to fight on. By her actions Athena facilitates Odysseus’ transformation to a great leader when she gives him his first chance to demonstrate his leadership (Stanford 1992). In this way she has helped him to surmount his despair and helplessness, given him an opportunity to develop his leadership practice and also increased the bond between them by helping him when he was in very dire straits. But Athena doesn’t just walk or stand beside those she is helping; she also gets right into the thick of things and is not beyond urging the men into battle herself.

...[S]o down the ranks that dazzling goddess went to stir the attack, and each man in his heart grew strong to fight and never quit the melee for at her passage war
itself became lovelier than return, lovelier than sailing in the decked ships to their own native land (Homer 1998, p.30).

But even in the full flight of battle Athena remains controlled and restrained and she defeats her fellow Olympian Ares in a detached and calm manner in contrast to his indiscriminate savagery and rage during the fight.

She protects Menelaus when he is in danger of an arrow strike ‘by deflecting by an inch the missile’s flight so that it grazed your skin – the way a mother would keep a fly from settling on a child when he is happily asleep’ (Homer 1998, p.60). She sows ferocity, makes men bold, models behaviour, presents challenging opportunities, holds their hands and leads them, walks beside them, appears in various guises so as not to startle, has warm feelings towards them. She impels, she shields, she confronts, she questions, makes connections, uses logic, clears the way. She is happy when she is chosen by one of her heroes to be his protector – ‘at this the grey-eyed goddess secretly took pleasure that of all the gods he chose to make his prayer to her’ (Homer 1998, p.315) – she supports and strengthens her heroes for the trials they face, she feels affection or love for them, and she runs interference, tricking and tripping as necessary.

Athena’s relationship with Odysseus grows stronger over time and once the war is won we can see that her interventions on his behalf are based on genuine affection and often compassion for her hero in his dilemmas. Athena intervenes to assist Odysseus more than fifty times before he finally makes it back home to Ithaca.
Their first meeting on his home ground has him disguised as a refugee from Crete and Athena appearing to him in the guise of a poor shepherd. Eventually she drops the pretence, appears as a beautiful woman and treats him with affection. Odysseus complains that he still has not reached his home despite all the years of wandering. She replies that she always had faith in his ability to reach home and she then reveals to him, by lifting a fog that she contrived to cover the countryside, that he is, in fact, home. Odysseus is overwhelmed with joy and together they plan how he will recover his birthright and cast out the suitors from his estate. He seeks her help to give him courage and she assures him that he will have her protection. The rest, as they say, is history.

Athena, however, is by no means a perfect being, having her own struggles among the other gods and with her powerful father. She displays some less than admirable traits in these moments of conflict, especially if she loses her temper. She is also capable of errors of judgement as exemplified by her plans to make Tydeus immortal only to realise her error when she sees him split his adversary’s skull open and eat his brains and then turns away from him in disgust.

Athena offers her heroes not only protection, but also wise counsel, foresight that is grounded in the practical and the opportunity to think things through (Baring & Cashford 1993). In effect she creates a safe space for them in which to reflect.

This is called metis, after her mother of the same name, translated as ‘counsel’ or ‘practical wisdom’, but sometimes with the overtones of shrewdness and craftiness, of thinking too much upon the event (Baring & Cashford 1993, p.339).
Why does a goddess hold the mentor archetype?

Given that the gods and goddesses represent the archetypical choices that are available to us, Athena presents those she helps with the opportunity to create and choose from options, rather than blindly following their automatic patterns of decision making. She is the giver or creator of the critical moment of choice (as in the case of Achilles) or the safe reflective space in which transformational personal change may take place.

She assists so many heroes that this quality is thereby recommended for those on the heroic journey for self-mastery and understanding (Baring & Cashford 1993, p.344).

As indicated earlier, the images of the mythical gods and goddesses seem to hold the dichotomies of paradox which confront humanity. Larger than life, they embody an idealised perfection and yet carry within them stark flaws (Paris 1990). At different times they are gentle yet ruthless, wise yet at other times totally mad or foolish, honourable yet sly. They suggest how perfect we could be if only we could overcome the imperfection that we contain. If the deities are representations of experiences and qualities that most humans hold at the archetypical level of our psyche (Jung 1992), they provide a vehicle for us to understand ourselves better, and to explore the contradictions and dilemmas of what it is to be human, not divine.

But why a goddess? And why did she disguise herself as a man? Might pondering these questions give us some insight into the intrinsic qualities of a mentor? Gilligan (1993) suggests that this could be because mentoring is about relationship – an arena often (even if simplistically) associated with feminine qualities. At a time when history tells us that men were the key
actors in Greek society we have a female, albeit in the guise of a man or sometimes other creatures, playing the key role in shaping the destinies of the great heroes of the epics. Moreover, she embodies both the archetypal feminine qualities such as wisdom and aesthetics and archetypal male qualities such as valour and fighting.

But if Athena embodies such power, why was it necessary for her to disguise herself as a man? It has been argued that the forms of gods and goddesses are reflections of the social structure of the society in which they are revered (Harrison 1989). The ancient Greece of Homer was a patriarchal society and women did not have the same standing and rights as men. It can be argued that that situation is not too far removed from many corporate and organisational environments today. Many successful women have learned to adopt the iconic mantle of the dominant group – the business suit, the shoulder pads, the tough attitude, and so forth – to better fit in with the dominant group and to gain more credibility for themselves and their work by visibly separating themselves from lower status women in their organisations (Zey 1984, p.114). So, too, did Athena have to appear in a form that would not ‘rock the boat’ with the traditionally dominant group in the society of the time.

Athena as Mentor was able to offer Telemachus the balance needed for true development of the whole person—the balance between masculine and feminine, *animus* and *anima* (Jung 1958), that would not have been accessible through a male god. By embodying both the feminine and the masculine, Athena presents Telemachus with more options for his self-
development – the well-rounded characteristics of a whole, healthy and fully integrated human being.

The concept of the mentor archetype as it appears in the Athena image is derived from two universal archetypes, *earth mother* and *hero father*, and I would suggest that to disregard or de-emphasise the feminine part is not only to skew the image of the mentor archetype and to diminish its value, but also to diminish the full potential of the mentoring relationship.

**The story of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice – holding the archetype of the impatient learner**

I turn now to a different myth – the story of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice. The modern image of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice comes from the interpretation of the classic tale in the Walt Disney animated feature *Fantasia (1940)*. But the original work is almost as old as the work of Homer, having been with us for around two millennia. Variously identified as a Greek, Assyrian or Roman satirist of the second century, Lucian of Somosata wrote the story of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice as a dialogue, *Philopsuedes* (The Lover of Lies) (Graf 1997).

In this poem Eucrates comes to live with a powerful Egyptian magician called Pancrates and over twenty years or so in the magician’s secret chambers beneath the desert sands, Eucrates learns the magic craft of his master, save for one spell which is kept from him. The secret spell is one that allows Pancrates to bring inanimate objects to life and command them to obey his wishes. He can make a broom, a door lock or any other object
burst into life and do as he commands and then with another incantation return it to its normal state.

Wanting to know the secret of the sorcerer’s power, one day Eucrates secretly himself where he is able to hear the three-syllable spell when his master utters it. Directly after the magician leaves he tries the incantation on a pestle and makes it bring him water. But having brought the pestle to life he is powerless to stop it and soon the chamber is awash with water and he nearly drowns. Fearing the magician’s wrath he tries to destroy the pestle by striking it with an axe, only to find that the two halves he creates continue their determined water-fetching. The powerful sorcerer returns and cleans up the chaos without raising his voice and chastising the apprentice – but he abandons Eucrates, leaving the apprentice to his own devices (Graf 1997; Anderson 2000).

In the eighteenth century the writer and philosopher Goethe (1749–1832) popularised the story when he wrote the poem Der Zauberlehrling (The Magician’s Assistant). And in 1897 French composer Paul Dukas (1865–1935) wrote an orchestral interpretation of the story L’Apprentie Sorcier which was used as the musical score for the sequence of the animated feature Fantasia (1940) in which Mickey Mouse is shown as apprenticed to a fearsome and accomplished sorcerer.

In the torch lit and shadowy chamber, while the sorcerer performs his magic and does the kinds of things sorcerers are supposed to do, the apprentice mournfully goes about the menial chores that are his domain as the learner.
We see Mickey trudging back and forth with a pair of buckets, filling a large cistern in the magician’s chamber with water from the outside fountain. Eventually the sorcerer takes off his magical blue hat with the stars and moons on it and leaves, his enormous shadow trailing behind him as he ascends the stairs leading from the chamber.

Meanwhile his apprentice continues his work, and presently his eyes light on the hat with the bright stars and moons on it. In an instant he decides to perform some magic of his own to get his task accomplished. He dons the sorcerer’s hat (which is far too large for him), utters some incantations, and soon has a straw broom pressed into service as a water carrier. To and from the fountain the broom carries buckets of water, until the cistern is full. Meanwhile the apprentice has fallen asleep and is dreaming of his power and all the great feats of magic that he can now perform.

Some time later he is shocked to his senses by water lapping around him. When he tries to stop the broom he finds that although his magic was strong enough to start the process, it is wanting when it comes to halting it. The broom continues its work and water floods the chamber. Abandoning the trappings of the sorcerer the apprentice picks up an axe and endeavours to stop the broom by chopping it and the buckets it carries to smithereens. Alas, he only succeeds in making things worse, with an army of bucket-carrying brooms rising like zombies from the detritus of splinters to continue marching relentlessly between well and cistern.
In the final scenes we see the apprentice struggling to stay afloat and not drown in the swirling waters that now fill the chamber. The sorcerer returns and uses his power to restore order. The apprentice sheepishly returns the magical, but now sodden and slightly misshapen, hat to its rightful owner. He is then dispatched back to his water-carrying chore by the sorcerer who gives him a swipe on the backside with the now inanimate broom.

While I would not claim that it is in same league as Homer’s poem, the story of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice is a classic in its own right and for me\footnote{I am aware of at least one other researcher, coincidently another Australian, who has linked the Disney version of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice to the notion of mentoring (Matters 1998).} articulates the archetype of the learner as an impatient, less-experienced person who is too eager to take on the mantle of their master and who must learn that they need to spend the requisite amount of time observing and being taught before they have learned enough to put on the cloak of the wise one.

**Consequences of the images of the archetypes**

Against the background of these two long-lived and powerfully symbolic archetypical images, it is understandable that the notion of mentoring for many people, researchers included, is most often woven around the idea of an experienced, wise and well-respected person helping another person – who is usually younger and less experienced – to achieve a new level of mastery or achievement, one that they might be unable to achieve left to their own devices.
Further reinforcement of this view of, or approach to, mentoring comes from the types of master and apprentice relationships that have occurred throughout history and across geographic, cultural and professional boundaries. Because of the gender bias towards a male view of the world in almost all recorded history until recent times, the examples of this relationship in operation are of young men or boys being apprenticed (either formally via some system of indenture, or more informally with a boy being delivered to and then left with a master craftsman) in a range of male crafts such as stonemasonry, carpentry, sculpture and painting. As well there was the kind of apprenticeship involving a scholarship or bursary with individuals bonded to institutions to undertake religious or scholastic studies.

The archetypes embedded in the story of Athena(Mentor) and that of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice also serve to reinforce the notion of the passing on of wisdom and benefit to others from one generation to another (Merriam 1983), the concept of passing the torch (Gladstone 1988) and of gift giving (Gehrke 1988).

But what of modern notions of mentoring? How has mentoring been framed in a modern context which is much less saturated with the mythical and magical, but, despite its modernity, is a context which continues to be defined through story. And how closely do modern concepts and images of

---

8 For simplicity I will use this form to emphasise the importance of the role of Athena rather than the more popular emphasis on ‘the wise old man’.
mentoring fit with those of ancient Greece? In order to explore these questions, in the next chapter I will examine the literature in relation to mentoring in the modern context.
Chapter 4—When words fail: attempting to define mentoring ‘now’

It is apparent that much is made of this elusive term, mentoring. What is a mentor? Is it a person, a process, a noun or a verb? (Walker, Kelly & Hume 2002, p.1)

Introduction

In Chapter 3 some archetypical images were described through the story of Athena (Mentor) and that of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice. These carry the idea of the passing on of wisdom and benefit to others from one generation to another (Merriam 1983), of passing the torch (Gladstone 1988) and of gift giving (Gehrke 1988). But how has mentoring been framed in a modern context where the mythical and magical are not as evident?

In order to begin to address these questions, in this chapter I review contemporary commentary on the nature of mentoring, including attempts made in the literature to define mentoring and its contribution in modern organisational settings.

Modern images and concepts of mentoring

I undertook much of my research into contemporary literature in the latter half of my research journey. This is not to say that literature was not reviewed at the start (particularly in my search for a definition of mentoring), but it was not until I had formed my ideas into some semblance of order that I consulted the literature extensively to compare my thoughts with those of others. I felt that by taking this ‘grounded theory’ (Strauss & Corbin 1990;
Strauss & Corbin 1994) approach I could better ensure that I would remain more open to the trends and ideas coming from the data than if I were already steeped in existing theory through my reading of the literature.

In beginning the more extensive review of the literature I initially reconnected with the broad ‘overview’ articles that I had found at the start of my research. I then moved to references cited in these works and so on, with each new piece of material generating possibilities for further study. After a short while I began to search for works by particular authors who seemed to be cited regularly (for example, Levinson et al. 1978; Phillips-Jones 1982; Merriam 1983; Zey 1984; Clawson 1985; Kram 1985b; Fagenson 1988; Noe 1988a; Murray & Owen 1991; Chao, Walz & Gardner 1992; Ragins 1996). In searching for the works of some of these more ‘significant’ researchers I discovered that some (often in collaboration) were particularly prolific and were published across a range of professional journals (for example, Ragins & Cotton 1993a; Ragins 1997; Ragins & Scandura 1997; Ragins & Cotton 1999).

By taking the approach outlined above I was able to source material forward and backward in time from my starting point as well as across disciplines and professions. In order to keep the task manageable, I examined literature from four broad professional streams. One was business, including management and organisational literature (see, for example, Shapiro, Haseltine & Rowe 1978; Klauss 1981; Kram 1983; Appelbaum, Ritchie & Shapiro 1994; Beech & Brockbank 1999; Higgins & Kram 2001; Lankau & Scandura 2002). Another was education and academia (see, for example,
Merriam 1983; Daloz 1986; Gray 1986; Colwell 1998; Samier 2000). Yet another was human services, including nursing and health (see, for example, Tosteson 1979; Bajnok & Gitterman 1988; Greene & Puetzer 2002; Thorpe & Kalischuk 2003). The fourth was psychology and human behaviour (see, for example, Barnett 1984; Noe 1988a; Dreher & Ash 1990; Burke & McKeen 1996; Ensher, Grant-Vallone & Marelich 2002). I selected these broad streams because in each of them there seemed to be an interest in the development of new practitioners as well as the improvement of experienced practitioners through the process of mentoring. As well, I examined writing by practitioners about their practice and their ideas about mentoring, a body of work that is rich in experience, though perhaps not meeting the scholarly criteria. The literature I accessed was from the English-speaking world, including Australian, Canadian and British work, with the bulk of it coming from the USA where there has been the most extensive research into mentoring.

**Interest in the value of mentoring**

The construct of mentoring became such a major focus for my work and interest that I was tempted to begin this review of the literature with the definitional material. However, one of the aspects that struck me about the literature was how much people were prepared to write about mentoring without actually ‘defining their terms’ or attempting to compare their definitions with those of others.

I found that this made the literature difficult to read and review, at least at the outset. Often it seemed to be taken for granted that readers would know
what was meant by the term. Despite this, there has been a steady stream of interest in the benefits of mentoring for individuals and organisations.

One of the most sustained studies was Vaillant’s (1977) research into men attending the 1939 – 1944 classes at Harvard University. This project followed the men’s progress while they were being mentored through various life stages, from being undergraduate students at university, starting out in occupations or professions, becoming capable practitioners, and eventually becoming mentors themselves. During the 1970s organisations in the United States began to feel the increasingly hot blast of economic competition from countries such as Japan, and as they searched for new and better ways to improve, mentoring came to be seen as a way of maximising the use of ‘human capital’ in organisations by speeding up the integration and development of individuals, be they new recruits, women, members of ethnic minorities or individuals identified as being capable, developing managers and leaders. An article titled Everyone Who Makes It Has A Mentor (Collins & Scott 1978) appeared in the Harvard Business Review, lending weight to the notion that climbing the corporate tree was difficult if not impossible without the assistance of someone higher up in the organisation to offer guidance, opportunities and protection. This seminal and often cited article was based on interviews with three chief executives who had succeeded each other in the one organisation. In the interviews they revealed the important role of mentoring in shaping their organisation. Ironically, it was written by two women.
At about the same time, the influential academic and consultant Kanter (1977) advised senior managers to support and help further the careers of young talent in organisations, guiding and protecting young people as they climbed the corporate ladder.

Others, from a range of perspectives over the years, have discussed the benefits of mentoring. For example, Montgomery (1993) found that establishing formal mentoring programs could have an impact on organisational culture and suggested that mentoring should be valued for the sake of individual and organisational development rather than for its benefits in a career promotion sense. And the impact of mentoring on new recruits was researched by Ostroff and Kozlowski (1993) who found that providing formal mentors to new staff improved their ability to gather accurate organisational information and be socialised into the organisation more quickly. Along similar lines Orpen (1995) found that mentoring of new recruits had a positive impact on their advancement during their first four years in an organisation.

Clawson (1979), who undertook research into the role of the mentor and its impact on ‘superior-subordinate’ relationships, initially agreed. His research suggested that the mentoring process could, in part, assist with career development. But by 1985 he had taken quite a different view, when after surveying 76 managers he concluded that mentoring was not essential. He suggested that most serious learning about management happens in the superior-subordinate relationship and that human resource practitioners should concentrate on developing the skills of managers as coaches, rather
than focusing on the more career oriented process of mentoring (Clawson 1985). Ten years later Clawson (1996) seemed to have shifted yet again, now arguing that mentoring is indeed a useful practice with a great heritage that has helped it to survive the paradigm shifts brought about by the Industrial Age and the Post Modern Age. He argued that, more than ever, mentoring is necessary to help people cope with the strains and demands of the Information Age.

I cite these shifts in some detail not to denigrate the scholarship of Clawson, but rather as an illustration of what appears to have happened broadly in the field over time as researchers, practitioners and commentators have shifted their views of what mentoring has to offer individuals and organisations in the light of changing economic and social circumstances.

Similar shifts can be noted in the fields of education (Daloz 1983; 1986; Gibb 1994), academia (Schön 1987a), nursing (Bajnok & Gitterman 1988), law enforcement (Fagan 1988; Barrett 2002) and social work (Collins 1994).

From a broader perspective, looking beyond any particular industry or occupational setting, Larson (1983) found that supportive relationships could be placed on a spectrum of mentor – sponsor – guide – peer – pal; and that while such relationships present both advantages and hazards to the participants, the advantages generally outweigh the disadvantages. Examining mentoring as experienced by protégés during their early career stages in organisations Burke (1984) found that, in practice, around three quarters of the respondents to his survey had one or more mentors; that
females were just as likely as males to have mentors; and, that the experience was generally a positive one for the protégés. Burke also noted the potential value of formal mentoring in the context of affirmative action programs.

Fagenson (1988) was another to explore the practical impact of mentoring. Her research indicated that people who were mentored reported having greater amounts of three forms of power: organisational policy influence; access to important individuals; and access to more resources. Indeed, her later study (Fagenson 1989) found that both male and female protégés reported having more satisfaction, more career opportunities and mobility, more recognition and a higher rate of promotion than individuals who were not mentored. She also found that protégés’ perceptions of their career situations were not affected by either gender or job level.

Others to study the outcomes of mentoring include Willbur (1986; 1987) who explored the relationship between mentoring and success in business and Zey (1984; 1988) who pondered how mentoring impacted on the managerial effectiveness of those who were mentored. Zey (1988) concluded that mentoring should not just be thought of and used as a tool for management development, but as an approach for dealing with problematic issues such as labour shortage, the changing workforce, the impact of mergers, the pursuit of innovation and the emergence of the cross-cultural corporation. Zey maintained that the benefits of mentoring flow not only to the protégé, but that the mentor gains as well by getting assistance for projects as well as a ready ear for their own ideas.
It is not my intention to offer here a comprehensive review of the literature which has explored the practical consequences of mentoring, even though interest in these impacts has continued into more recent times (see, for example, the work of Aryee & Chay 1994). It is important, though, to acknowledge at least three of the major themes in that literature over the past forty years. One is the criticism of traditional, informal mentoring that has been seen as favouring particular groups. Another is the value that has been placed on deliberate or formal mentoring for groups identified and labelled as ‘minority’ or ‘disadvantaged’ on the basis of gender, socio-economic status or ethnicity. Lastly, is the concern that there are risks, as well as the benefits, that can flow to those singled out for ‘special treatment’ through formal (orchestrated) or informal (self-generated) mentoring.

Phillips (1977) and Zey (1984) raised concerns about the fairness of traditional, informal mentoring in organisations citing its bias towards white, well-educated, advantaged, Anglo males. Many years later, remuneration and race were the foci of research by Dreher and Cox (1996) who found that non-white MBAs were less likely than their white counterparts to be in mentoring relationships with white males. They also found that females with MBAs were less likely than males with the qualification to form such relationships. As well there was a very significant difference in remuneration between graduates who had white, male mentors and those who had mentors with other demographic characteristics.

In a similar vein, Whitely, Dougherty and Dreher (1991) found that while mentoring had a positive impact on promotion and remuneration, this
impact was greater for individuals from higher socioeconomic levels than for those from lower ones. They postulated that this was because protégés from higher socioeconomic backgrounds had mentors from similar backgrounds with more influential networks, whereas those from lower socioeconomic levels did not. In a follow-up study of managers and professionals in early career, Whitely, Dougherty and Dreher (1992) found that individuals who were younger, from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and who involved themselves more in work (ie. showed more ‘commitment’) received more career-oriented mentoring. As well managers received more mentoring than professionals did, as did those higher up in the organisation. Interestingly, in this study, while gender was unrelated to the amount of mentoring received, age was negatively related.

There has been a deal of interest in whether women are as likely to be mentored as men, such as the study by Noe (1988b) which found that a number of barriers impeded the development of mentorships for female managers, including their not having access to information networks; the operation of stereotypes; the socialisation or enculturation practices in organisations; issues relating to cross-gender relationships; and tokenism. Similarly, Ragins in collaboration with Sundstrom (1989), examined the relationship between gender and the level of perceived power in organisational settings and found that ‘research reveals a consistent difference favouring men in accessibility to and utility of resources for power’ (Ragins & Sundstrom 1989, p.51). In the same year Ragins wrote that:
The mentoring relationship is important to men but may be essential for women, especially female managers, since mentors can buffer them from discrimination. Mentors may also train female protegees in corporate politics (Ragins 1989, p.1).

Her recommendation was that organisations should provide opportunities for female managers to interact with potential mentors; to provide training for both; grow female mentors at lower organisational levels; and institutionalise the mentoring relationship.

Despite being one of the first to call attention to the power of mentoring – and to point out that formally orchestrated and targeted mentoring programs are important ways that women and others can ‘catch up’ with those who are privileged by informal, traditional and male-dominated mentoring processes – Kanter (1977) was also quick to note that any organisational program can result in accusations of preferential treatment and that, ironically, these accusations can be most audible where women mentor women.

These concerns were echoed by Fitt and Newton (1981) who suggested that male-female mentoring relationships run the risk of being seen as sexual by others. Nieva and Gutek (1981) elaborated a number of possible problems associated with cross-gender mentoring, including perceived or actual sexual intimacy and sexual exploitation and harassment. Gutek (1985) specifically examined the roles of sexuality and intimacy using the ‘sex role spillover’ model that outlines the carryover of gender-based roles such as sex object, lover, wife, daughter and mother that are not relevant in the workplace. Much later, Hurley (1996) reviewed the literature exploring the challenges presented by cross-gender mentoring relationships.
However, the importance of mentoring for women has been a continuing theme, so that Ragins and Cotton (1993a) assert that:

[*] for women, mentors are essential. They can buffer the women from discrimination and help them overcome gender-related barriers to advancement. The shortage of women at upper levels of organizations creates a dearth of potential female mentors, and the women in management who are available to form mentoring relationships are overburdened with requests from the large block of women at lower levels. This means that women have to approach men to form mentor relationships (Ragins & Cotton 1993b, p.20).

Gender has been a continuing area of interest for Ragins and with Scandura she investigated differences in the costs and benefits of being a mentor and found that women were as likely as men to be mentors and that their reported outcomes and intentions to mentor in the future were similar to those reported by the men in the sample (Ragins & Scandura 1994). Despite a number of perceived gender-related barriers which might mitigate against them taking on the mentor role (such as heavy demands on their time away from work, accusations of bias and feminist conspiracy) they found that women reported similar costs and benefits to men.

And mentoring can have other downsides for both parties. Zey identified the negative consequences of being in such relationships when the mentor fails to adequately protect the protégé or when a mentor falls from grace in an organisation and takes the reputation of their protégés with them, calling the phenomenon ‘the black halo effect’ (Zey 1984, p.137). The dangers for mentors were outlined by Halatin and Knotts (1982) who highlighted a number of ‘costs’ linked to being a mentor, including: the time and energy required; being associated with a poorly performing protégé; and, being ‘backstabbed’ or displaced by ambitious protégés. Scandura (1998) has provided a framework for studying the negative aspects of mentoring within
the context of close interpersonal relationship by using Duck’s (1994) ‘dark side’ typology. And, more recently, using Scandura’s propositions as a basis Eby, McManus, Simon and Russell (2000) have developed a taxonomy of negative mentoring experiences from the point of view of protégés that include neglect, intentional exclusion, deception, credit taking and sabotage.

A number of other writers have highlighted the dilemmas that come into play whether mentoring is ‘arranged’ or simply ‘happens’, and whether it involves a mix of gender. Schmidt (1997), for example, has explored the ways in which motives related to power and intimacy affect mentoring, reinforcing Montgomery’s (1993) earlier research which suggested that critical success factors for matching pairs formally in organisational settings included the ability of both parties to engage in relationships of temporary inequality in terms of power as well as difference in age.

And Allen, Poteet and Russell (2000) observed that when choosing protégés in the complex politics of contemporary organisational life, mentors are more influenced by their perceptions of the protégés’ potential and ability than by their ‘need for help’ (p.271).

**‘Arranged’ mentoring**

Later in this chapter, having reviewed the construct of mentoring and its characteristics, I will return to the notion of whether mentoring can, in fact, be 'arranged'. For the moment, it is important to acknowledge that the perceived potential benefits of ‘arranged’ mentoring initially sprang from concerns about the inequity of traditional, informal mentoring in
organisational and life settings more generally. As a consequence, there has been some research interest in how mentoring can be provided to people formally and with what success. For, example, in his examination of mentor relationships in the public sector in the United States of America Klauss (1981) identified as problematic issues of clarity around role responsibilities and expectations; the processes used to match mentors and ‘advisees’; hierarchical tensions resulting from the programs; and the quality of the mentoring relationships. Cunningham and Eberle (1993) explored the characteristics, attributes and skills of effective mentors and the characteristics of the mentor-protégé relationship as well as examining some of the problems associated with arranging those relationships. They concluded that mentors and protégés differed quite markedly in their views of the skills and attributes required, and that they had different perceptions of the benefits as well as differing views of the problems.

There is even strong doubt that formally arranged mentoring is as effective as mentoring that occurs spontaneously. Chao, Walz and Gardner (1992) found that protégés in informal relationships reported more career support from mentors and higher salaries than those in formal mentorships. Also, those in informal mentorships reported better outcomes on all three outcome measures than non-mentored individuals and the researchers hypothesised that people in informal relationships developed stronger relationships because of the manner they selected each other – freely, mutually. And Ragins and Cotton (1999) found that the protégés in informal relationships gained greater compensation and better career outcomes than those in formal relationships. Nevertheless advice about how to set up
programs to orchestrate mentoring abounds. Phillips-Jones (1982) encouraged organisations to ‘start small’; ensure that there is top management support for programs; create mentoring programs as part of larger career development or management training efforts; ensure that participation is voluntary; keep cycles short; select both mentors and mentees carefully; provide an orientation program for them; allow mentors to use the style which is most comfortable for them; expect problems and challenges along the way; and monitor programs carefully.

While acknowledging that formal mentoring programs have some risks associated with the potential for mismatch between pairs, forced matching and the time and commitment involved, Burke and McKeen (1989; 1990) outlined strategies to reduce these, emphasising that mentoring relationships between men and women require special attention. Acknowledging problems or risks associated with cross-gender mentoring such as sexual attraction, marital impact and gossip, they suggest that discussing these issues openly in organisations is necessary to develop positive mentoring relationships. They recommend that organisations establishing formal mentoring programs include discussion of issues related to cross-gender relationships as explicit parts of their programs. Ragins (1996) also made a number of recommendations as to what organisations can do to help women overcome the barriers to their being mentored, including running formal programs and encouraging more women to be mentors. Ragins (1997) examined the linkage between diversity and mentorship in organisations from a power perspective, using sociological
frames to develop and operationalise a construct of diversified mentoring in organisations.

In view of my own exploration of the nature of mentoring, I was particularly interested to discover two researchers who thought it useful to look at how mentoring happens ‘naturally,’ to assist those who want to make it happen ‘intentionally’. Cunningham (1993) observed that despite the increasing popularity of formal mentoring programs in organisations, the overwhelming majority of mentoring takes place in informal relationships. He outlined a number of underpinning principles for setting up, designing and implementing a mentoring program so that organisations can create a culture that embraces mentoring not just a set of instructions and procedures. Two years later, Bennetts (1995) studied informal mentoring by interviewing 24 people in training or teaching roles across a range of organisations to find out ‘what makes this informal relationship tick, and whether the relationship was different for each pair’ (p.38). She suggested that while the mentoring relationship is different from other types of relationship, it needs time, not rules or conditions to allow it to flourish.

Interest in this particular issue is not new. From the late seventies and early eighties there has been a significant commentary on the characteristics of formal and informal mentoring (Collins & Scott 1978; Levinson et al. 1978; Shapiro, Haseltine & Rowe 1978; Clawson 1979; Kram 1980; Missirian 1982; Phillips-Jones 1982; Daloz 1983; Kram 1983). The suggestion by some authors has been that informal mentoring is more transformational or influential than formal mentoring and, because of its ‘ad hoc’ nature and the
interpersonal dynamics of attraction between participants, is not able to be replicated in the context of the ‘forced’ matching that occurs in formal organisational programs (Klauss 1981; Phillips-Jones 1983; Burke 1984; Kram 1985b; Zey 1985). By comparison, formal mentoring has been seen to be focused more on achieving outcomes for the organisation than on meeting the needs of the individuals taking part (Klauss 1981; Phillips-Jones 1983; Burke & McKeen 1989; Chao, Walz & Gardner 1992; Montgomery 1993).

As I eventually came to realise, however, beneath the discussion of whether or not mentoring can be effectively ‘arranged’ or ‘manufactured’ sits another, much deeper issue that goes to the heart of what mentoring actually is.

**The literature and me**

In reviewing the literature, I have tried to present accurately the dilemmas and challenges that it presented for me – and that, I feel, it has most likely posed for others. What I have found harder to do is to concisely explain how the literature informed my sense-making in ‘real time’ as I went along. My engagement with the literature was not sustained in an unbroken episode. Rather, I went back and forth to the literature several times and at one time, as I mentioned earlier, I turned my back on the literature altogether and immersed myself in the analysis of my data – which, in turn, led me to the writing of the stories based on my interviews and my life experience.

In the chapter that follows through presenting my ‘real time’ reflections I will track the development of my thinking that came about as a result of writing these stories, as well as presenting the stories themselves. I will then present
a summary of my understanding of mentoring and how it developed from a focus on ‘doing’ and ‘knowing’ to my framing of Athenic mentoring in terms of ‘being’.
Chapter 5—Contemporary accounts of mentoring: Stories from the data of others

Something that preserves plausibility and coherence, something that is reasonable and memorable, something that embodies past experience and expectations, something that resonates with other people, something that can be constructed retrospectively but also can be used prospectively, something that captures both feeling and thought, something that allows for embellishment to fit current oddities, something that is fun to construct. In short, what is necessary in sensemaking is a good story (Weick 1995, p.61).

Introduction

In this chapter I offer a selection of stories which are my interpretation of the lived experience of mentoring as others told it to me. The source of the stories, the means of their creation and analysis have been described in Chapter 2. In these stories of the experience of others (and in the stories of my own experience in Chapter 7) I suggest that the ‘archetypical’ nature of mentoring is revealed, as much by its absence in some stories as by its clear presence in others. As a result I anticipate that the reader will make their own connections with the material, but at two levels – a conceptual level which reflects what has been read and thought; and a more emotional, but perhaps less conscious level which reflects their personal experience of the mentoring archetype. It does not necessarily follow that any one story or even all the stories will describe the archetype as readers hold it within themselves. Indeed Jung (1992) has argued that archetypes cannot be described fully, but that descriptions of archetypes resonate with individuals at a deep and personal level.
In some of these stories the names, occupations, status and in some cases gender have been deliberately distorted to help to maintain the confidentiality of the people who shared their stories with me. At the end of each of the stories I will present very brief summaries of the ‘real time’ reflections that they evoked for me. It is my hope that these summaries help to track how each of the stories shaped my ultimate understanding of the concept of mentoring.

The reflections are necessarily brief because at the time of writing the stories and doing the reflecting my concepts and understandings were tentative and ‘blurry’. Because they are ‘real time’ reflections they are all in the present tense.

**Story One**

Meeting with George is like being granted an audience. The office is large and sparsely furnished, but comfortable. The room and everything about his manner says, ‘You’d better mean business’ – despite the smile and relaxed banter. George is the second in charge in his organisation and is generally seen to be the operational brains of the organisation. The CEO may have the vision and do the corporate rollouts, but George is the person who ensures that it all happens and that at the end of the day the books are balanced. Now in his forties he has made a steady progression to the top through hard work and postgraduate studies.

From his earliest steps up the corporate ladder George has experienced the benefits and the pitfalls of being mentored. Spotted as a ‘bright young talent’
he was pulled out of the pack by a senior manager for some special, individual attention. He describes the mentoring model his boss used as ‘the classic mentor/protégé approach’: the wise and experienced master takes on the malleable clay of the inexperienced apprentice and moulds, hardens and even tempers it with ‘fire’ until the neophyte is able to do for themselves in the hurly burly of the business world.

To be mentored … was really to have somebody who was, in a very independent and apolitical sort of way, providing guidance about a whole range of processes, procedures, rules of the game that were informal … not written down in any sort of way.

The approach here involves exposing the apprentice to a variety of what are perceived to be the right experiences and opportunities, passing on hard won experience through timely advice and, when necessary, running interference to protect the chosen one from their rivals, from political problems and even from themselves. The approach is not without its problems as the special relationship between the master and apprentice can often be seen as favouritism and can engender envy and anger in people who then might set out to ‘hurt’ the protégé, if and when possible. It’s certainly a downside that George is well aware of as a potential problem for the people he mentors. He also experienced it in a very strong way himself, resulting in him leaving an organisation well before he would have liked because the hostility from his peers and many others in the organisation made his position too uncomfortable for him. Despite this he maintains strong if not regular contact with his mentor to this day. If George wants to reality test a critical idea or needs some support or encouragement he knows where to go, even though these days his success has eclipsed that of his old master.
When George talks about his own experience of being mentored, he talks about getting ‘apolitical, independent and supportive advice about how to survive and operate successfully in organisations.’ The relationship is a non-threatening one of trust and understanding ‘that it’s absolutely coming from the perspective of looking after my interests rather than anything else.’

Although the relationship between George and his mentor developed over the years, with trust and even friendship building over time, there were some things that defined the relationship right from the start.

...[A]nd the one thing that I can remember very clearly out of all that was that he was very good about feedback on the nature of the work. And it's one of those interesting things because he has the reputation amongst other people for being a very draconian sort of boss – but he was the most supportive boss I've ever had. I can't ever remember being told I got it wrong – and yet, I must have got it wrong on many, many occasions. I mean in terms of the nature of the stuff. ... [The] feedback was always done in a constructive way that was built into the next generation of the product, or whatever you were doing.

If it was a report then it was just sort of in there – a correction, an improvement, an enhancement that was most likely done jointly and it was never, never part of a process where you put in the report and got it back with red pen all over it with a very clear view about “Well, you got it wrong. You missed that out. Put these in and I'll sign it.”

...[I]n talking about what we were working on he would explain why the extra bit had to go in there. So he was mentoring as he went because he was explaining the larger picture, or the context, or some other part of the information you weren’t aware of, or hadn’t seen the connections between, or whatever... And so the mentoring just sort of evolved out of that process rather than a process of formal mentoring where you go in and say, “I really need to work on this stuff, and here’s where I think I am weak and I’d like your help to develop.” It was never that way.

George says that feedback is fundamental to having a mentoring conversation, and while mostly the feedback came from his boss, there were plenty of opportunities for him to make it a two-way process, to have a robust conversation about issues. At different times in these conversations George pushed the boundaries of the relationship by treating his boss as he would any another colleague. He recalls that it was a characteristic of the relationship that the boss valued, remarking that George was one of the few
people in the organisation who actually dealt with him as a human being. This is not to say that George was not respectful. He emphasises that strong respect is critical to a good mentoring relationship, but being able to be forthright and being able to operate ‘at the human level’ are essential elements too. The art is in getting the mix right at the right time.

George feels that open dialogue and straight talking are essential parts of what a mentor does. In this way the mentor can provide the protégé with a ‘reality check’. There is a danger in getting ‘too familiar’ or too close to the other person as this can result in the reality check being watered down, and that’s not a good thing in the long run according to George.

George believes that the major quality he brings to a mentoring relationship is the wealth of experience and level of mastery that he now has.

I guess its just having been around. I mean all it is, is experience and being able to see bigger pictures and bigger connections, which is what I found with [my mentor]. And the capacity to put things in perspective whether it’s in terms of science and drama or how this bit fits. I don’t know if there’s much more to it.

And as a protégé, what is it that he brings to that relationship?

Something about a willingness to learn. You wouldn’t actually be in the relationship unless you wanted to be there and you thought there was something to be gained. I suppose you might be there because you felt good that someone was taking an interest in your career, but I suspect that’s not enough to sustain twenty years of it. So in that respect it’s about a belief that they still have more understanding, experience, knowledge, whether it’s technical knowledge or whether it’s knowledge of organisational stuff than you’ve got.

So how does George work with his protégés? There are two sorts of protégé that George works with: ones who come to him via the corporate mentoring program and those who George selects himself as having ‘the right stuff’.
George deals with those in the first group in a very business-like manner. It’s something he has to do. Because of his leadership position he has to be seen to be supporting corporate development programs like the mentoring initiative and the best way to clearly demonstrate that support is to actively take part in the program. For the most part people coming to him in the corporate mentoring program get access to him and he shows interest in what they are doing. Of course, he’s always ready to offer advice and guidance as to what they should or should not be doing in relation to the problematic situations they bring to him. His manner with them is polite and reservedly friendly and when the time is up the mentoring relationship is over.

In terms of focus there would be absolute focus and engagement with the person for the hour that they were in the office. And as soon as they’ve walked out the door you’ve forgotten about it. Sometimes there isn’t that level of respect or personal attraction to the person so you can find yourself, not withstanding the fact that you’re engaging with their problems and giving as much as you can to them, [feeling] boredom or turn-off or irritation. I’ve had all of those … it’s just the equivalent of dealing with a set of budget figures. It’s another job of work and doing that with a level of commitment to work that you would do normally – pretty high. I mean the feedback out of those things is pretty good. I always have trouble getting rid of them, but by the time I’ve done the twelve months, I’m ready to get rid of the person and move on. Thank you!

The people who are selected by George for his personal attention get a much closer involvement and a relationship where the duration is defined by the unfolding situation. It may last a long time, but the limit is not defined from the beginning. It’s a fluid situation that allows the relationship to develop in its own time. George works to give his protégés exposure to a variety of challenging experiences and situations that will be of benefit to them in their careers. They have much easier access to him, although he is mindful of not
exposing them unnecessarily to the difficulties that can arise if they are seen to be favourites.

...[A]ny mentoring relationship where it looks as if there is special treatment going on or a special relationship going on within an organisation will excite organisational political jealousy. There is a price you have to pay, and I would think probably ... formal mentoring doesn't actually attract that price because it's ordained by the organisation and everybody signs off on it and everybody understands it. So it may well be that you differentiate between formal and informal mentoring in relation to that.

The relationship is closer and more robust, the challenges tougher, but there is more support and encouragement. George has a real sense of being closely involved with ‘bringing new talent on’ and of ‘giving something back’. New to the world of work, he had mentors and he believes that it helped him greatly to achieve success. He is now passing on the tradition by finding bright and up and coming people and being their mentor.

But having had such a wonderful experience, there was an obligation about passing the baton on.

**Reflections: Is that what mentoring looks like?**

This story is paradoxical. On the one hand George tells about his own experience as a mentee and as a mentor in a way that is not very personal. The ‘out there’ nature of George’s notion of mentoring is captured when he talks about what it is to be mentored. The emphasis is on the development of individuals organisationally and technically, I don’t see anything about the development of themselves as people. A first reading suggests that there is no transformation, but rather incremental change in technical skill levels – it's about ‘processes, procedures, rules of the game that were informal … not written down in any sort of way.’
He says, ‘the mentoring just sort of evolved’ out of a boss-subordinate coaching process and this involved being given insights about things beyond the direct experience or knowledge of the mentee.

Yet the relationship is special – ‘you felt good that someone was taking an interest,’ the mentee is special – ‘the chosen one’ – and this can lead to a ‘price’ being paid in terms of ‘organisational political jealousy’. In George’s own case the relationship was special enough to translate into over 20 years of support and friendship. While he says that in his own relationships he is wary of getting too close or familiar because it might distort the ‘reality check’. It is interesting that he has committed so much time and effort to so many others. In that sense, there is a curious dissonance between the words and his reported actions. Is this a good example of the unconscious as well as conscious recognition of the value and power of mentoring, coupled with a sense of obligation to pass on the gift that was given to him? For all those he mentors he gives feedback and offers challenging experiences that will benefit them in their careers.

With those he deliberately selects (the bright and upcoming mentees) there is more special attention; a ‘level of respect and personal attraction’. For these individuals he is a guide to the ‘big picture’ and the secret world of organisational politics. He supports, but can confront; expects the mentee to try hard, but will be there for the person.

For those who come to him as part of a formal program, they have his undivided attention ‘for the hour’. He’s polite and reservedly friendly. But
Story Two

Derek’s office is spacious, well appointed and has the feel of a place where a lot of serious work is done, both at his large and well organised desk and at the more informal couch and coffee table area. A ‘no nonsense’ man in his late fifties, his manner is friendly, businesslike, forthright and he exudes the confidence of someone who has been around long enough to have experienced the best and worst that organisations can throw at a person. Derek has spent most of his career working at the top echelons of public sector organisations. He was seen to have potential from the earliest stages of his career and he sought out and was given many opportunities to develop his talent and advance quickly to positions of considerable power and influence.

Anyone who wants to get to spend some time with Derek runs the gauntlet of a very effective personal assistant. She’s a gatekeeper who guards his time as if her very life depends on it. She is polite and efficient and knows well that a key part of her role is to ‘run interference’ for her boss and minimise the impact of timewasters. Time is very important to Derek because as a senior manager it’s the one thing he never seems to have enough of.

The scarcest commodity a senior person has got is time.
Despite the pressures of the senior positions he has held over the years he has regularly been able to find the time and energy to mentor others through informal relationships at work. Mostly Derek has been a mentor for his own junior staff. Handpicked, talented, bright young people whom he thought might have good career prospects and whom he believed merited the time and effort he would invest in their future. In some cases the relationship has continued well after his protégés have gone to other jobs or he has moved on himself.

...[B]ecause we both know the way each other thinks. We both respect each other's views and both trust each other.

In fewer cases, a strong friendship has developed despite Derek’s working actively to maintain a certain amount of formal distance in the relationship. He believes that mentoring up and coming talent is an important aspect of his job as a senior manager even though it might not be spelt out in his job description. But it’s not just about young, new to the job and inexperienced people.

I talk about young people “coming on” because they’re the people I’ve had more involvement with. But there have been other ... It’s not an age thing. Somebody new or somebody changing direction to come into the organisation or into an area and some of those have been especially successful.

His model of mentoring follows the traditional mentor/protégé approach. For him there is an element of ‘passing on the torch’ in the work he does with his protégés and he easily recalls and talks about a critical ‘mentoring experience’ that he had with a very senior person at the dawn of his career around three decades ago.
Derek was interstate with a number of senior colleagues for a very important series of meetings. Early on the morning of the first day, because he couldn’t sleep, he went for a walk and soon found himself bearing down on the most senior member of the team who was out walking in the same direction. Acutely aware of his lowly status on the team and not wanting to disturb the senior man’s thinking, Derek slowed his pace a little.

...[T]his was about seven and just down the road from me, ten yards, was [the boss] up by himself for an early morning walk. He saw me and called out to me, “What are you hanging back for? Come up and have a walk.” He said, “You could have caught me easily” and I said, “You’re about to go to the conference and I thought you’d have a lot on your mind and didn’t need some junior economist turning up.” “Not at all,” he said, “tell me what you think about the issues for today. How would you approach some of those things?”

And we walked for an hour around the lake. I’m not sure if he took any notice of what I said, but I thought, “Hey, if he can make time for that sort of thing!”

Two things stand out for me from that. One, he trusted. I could have been some young clown who would have gone back and blabbed about it, “I’ve been out walking with [the boss] this morning.” But secondly, he exposed me to some of his thoughts and it occurred to me at times when I began to get more senior in the organisation ... that the same sort of feedback might be valued.

Despite its brevity, this incident lives in Derek’s mind as the first significant incident where ‘someone much higher up the tree’ spent some of their valuable time both talking with and listening to him in a way that had a profound influence on the way he later would work with others one-on-one.

I don’t think you decide in the sense of getting up one morning saying, “I’m going to mentor somebody. Who will I look out for to mentor?” I think it’s much more something that evolves in the selection of the individual and it’s not really a selection process. It more often or not just happens and it frequently doesn’t begin as mentoring in the sense of some formal idea that I’m going to mentor this person.

People that I appointed to a job, working to me, and, in one way or another, I begin to take more of an interest in their career and their development and because of how good they are and because they are committed to what they do.

I prefer to work with people who will push me every inch of the way. And having over the years selected good people, in a number of cases, but not always, this has lead me to take an interest in the development of their careers. It’s evolved as a mentoring type thing rather than starting off as a mentoring type thing. ... [T]he movement from support or help to what is taken as sort of an interest in mentoring, I think (a): depends upon their commitment to the job and (b): them being very
committed to, wanting to get, the best result out of their work, work career, that they can. I think in every case the person I have developed, got involved in mentoring with, as a mentor, has been very bright.

While Derek insists that his approach is not one of the wise ‘master’ working with and developing a talented ‘apprentice’, he says that he does very much involve himself in passing on his collected wisdom to up and coming members of his team.

It’s not a master ... It’s very much the opposite of the master–apprentice role. If you’re going to play the master–apprentice role in the old traditional style, the whole thing would fall apart because it would be a set of instructions which is not what mentoring is all about.

I believe that it’s a bit to do with accelerating the way people get operational wisdom. You know, we all look back and say, “If only I knew then what I know now. I might have done something that was quite important in my career or my life rather differently.” I think one of the techniques, one of the advantages, of mentoring is to just observe and react to it. From time to time encourage people to approach a subject in a particular manner that may not be the manner they would necessarily have chosen or approached the problem...

...[L]earning the technique of when to go in really hard on a particular kind of problem and learning to read that it's going to be counterproductive to do it this week. Take a more oblique attitude and, or conversely, this is not the week to go in softly. This is the week to go right in to the cause of the problem.

Derek has a way of picking the people he is going to invest time in developing. It’s a gradual process, not a decision he makes quickly on ‘day one,’ or a matter of making ‘a sudden death’ choices about whom is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’. The people Derek is prepared to spend time working with need to be intelligent, committed to their work, show signs of being independent, be capable of questioning, be able to work in partnership and be trustworthy.

There are a number of things. Firstly, they’re bright, obviously, and interested. Their work is not “9 to 5” or “8 to 6” or whatever they work – and then it’s all switched off. What they’re doing is very much a bit of their daily existence that’s at a higher level than coming along to earn the bread and to go and play golf at the weekend. There’s a commitment there and openness and wanting to talk about their work. Really try and find out about their work...an inquisitiveness, a curiosity. “Why are we doing this particular...? Why are we even doing this? What’s in it for us as an organisation
or this as an area?” Rather than, “The boss says we’ve got to do it. Let’s get on with it.” There’s a combination of those things.

In my case a number of the people who I’ve felt I might have had a mentoring role with have been women. That comes from a particular view I have that because of the way organisations work a woman – that’s changing now – starts one foot behind the male. A number of women I have done that [mentoring] with because I do believe that it’s a little bit of squaring up of the account.

I think it’s fair that I will help them and they’ve got to stand on their own feet, because if they don’t somebody like me isn’t always going to be around. On the other hand I would normally keep a weather eye on the back of anybody I was mentoring and if I saw them getting a bit exposed either take action to deal with it myself or preferably tip them off and give them a bit of a suggestion that they might do this or that.

It must never be seen to be nepotism, they have to earn this first. Whether they turn out to be winners or not, the standards that they are required to perform to both in intellectual and tactical ability, and in the number of hours they put into the job are much higher than would be required for the rest of the employees in that area.

It is not a free ride. If something is going on and it’s seven at night before I even get to it, then seven at night is when we start.

There’s an absolute mutual obligation because one of the things that comes out of the mentoring thing is that they get better and your reaction develops and evolves and they end up doing a higher level of work and get involved in issues that people at their level are not necessarily involved in. And why this has got to be done at seven o’clock is because it is an issue for the organisation that can’t be put aside.

I’ve never, never once been let down by anybody on a matter of trust. They know a great deal about what I’m thinking about a particular issue and they’ll frequently see paperwork and be aware of information that in normal circumstances they would not be aware of or see. And they understand the context I’ve provided to them and I’ve never been let down either in anybody ever leaking or misusing that information.

It’s not a “three strikes and you’re out” game. It’s a one strike and you’re out because, once broken, trust can never easily be rebuilt.

While Derek isn’t a mentor to all of his staff, the process he uses for selecting people to be on his team means that he already has a high level of confidence in everyone’s capabilities whether he decides to mentor them or not. The process of choosing someone to mentor begins with making an assessment of their level of openness and then building on that assessment in a series of small steps that ‘naturally’ either lead towards or away from a longer term mentoring relationship.
I tend to trust open people more than people who aren’t open. I may be wrong, but all I can say is that the score has worked out all right so far. You get a feeling. It’s part of watching their behaviour and not in any way spying, but interacting so you’re seeing them at lunchtime or on a social occasion or with groups of other senior staff where they don’t overplay their situation or big-note or want to talk about things just for the sake of impressing somebody. I guess they’re the main things. It’s a very difficult question as to how you make that judgement.

...[B]ut gradually they reveal that openness and you can read the relationship much more easily. You don’t waste time guessing what the situation is. It’s about transparency. Some of my best debates are with people I’ve mentored because they do argue and that’s good. There is feedback.

There is nothing more refreshing than to have a pretty intelligent, bright person who you’ve worked with and in a discussion you suggest they might go down that particular direction ... and to be challenged on that. Now that’s a bit of feedback! It’s a two-way street.

For Derek a critical element of mentoring people in a work context is that the mentor understands and accepts that in many instances a consequence of the mentoring process will be that the protégé surpasses or eclipses the success of their mentor. Derek has reservations about mentors who are unable to embrace this occurrence as a natural and proper consequence of their work with protégés.

There is one thing I noticed with some other people. I think in my case, hopefully, it hasn’t been an issue, but I have seen it in others. There’s a critical time with a mentor that the person you mentor, or mentoree I suppose, really makes the grade and soars to great heights. They will exceed what the mentor achieved. In my case I always felt that one of the people who mentored me, I know got quite chagrined at one stage. Jealous, if you like. And I’ve seen other examples of it, especially in the public sector. I haven’t got enough experience in the private sector to have seen the mentor have to cross the threshold. I mean some, and I hope I’m in that category, just sit back and think “Fantastic! Isn’t it terrific that person’s done so well”. It’s not always the result and that can lead to some difficulties. If it’s not the result it needs to be watched.

...[S]ome people can do it. I have passed the test up to date, but in my case it led, I think, to a breakdown in the friendship for many, many years.

**Reflections: Is that what mentoring looks like?**

Derek has a clear and unequivocal recollection of his first mentoring experience and interestingly it was fleeting or ‘spot mentoring’ (Hay 1995). His mentor was very much a role model who in just an hour’s walk
had a deep and transformative effect on Derek by demonstrating to him the value of trusting people, opening up to them and giving them time – a commodity that he identifies as being paramount in importance to a senior manager. Derek was surprised and felt special to be treated in the way he was. There was no ‘deal’ made explicitly nor any obligations placed on Derek in relation to the conversation or the matters discussed – the mentor just trusted him to have the good sense to do the right thing, despite not knowing him at close quarters, if at all. Years later, when he became a senior manager, Derek realised that he could emulate this very senior mentor and put some of what he had experienced and learned into action.

Derek’s mentor was prepared to take the risk to expose him to his thinking in this ‘fleeting encounter’, relating to Derek at a personal level despite the wide difference in their formal rank. He encouraged Derek to speak his mind and created a safe space for him to do that.

Derek is now ‘passing on the torch’ selecting his mentees from the best and brightest – those who merit the time and effort he will put into them. He gives freely of his time and wisdom, but expects them to work hard in return; trusts ‘open’ people and likes to work in partnership with them. He guides, protects and gets a great deal of satisfaction from his mentees’ success. He is happy if his mentees eclipse him.
**Story Three**

Rachel describes her office as being ‘very nice surroundings, but messy’. As I look around I can see what she means. It also strikes me that the room is extremely large. Her mentor, Jane, is a key General Manager of the organisation that Rachel has worked in for around seven years. Jane has singled Rachel out to undertake a special project for her. As evidenced by its spaciousness, the office Rachel has been given to work in used to accommodate a much more senior manager. Rachel has ‘set up camp’ by moving and changing only the very minimum necessary for her to able to do her job effectively. She’s in her thirties and is firmly focused on her project. Rachel appears to value the size of the room for the freedom it gives her to spread out her piles of paper and files and not for the status which may be associated with having a room of this size. Whether she is successful or not she knows that this will not be her office in the longer term and so she’s not wasting time changing things that don’t directly help her to achieve her objectives. Jane has selected Rachel for this job because Rachel has a solid background in economics and what she describes ‘an interest in numbers’ and because she can rely on Rachel to do her best to achieve. Jane is mentoring Rachel as she progresses the project, but Rachel knows that Jane has been mentoring her informally over a much longer period of time. Rachel thinks that Jane decided to mentor her in part because the two of them are very similar in a lot of ways. They are both prepared to work very hard to achieve results, have similar career backgrounds, think in similar ways, are able to work well together and have a number of other connection points including some common friends.
I think I became aware of it about [five years ago]. It was never an explicit thing and it wasn’t until we had a big chat [a year after that] about where I was going with my career and she helped me to put into motion all the work needed for me to get into [University] and do my Masters that I realised that she was [my mentor]. I guess that’s the conscious point, but I think probably she was doing it earlier. I knew she liked me and she’d talk to me about things and I could confide in her and she’d worked out she could trust me.

Although she had been growing in awareness that something of great benefit to her was happening during this time, it took Rachel quite a while to figure out what Jane’s motivation might have been for spending the time with her.

And you’re sort of not sure of why she’s doing it or what she’s doing and then you realise that she’s doing it because she, you know ... Oh well, she likes you. She sees some benefit. From an organisational point of view as well, she sees it as an investment that’s worthwhile. And it wasn’t until it came to her supporting me to study that I realised the full extent of the support. Even though she’d always been there and been encouraging and stuff like that.

While she doesn’t say so directly, Rachel recognises that she is in a protected relationship. Rachel describes Jane as being someone who mentors because she is prepared to support people. But she is also sanguine enough to realise that Jane doesn’t mentor just anybody who comes along and that Jane gets something out of these relationships because, at the very least, the mentoring she undertakes is a good advertisement for her as a senior manager.

I think she thinks I’m worth it, but I guess she had to be convinced that I was going to stick around being loyal and contribute and have a particular mindset or set of skills that they need. I’ve had to prove to her that I can do things and that I’m growing in terms of my skills and career.

It sounds so cliched, but I guess there’s trust that you do have each other’s interests at heart. She’s got my loyalty and I’ve got her support. And I know she has my best interests at heart. I think it helps if you see things in a similar [way] ... well, that’s my experience. But it just seems that she and I see a few things in similar ways and whether that’s because I’m a bit under her spell too ... but I think we used to even before we started working closely. We can use a lot of shorthand. I’m not just talking about words, but in terms of ideas – you can cut through a lot of stuff.

I hate it, but she’s used the analogy ... she’s ten years older than me and you do sometimes think of it as a bit of a mother daughter thing. And I don’t know if that’s healthy or not. I’ve got a good relationship with my mother so it’s not like I’m looking for another one. I remember [something] she said a few years ago when I had to
speak at some forum. She said, “Oh, I thought, my little girl’s grown up.” And I was going, “Erhhh,” but I guess it’s a bit like that.

Rachel is aware that there is a price to be paid as a consequence of the relationship she has with Jane. Her working relationship with her former boss was strained to breaking point because her boss thought that she couldn’t be trusted any more and increasingly shut her out of anything that might have negative consequences for her if Jane found out. Rachel thinks her former boss found the situation very hard to deal with and that it was made worse because her boss had always had difficulties working with Jane. Rachel was never able to convince her boss that she could be trusted. Eventually Rachel realised that her position was untenable and that she had to move out, but she never told Jane why. The project she is working on now is her escape route. No matter how it turns out, she won’t be going back to her former job.

Another part of the price to be paid is that some people see Rachel as being given opportunities that they don’t have, but she feels that they don’t understand that it’s not ‘just patronage’. Rachel has had to earn her ‘stripes’ with Jane and that’s meant having to be seen as being a hard worker who can prove that she can do things and that she’s growing in terms of her skills and career. Earning her stripes on occasions has meant working ‘extremely long days, seven days a week’ – sometimes even all night. She feels that by working in this manner she has demonstrated her commitment, but that her colleagues don’t see that part of the relationship and think that she’s lucky and is just coasting because she’s part of the ‘girls’ network’. While Rachel easily dismisses the ‘accusations of cronyism and patronage’
that she encounters, she recognises that her relationship with Jane has privileged her with some very clear benefits that generally have not been available to others. The most significant of these was Jane taking the risk to get support – including a year’s leave on full pay – for Rachel to complete her Master of Business degree.

The organisational support Rachel received for her studies resulted in a formal obligation for her to continue working in the organisation for a number of years – an executive version of the more common indenture of an apprentice. Rachel willingly signed the formal agreement and insists that she would have done the right thing and continued working there even if the formal contract did not exist. Certainly she seems to be very conscious that she has an obligation to Jane for the attention and help that she has given her.

She’s got a very strong ally. If someone is doing those things for you and really helping you, she’s got a very great confidante and supporter ... someone who she can really rely on which is important with an organisation like this one. So I also, I guess, feed her information and ... I was going to say do her bidding and that sounds a bit too mindless. But I guess I’m a bit captured by her because I think she is really intelligent and I like the direction she is setting. So whether it’s just that or the fact that I have this gratitude in me, but there’s often competing agendas here and I’ve always got my ear to the ground for what she’s thinking about and so I’ll be prepared to try and do what I can to accomplish that for her. So that’s a benefit for her too.

While Rachel feels very close to Jane she says that they don’t know very much about each other’s personal lives. The relationship they have is very much focused on developing Rachel’s technical skills and ‘political nous’ so that she is able to read the environment, achieve success and progress her career. The mentoring Rachel is getting is not part of a formal program and the ‘pacing’ of it depends largely on how Jane sees things are going with
Rachel and with the project. In fact Jane ‘always denies that it’s mentoring.’ While some of the mentoring happens over the phone, via e-mail and in meetings they have together to discuss work, Jane will always make the effort to see Rachel face to face, often over breakfast together, if she feels she’s not seeing enough of her. Working together on the current project has given Jane and Rachel plenty of opportunities to have face to face contact for what Rachel calls ‘a two dimensional conversation’ where they talk about specific work issues as well as the broader issues which might be of help, such as,

...tactics, approaches, something else. It would normally be issue based, but she will always apply... look to the learning in the situation and make sure that I’m aware of it. Or give me clues about how to handle the situation, which is about me. Or further context which she’ll always provide so that you are able to take the discussion or the task, or whatever, that step forward.

Rachel feels that these ‘two dimensional conversations’ aren’t just about her work and development needs, they also provide a rich resource for her mentor.

I provide a perspective that she doesn’t have, which is from someone who is in the middle of the organisation. I’m talking to people about different things than she is. People are a bit guarded with her, though I think sometimes people would be guarded with me because some of them think that what they say to me gets back. But probably what I tell her she knows anyway. So I guess there’s a bit that she’s learning that’s more about the organisation and the culture and the climate and stuff like that. I think she probably has the opportunity to experiment a little bit in terms of her own management style with me which I’m not terribly conscious of, but I suspect she would be doing. She would be approaching it on a number of levels like that.

Rachel feels that she has two-way conversations with Jane, but she does not feel that their relationship is one of equals. Rachel thinks it’s a bit unequal because, despite her protestations that it’s ‘rubbish,’ Jane is ‘one thousand times more intelligent and one thousand times more perceptive’ than she is. While she may perceive the relationship as unequal in some areas, Rachel
believes that it is different from the kind of normal working relationship she would otherwise have with Jane.

We’ve had fights about stuff to the point where I thought she was never going to speak to me again. So that’s taking it a step further than you would in a work relationship. You realise that you can fall out a bit. Although I’m very conscious all the time of living up to her expectations, to the point where it causes me a lot of stress, but that’s not a bad thing I don’t think.

Rachel feels that being able to have a close relationship with a clever and powerful senior manager means that she is being stretched to learn new things for much of the time, but while Jane keeps the pressure of challenge up she is careful that Rachel is not stretched too far.

I think she tried something with me last week and it didn’t work. It was a battle that she wants to win and I don’t really have enough knowledge about it, but she was happy for me to go and stick my neck out about it and get shot down. And it was either going to work or not, and it didn’t. So she can sort of play with things a little bit that way too, but she’s always given me safety nets. She’s extremely good at working out how much she can let people off the leash. I always feel very... I always feel that she’s looking after my best interests.

Having a mentor who is seen as wielding a lot of power in the organisation sometimes creates difficulties for her and for others because of the assumptions they make about the nature of the relationship Rachel has with Jane and the expectations they build up as a consequence. Often it’s assumed that Rachel has a direct link to Jane and that she can go to her at any time and with any issue. Because of this, colleagues will pass information on to Rachel with the expectation that Jane will be told, rather than going to speak directly to Jane themselves.

People expect you to be a conduit and try to solve problems because you’ve got access to someone that’s very senior ... and sometimes it’s appropriate to feed things to her and sometimes it’s not. It’s just an issue that comes up sometimes.
Rachel gets to see both sides of the mentoring coin as she has been a mentor in a formal program. Although she believes that it’s different from the informal mentoring that she has with Jane because people are ‘paired up’ instead of self-selecting, Rachel feels that it is important to participate in the formal mentoring program as she has benefited so much from being mentored herself. She is so enthusiastic about the benefits of mentoring that she is ‘always encouraging everyone to go and get mentored’. Rachel feels that by being part of the formal program she is able to help someone else develop themselves and to offer them the support they might need while they’re doing it. While she was aware of other people’s mentoring approaches and she had talked with others about their experience of mentoring, the model she has used with her mentee is based on her own mentoring experience with Jane.

I was conscious of not trying to clone myself. And stretch, just trying to make her feel all the time that there’s more she could do. Make her aware of her strengths. I always feed back positive things I hear about her around the organisation. Jane’s very good at doing that too. So I’d make sure she got constant… I wouldn’t be making anything up… positive reinforcement. Usual management stuff. Then you can say to someone, “Well, I think you’re being slack in another area.”

I made sure that she realised that the mentoring was important to me – that it’s not an inconvenience. There’s that thing about mentees feeling that they’re imposing heavily. But I would always make sure that if I promised her any information that I would give it to her. That I would be reliable, punctual. That’s about taking the relationship seriously. And I would always be looking out for opportunities to expose her, to introduce her to people, to take her to meetings, make sure she knew about seminars. So you take it outside that formal meeting arrangement.

Goal setting is very important. It couldn’t just be about talk. It would have to be about, “Let’s set some goals. You’ve got homework to do. You’ve got to do the thinking. It’s not me.” That’s what Jane started to do with me… about where you’re going, your career. “I don’t think you’re going to go anywhere shortly, so what are you going to do about it?”

As well as the formal mentoring she’s been doing Rachel finds herself involved in a lot of informal mentoring as well, mainly with women –
especially, younger women to help them focus on where they see their
careers going. Because of this, many people call her and arrange to have one
off conversations about their careers. She finds this a lot less satisfactory
than having ongoing conversations. ‘It seems a bit shallow’ to her because
she feels that this approach does not allow enough time for useful insights
to develop. Despite her reservations she continues to respond to the
requests as she feels that even a one off conversation can be of some help.

Rachel believes that people with under-realised potential can get great
benefit from mentoring and that’s where she prefers to target her effort.

Where I think people might be just a bit limited with their horizons and can’t see
that they’re capable of a whole lot more and that I may not see enough people
having confidence in them to go further. It’s easy to see people who are under-
appreciated and that sort of stuff. I think there’s always got to be a personal element
to it. I like the person to have an interest in things I’m interested in, like numbers
and organisations and to be a match in terms of skills and aspirations. I couldn’t do
it with someone who I just didn’t have natural rapport with.

But it’s not a one way street. Rachel indicates that the relationship with her
mentee began to get really interesting for her when they got to the point
where she was starting to learn from her mentee. That relationship is now
over and Rachel has since been matched with someone who does not seem
to be such a good fit in terms of skills, interests and aspirations. While
Rachel thinks that it may be interesting and could work well she’s not sure if
the relationship will last.

Reflections: is that what mentoring looks like?

I think Rachel has a very strong protector as evidenced by the very ‘nice
surroundings’ she has been given while she is on the project which are way
out of line with her status. She thinks that the mentoring started about 5
years ago but that she only became aware of it about one year ago. There
seems to be some benefit that flows both ways in this relationship. She feels
special, but as well Rachel feels a deep sense of obligation to her mentor
and provides her with information and perspectives she would not normally
have access to. There’s a ‘deal’ of sorts. ‘She’s got my loyalty and I’ve got
her support.’

While Rachel talks a lot about a certain equality in the relationship as well
as its two-way nature, it appears to have some aspects of dependency, ‘it is
a bit of a mother daughter thing’. Who is dependent on whom is not quite
clear. It’s a very ‘out there’ relationship focused on technical skills and
‘political nous’. Despite the pair feeling close to each other they know little
about each other’s personal lives. There’s a lot of admiration, even hero-
worship with Rachel in awe of Jane’s intelligence, but there doesn’t seem to
be a lot of warmth in the relationship.

Jane has taken a risk in supporting Rachel, but that seems to have made
Rachel feel more obligated to deliver – to work hard and long to prove that
she is worthy of the special attention. ‘I’m very conscious all the time of
living up to her expectations, to the point where it causes me a lot of stress.’

Work and career are the foci of the relationship, but it is not completely
focused on Rachel’s needs as sometimes Jane experiments ‘a little bit in
terms of her own management style’. And Rachel gets the sense that she is
sometimes played with a bit. Also, Jane has used Rachel in battles that she’s
wanted to win and it isn’t clear that this has entirely been for Rachel’s
benefit.
While there has been ‘stretch’ and development there is nothing to indicate
that it has been anything but incremental and certainly not transformational.

So Rachel’s mentor thinks Rachel is ‘worth it’, but seems to have placed
Rachel in a position where she feels an obligation, even without the contract
– a protector who provides patronage and expects something in return.

**Story Four**

Jill came to the organisation three years ago from a different industry sector.
An accountant by profession she wanted to have a ‘bigger impact than just
being an accountant and preparing numbers for somebody else.’ She joined
her current organisation via the finance area. After two years, she made the
transition to her present job in a business unit that, while drawing on her
financial background, also involves her in an advisory and policy role that
allows her to use broader skills. As well, she has to manage staff for the first
time. Jill is in her early thirties and while she would like to continue to have
interesting organisational roles and perhaps move up the corporate ladder,
she has a relaxed attitude to developing her career and is not driven by a
burning ambition to reach the top. ‘I’m into career, but I’m also into enjoying
myself. I don’t think I have to be somewhere by the time I’m 35.’ For over a
year now Rachel has been mentoring Jill through the formal organisational
mentoring program. Recently the formal relationship was ‘terminated
because it had run its course.’
It took Jill a couple of months of thinking before she decided to participate in the organisation’s mentoring program. She felt that it was the sort of thing that she should do, but she was apprehensive about it because she feared that she would be matched up with somebody that she didn’t find very useful or helpful, and that she might not be able to extricate herself for the situation. A key concern for her was the age and experience of the mentor she would be working with because Jill was very aware that she would not be comfortable working with someone much younger than herself, or someone who had achieved a lot and was arrogant enough to think that they had all the answers. She didn’t want someone who would be ‘telling’ her what to do and ‘judging’ her.

People who tell and dictate. They make an assumption of who you are and what you should be. I guess I worried about a mentor who’s sort of blinkered. Who only sees the world in one way. That’s what I’m worried about. Yeah, sees it one way and therefore there’s one path. And you sort of think, “That’s not me. It’s a whole package.”

She was also ‘worried’ that she would have to adapt to her mentor and that she ‘would then be performing for somebody else’. It was also of concern to her that she might be matched with someone whom she didn’t respect. After being paired up with Rachel she began the process cautiously, but as the relationship stabilised she began to get value out of it.

We met every two weeks or three weeks or even less, roughly once a month I suppose and at first it was just sussing out who she was. And I guess she was sussing out who I was. I guess what happened is that I used her as a sounding board. I didn’t come up with too many real world examples of, “I’ve got a problem,” like a lot of people say they do in mentoring.

What it did for me is it helped me use someone else as a sounding board for either what I was doing or what I had done and I got a lot of positive reinforcement which doesn’t mean I was doing anything right. I know when I’m not doing things right, but I was able to say, “Well this is how I handled the situation,” and talk it through. So she actually got me to put into words what I’d done when, perhaps, I was doing something instinctively, particularly in areas of handling my staff.
Through mentoring Jill was able to draw on the different ways a person with different skills, experience and education looks at issues. She thinks that Rachel is a very different person from her and that difference adds value to the relationship. She thinks that if she’d sat down to have conversations with someone just like her, it wouldn’t have stretched her and it wouldn’t have helped her as much.

Because it would be someone who thinks the way I think. I need someone who doesn’t think the way I think because otherwise it’s not challenging. If you’ve got someone who thinks too much like you, well we just reaffirm, “Oh yeah, we’re doing all right” or “Isn’t this scary” or whatever. Whereas if it’s someone who thinks differently then that’s where it’s valuable. We don’t have to agree with everything they say, but at least it gives you a different perspective.

The challenge of working with someone who was a good thinker made Jill very uncomfortable from time to time, but she knew that being out of her comfort zone meant that she was being challenged to learn by being prepared to take the risk and actually trying the action that Rachel suggested. She was also confident enough in the relationship that she was prepared on occasions to ‘stand up and say no, I don’t think that’s for me,’ but that confidence took time to build and was based on Rachel listening to her.

I think with Rachel, at first, I thought, “Oh we’re not going to connect” or “She’s too different to me.” Because she’s a very quick thinker and I’m not. And she speaks her mind and I need to be a bit more familiar with somebody before that happens. I’m very discrete. But I think to connect you do need … like I say, I’ve got this guy [a new formal mentor] and I don’t know if he’s a listener and we’re not going to connect, I don’t think, if he’s not a listener. It will be an interesting challenge to me if I have to say, “Can you be quiet and listen to me?”

Jill has clear expectations about other qualities that she feels are essential for her to have a good experience in a mentoring relationship.
It needs to be someone you can talk to openly and easily and have a laugh with ... because I find that laughter diffuses any tension. If it was someone I couldn't relate to and didn't laugh at my jokes, we'd have a real problem because it would be so forced and I would hold things back. Someone that you respect. Someone that you knew was widely respected and I guess someone to be honest with. Although you can't always be 100% honest. Someone you can be honest with and trust. And you can be yourself. Someone who's not going to judge you. That's very important, because you are opening yourself up and saying this is me.

Jill feels that mentoring can't work with people who are in direct working relationships because of the personal work that needs to happen in mentoring. For her this is especially true for boss/subordinate relationships, but she feels that any close working relationship precludes an effective mentoring relationship being established and continuing to function. She has been offered the opportunity to mentor someone in the formal program, but because of a close working relationship she has declined. 'I deal with that person in my job. I can't be their mentor as well.' The issue for Jill regarding mentoring someone with whom she works closely revolves around the mentee knowing that nothing that is said or done will leak out of the relationship. But her misgivings about mentoring among people who have other working relationships are founded on more than just the discretion needed to 'keep secrets'.

I guess my worry, too, is that people might patronise you. Because they know you as a mentee and then if you're sitting in a room and it's a meeting and here's your mentor and you're a mentee.

So does she feel that it’s better to keep the fact that she’s being mentored a secret?

That's another thing I find difficult, who you let know who your mentor is. I don’t think it’s anyone’s business that Rachel is my mentor, but I’ve got staff and I say, “I've got Rachel” because I want to encourage them to get into the mentor program. But now that I’m not working with Rachel in this relationship I feel like I have to say, “We’re not doing the mentor thing any more.” So I think you want to be open, but also it’s a special relationship and it does have privileges so you don’t want to abuse the privilege. You’ve got to make the most of it, but you don’t want to abuse it.
Jill’s experience of the relationship is that it was most definitely a two-way relationship, and that Rachel wasn’t just her sounding board.

She did bounce problems off me as well. She had a difficult staff member and so she... yes, she discussed it. She didn’t say, “Oh, can you help me with it?” But she discussed it with me. I think it was good from that point of view. There have been other things too.

Despite the high value she places on what she learned during the mentoring period, Jill recognises that the relationship ended some time after it was past its ‘use by date’.

She was quite open and said, “I don’t think I’m doing anything for you.” The first time she said that I said, “No, it’s going fine,” even knowing that it wasn’t. I needed to stop and think about how I actually ended it and then when we had the next meeting I said, “Well, I think it’s over.” The first time she offered I couldn’t say, “Let’s end it.” I sort of had to wind it down a bit slower.

Although the formal mentoring is over, a friendship has grown and now their conversations occur on a much more equal footing than before. Jill is alert to the fact that she needs to feel that she is no longer the mentee, that she is contributing to the ongoing relationship and that she and Rachel are helping each other.

Jill is now participating in the mentoring program as a mentor as well. She feels that she has gained through her participation as a mentee and now should be putting something back to encourage and help someone else. Normally she would not participate in an organisational program such as this one. In fact she is quite candid in revealing that her level of involvement in the meetings and workshops that are part of the mentoring program was of a minimalist nature. She knows that as a mentor she will have to be more involved because people will be looking at what she does more closely and
she’s aware that she needs to be a good model. Jill is very clear about her responsibility, but she is equally clear that the mentoring is for the mentee and that they need to take responsibility for a large part of what happens. Getting started in the right way is what’s concerning her at the moment. The person she will be mentoring has had a negative experience with another mentor and, although she is interested to hear about what happened, she wants to make sure that the mentee can raise any issues in her own time and not feel that Jill is ‘like a bull in a china shop’.

I don’t know what went on there. It’s tricky. I guess just to listen. Just shut up and let her talk and find out who she is. Suss out who she is before I can even know how we’re going to tackle whatever her issues are. And just, I guess, give direction if that’s what she’s after. I don’t know what she’s after, but I have to have enough guts to say to her, “Look, this is the way I see it,” but very, very clear that that’s my opinion. She takes this as it comes.

She hasn’t called me yet and that makes me think that she’s fearful. Of if she’s not fearful she’s too busy, but she knows someone has been assigned to her and she knows the onus is on her to call. So even if she rang and said, ‘I can’t meet you,’ as a courtesy. So I’m thinking, “Great start!” But I’ll give her a call because she might just be timid.

**Reflections: Is that what mentoring looks like?**

An interesting contrast with the previous story, this is a formal mentoring relationship where the mentor’s experience is in an informal relationship.

Rachel and Jill are closer in age, experience and in the hierarchy.

Jill did not come to the relationship freely, but because she felt it was something she should do. She is quite different from Rachel in that she’s more laid back and not so concerned with developing her career. In Jill’s story there is a clear sense of her notion of a mentor. It’s someone who listens and ‘doesn’t tell and dictate’. Someone she can use as a sounding board, get feedback from as well as positive reinforcement. Someone who is different from her because that ‘adds value to the relationship’, but with
whom she can connect and have robust conversations with. It seems important to her that a mentor is widely respected, honest and someone she can trust to be non-judgemental; someone she can be herself with.

Despite the fact that Rachel’s relationship with her own mentor seems to be ‘out there’ to a large extent, she has had to work with Jill in a very ‘in here’ way. Jill is very much an ‘in here’ person and believes that this is an essential aspect of mentoring and that’s why mentors should not be line supervisors ‘because of the personal work that needs to happen in mentoring.’

Absolute confidentiality is paramount, ‘nothing that is said or done will leak out of the relationship. There is the sense that Jill managed the relationship with Rachel so that this would not be an issue.

My sense of this relationship is that it was an initiation to the ways of the organisation of a ‘new hand’ by an ‘older hand’. There was coaching around work issues and problems and there is no indication of transformation, but, rather, some personal and professional growth.

**Story Five**

Bob is an academic in a university on the West Coast of the USA. I had the opportunity to talk with him about my research when I was on a holiday visit. I had arranged to meet him at the university. He arrived late for our appointment and was very apologetic for keeping me waiting as he led me into the Boardroom where he had arranged for us to have our conversation.
A past Dean of one of the Faculties, he is still active as a Faculty member and also as a consultant. Bob has the gentle confidence of someone who is sure of himself and has learned the lessons of life – a relaxed elder statesperson. He was involved with the Faculty from the very beginning, helping to shape it both physically and intellectually, and ensuring that the research base is innovative and practice-based. He seems pleased to have been able to help shape the complex dynamics of this part of the institution.

Bob explained that the learning approach used with the adult learners in the Faculty is based on the theory of andragogy\(^9\) of Knowles (1980) and is underpinned by what he calls ‘a mentoring process’. He points out that the members of the Faculty are called mentors and that they are facilitators of learning who don’t give lectures or orchestrate learning experiences, but work collaboratively with their students to help them identify and engage with their particular learning needs.

> I like to think of our faculty in the best sense. That they take a person and they’re like a good psychotherapist. They’re one step ahead and not two or three or four steps ahead. They are moving essentially with the person and guiding them through the kinds of issues, the kinds of problems that the mentee encounters. So they are facilitators. They help to stretch a person in terms of challenging them to try on other solutions – to trial a variety of solutions. They might use an action research model to help them explore then test and see how that works, and then re-evaluate and move on. And this is standard procedure for it.

The mentoring follows a contractual approach (Knowles 1980) that helps the mentee to work out an understanding of what it is that needs to be learned, their learning goal, and to plan ways of achieving it. Individual learning contracts are established with each student so that they are able to design their own learning process, resource it and review it systematically to

---

\(^9\) ‘The art and science of helping adults learn’ (Knowles 1980, p.43).
achieve their learning goals. Bob finds that establishing mentoring relationships with students places demands on the Faculty to be able to work with and motivate each student appropriately to achieve their goals.

One needs to be sensitive to the fact that some students do not have the necessary ego structure to challenge authority or to even move in new directions for themselves. So you have to motivate, you have to cajole and sometimes confront a student to get them to become unstuck.

...[We] use a kind of non-directive method. Carl Rogers would be our guru in terms of counselling and the kind of guidance that we give, because we inherently feel that the solution lies within the experience of the mentee. So we don’t do a lot of coaching of our student population nor do I do that in my consulting.

For Bob the accent in mentoring is on the unique development of the individual rather than offering a prescribed set of experiences or ‘exercises, cases or events’. The mentor helps the student to be alert to opportunities, to develop a skill base, to become aware of a variety of different theories or ways of systematically analysing their world and to be open to the opportunities that come their way. The relationship is collegial and needs to have a degree of trust that’s established with the mentor ‘opening doors of interest’ to help the student to find their own answers.

...[It] requires that the mentor not solve or provide pat theories as to what’s going to be solved, but evokes that from the client – and that has proven itself time and time again.

Starting where the student is or where their interests lie is at the heart of the process used in the Faculty. Through the mentoring process the mentor is attempting to facilitate the ‘creating of a vessel or a space’ in which the work can take place. In the best examples Bob can think of the mentor and student get into a kind of synchronicity which leads to what he describes as a ‘flow experience’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1997).
Flow experience is the kind of higher state of being when the task you’re working on meets the skill level you attain and once in the flow you lose the sense of moment, of time passing. You’re highly motivated, thrilled to be doing what you’re doing and totally focused on the task at hand.

Bob maintains that a special kind of relationship occurs when people are ‘working in sync’. He thinks that it might have something to do with the matching of the mentor’s skills and experience with the skills and experience of the student as well as a match between the mentor and the problem that the student is engaging with – whether that problem is one of solving an issue in an organisational context or something like developing and managing the transition to a new career. In trying to explain the special synchronicity that can happen in mentoring Bob offers an illustrative story.

I’ve been intrigued with the phenomenon of shipboard romances and have looked at the environmental factors that contribute to that. We used to say that it’s because two people come together without any requirement or any pressure to get to know each other. And there they are in this environment, relieved of any responsibility and they establish a relationship.

That’s not quite good enough for me. I think sometimes what happens – this is going to sound far out – is a kind of hypnotic, natural hypnotic trance-induction takes place when you’re in an environment where the ship is droning on or the airplane or the train or what have you. As a consequence the voices of the two people induce a trance state and once in that state all kinds of endorphins are released and sort of pleasurable experiences – and you think you are falling in love. Until you get off the train – and then if you try and pursue it a little further, it’s disastrous. I think that can happen in mentoring, in a really close mentoring relationship.

Mentoring is quite distinct from coaching for Bob and for him ‘it would be hard to standardise what makes two people work together productively,’ but he is able to articulate the essence of what it means for him. It’s not a glib rehearsed definition that Bob offers, but rather an evolving statement full of pauses and thinking yet still a coherent whole.

A collaboration between two persons in which the role of the mentor is the facilitator of new knowledge and the role of the mentee is to learn. It’s both a guide and a companion – the mentor is both guide and companion, and hopefully a wise and experienced person who can stretch the mentee to try new kinds of thinking; help that person reflect on learning out of whatever action they may take; and, is a
sufficiently good enough observer of the mentee’s world to be able to understand how to motivate, how to cajole, how to stretch that person. A lot of words, but it captures most of it.

Having slowly assembled the content of the statement above, in a contrast of both flow and content, Bob then quickly and easily begins to compare coaching with mentoring.

I prefer the word [mentor] to coach. Coach has connotations that really don’t fit the mentor. A coach could be challenging, but is more directive, I think, [and] sets up the exercises and the operation in a very planned kind of sequence and then puts them through their paces. Where the mentor is working along side, guiding, potentially using the direction of the mentee to work collaboratively. Opening up the mentee to ... opening up their boundaries to important stuff.

...[Mentoring] is a more intimate relationship, I think, than being a coach. Good coaches can be good mentors. We have a physical education instructor who will be our mentor in many ways because she is sensitive to how we are feeling on a given day and is able to challenge us – to always stretch us a bit both literally and figuratively.

Reflections: Is that what mentoring looks like?

In talking about the practice of helping students to learn in his Faculty, Bob focuses on the process used and the skills of the mentors. It would be easy to see his description as weighted towards Mentor rather than Athena – science rather than art. The elements include a focus on the mentee’s needs; not directing; treating each student as special or unique; creating a safe space. In the ‘best examples’ the mentor and mentee experience ‘a higher state of being’. Bob illustrates this special state by telling about the trance-like state of ‘shipboard romances’ – those well-known and fleeting connections that people sometimes make when they are travelling together, but which don’t survive the journey. The ‘special kind of relationship’ he’s trying to elaborate doesn’t happen always, only in ‘a really close mentoring relationship’. It’s not something that can be constructed; it can be fleeting; it is enjoyable; it doesn’t last; it is intimate; it is hard to standardise. When
he gives his definition of mentoring he articulates the things that mentors do and the skills that they have saying that it’s ‘[a] lot of words, but it captures most of it.’ Ironically what the definition does not capture are the elusive elements that he has tried to outline earlier.

**Story Six**

We meet in the lounge room of the house of a friend of his with whom he is staying during a short sojourn in Australia. Our meeting has been orchestrated by a contact of mine who is handling his engagements in the region. Sebastian is in the middle of doing something when I arrive for our appointment and seems quite distracted as he asks me to sit down and make myself comfortable. I am just beginning to tell him about my research when the phone rings for the first of what is to be several times during our time together and Sebastian excuses himself to take the call saying, ‘I’m expecting an important call. I’ll have to get that.’ While he speaks I set up my tape recorder and locate the various bits of paperwork I must make sure he reads and signs before I interview him. All this being done I am able to observe Sebastian as he speaks on the telephone to someone whom I am able to ascertain is not the person he had been expecting to call.

Sebastian could be aged anywhere between his mid-fifties to late sixties. The latter is most likely, but he has a weatherbeaten look that makes it difficult to be sure. His voice is pleasant enough, but as he speaks, first on the phone and then later on with me, it seems somehow forced or pushed and his sentences come in rapid-fire succession. He does not have the
demeanour of a man who is very relaxed and at ease. Perhaps the call he was waiting for was very important, but he seems in no hurry to truncate the one he is now on. I am not pressed for time and as he has been generous enough to see me I am prepared to wait for him to do what he needs to do. A few more minutes pass before we get to the business of talking together.

Sebastian has worked internationally as a consultant for many years. He has published a number of books on leadership. As an organisational consultant Sebastian in working with groups has used models founded on the methods and theories of the Tavistock Institute in London.

So the model is that you are permitting people to go to a special space where they can strip away all the confusing content and just work with their basic assumptions and then take that back into the work setting.

Over time his practice has moved to working on organisations through doing one-on-one work with senior people who play significant roles in shaping the strategies for their organisations to attain and ensure business success. He has modified the models and theories he used for group work to his one-on-one work. These days almost all of the people Sebastian works with closely are at Chief Executive Officer or executive management level in the private sector or its equivalent in the public sector.

I’m really not working on the person. I’m working on the system or the organisation via the person. That’s not to say you don’t get down to some quite personal stuff too, but only as and when it seems appropriate in relation to that task. So the focus I take is very much to do with the system and the role of the person, although I would say that people who observe my practice would say I’m doing coaching and mentoring.
Sebastian maintains that there are a number of situations that have
developed in organisations in recent years that have led to an increase in the
perceived need for mentoring.

Now, on the mentoring and coaching this, whatever it means, it’s really interesting
to reflect on the extent to which that activity is embodied in ordinary relationships.
When you have an appropriate relationship, mentoring is an irrelevance. Basically if
managing is done properly we don’t need mentoring. Mentoring is the surrogate.

If you want a theory from me about why so much mentoring and coaching is going
on around the world I have a very simple answer. It is that organisations are being
so stripped out that any typical senior manager if you ask the question, ‘Has this
man got a boss?’ in the ordinary sense, probably not [is the answer]. And if he has
got a boss, the boss will be too young. That’s to say ten or fifteen years younger than
the equivalent person would have been fifteen years ago. What I’m effectively finding
is very, very senior people with enormous burdens of responsibility who are basically
without a boss [and they’re in] a position to cause the most awful, embarrassing
cock-ups.

Because of this thinning out of the experience and talent in organisations
and the exposure of less experienced managers to high levels of risk,
organisations around the world have been increasingly looking to external
coaches and mentors to help their senior teams.

The more sophisticated companies have realised the need for this and that partly
accounts for the growth. It’s a very planned and organised, conscious thing, but a
lot of it has just happened. Partly because, I think, in America it’s become a bit of a
fashion accessory in the way that a personal trainer was. You know, ten years ago if
you had a mentor or coach it would have been seen as a sign of weakness, but it’s
rapidly now become a kind of fashion accessory.

Sebastian has some very clear rules that he makes clear to every person who
seeks his help. If the organisation is going to be paying for his time, and this
is almost always the case, he insists that there is a meeting with the
person’s manager so that all three people can gain a mutual understanding
of the aim of the process. If he can’t get agreement to this meeting he won’t
proceed because he feels that the sort of one-on-one work he does with
people needs to be seen as a normal process in organisations and not something ‘transposed to a special activity’.

*Reflections: Is that what mentoring looks like?*

This story doesn’t have anything that looks like mentoring in it to me. Even the storyteller says that others would say that what he does is coaching and not mentoring. The emphasis in this story is on doing things and the kinds of things this person does. It’s focused on the mentee’s behaviour and practice and there is no emphasis in what is said on the mentee as a person and their needs past some challenge in operating in a work setting. The ‘mentor’ is in control ‘permitting’ the mentee to ‘go to a special place’. While this is quite likely a reflective space the indications are that what is being reflected on is work only – ‘I’m really not working on the person. I’m working on the system or the organisation via the person.’ To me this makes the person a conduit, a tool or an object. The only time personal issues are engaged with is when they are getting in the way of the task.

Mentoring is seen as an activity to remedy deficits. But buried deep in this story again we have a feint glimpse of the recognition of mentoring at the archetypical level. It is embodied in ordinary relationships and it happens as appropriate and when that happens ‘mentoring is an irrelevance.’ I take this last phrase as meaning mentoring as I do it is irrelevant. In the light of this his disparaging comment about mentoring ‘being a fashion accessory’ goes to the heart of what the commodification of mentoring has given rise to.
Story Seven

Zoe is a professional coach. By that I mean that she makes her living entirely from coaching. Every month she leaves her home in the country and travels around the capital cities to work with her clients. She began her practice in 1990 with a lot of encouragement from her then mentor and now partner. Zoe describes what she does as ‘leadership coaching’ and works mainly with women who are working in the middle to senior levels of large organisations. She has had some male clients, but finds that most men who have tried out her approach do not seem to be comfortable working with someone who doesn’t have or profess to have ‘technical expertise’ in their area.

Anyone who wants content, they don’t get it from me, because I don’t know. I don’t want to put myself down, I don’t have much. I pride myself in not knowing lots. So they don’t get heaps of content.

...But I think a purer process, the less content, the less “teachable moments”.¹⁰ You know even if it means just silence, the more the person is going to find things by themselves. And really, a lot of talk stops that happening.

Zoe is always open and emphatic about the fact that the expertise and experience that she brings to a session with a client is about the process of what she calls leadership coaching and not about managing, and that expertise is about listening.

I’ve decided the main thing I do is be a generous listener. So what I do – I listen generously. To be able to listen generously, I use a process called a Learning Map which guides us through a conversation together ... I make it very clear to people that this is a learning process not a therapy process.

¹⁰ A phrase coined by Havinghurst (1970) referring to ‘times when individuals ... find that their existing mode of functioning has been disrupted in some fashion’ (1995).
Zoe’s background is in nursing and she worked for many years as a community nurse, a job in which she had the opportunity to hone her counselling skills. After leaving nursing she established a consultancy practice focusing on career training and working with people in organisations around the requirements of equal opportunity/affirmative action legislation. In undertaking this work, increasingly she found herself working with people ‘one-on-one’ to focus on the issues that were concerning them. Her coaching practice grew naturally, but not easily, as a consequence. She made the decision to devote her time exclusively to ‘leadership coaching’ in 1990. Working with her coach and partner, Kent, she has developed a range of principles, a methodology and tools that she employs to guide the sessions she has with her clients, using them as flexible, strengthening fabric rather than a rigid framework.

The first start up thing I do is walk them through this learning map and explain that this provides a loose framework to our two hours together which we can deviate from, but which gives us a little bit of gentle structure. Whether it’s a free trial or whether it’s a first contracted session the other couple of things I ask people to do are, first of all fill in a Learning Styles Inventory. I use Kolb. And then the other thing I ask people to do on the first session is in our proposal. There is a list of the benefits that others have got from the process and I ask them to scan and tick which ones they’d be looking for and if they want to tick them all to prioritise what they really want to get out of the relationship.

Although Kent has been her coach and mentor since before she began her practice, his own practice was soon eclipsed by the success of Zoe’s. This led to some difficulties initially, but they soon decided that ‘every coach needs a coach’ and that Kent’s coaching would be provided on a professional basis, with Zoe paying for the sessions she had with him. Their collaboration eventually lead to them establishing a business together, Kent doing the

11 See Kolb (1983).
development and ‘theory’ work that he likes best to focus on, and Zoe doing
the one-on-one work which satisfies her need for action – a successful
partnership that has continued and developed into a life partnership with
them living and working together.

Zoe always offers an initial session at no charge to a prospective client.
During these first two hours she outlines how she works with people and the
tools she uses to help the process. Her main tool is her learning map that
contains the critical steps of her process.

The Checking In step is our getting connected step and typically I say, ‘How are you
feeling? How are you travelling?’ Something like that. I find that can be a useful
question to ask people who have been going at such high speed that they haven’t
been able to get inside themselves. And some people might spend quite a lot of time
answering that question. Its use is for the person themselves to get connected with
themselves. Its use for me is getting a sense of, as well as they and I getting
connected, me getting a sense of the energy that they have for the session.

You know, it’s quickly obvious if someone is hot to trot and wants to really dive into
the process with a huge problem, or something, or if they are really tired and come
to have some gentle time.

The next step is the Review Step. Where it is a follow up session the Review Step is
about reviewing what’s been going on since we met last.

What Zoe gets people to review is the experimentation they committed to
previously in the form of a Personal Learning Contract which is based on the
adult action-learning principles outlined by Knowles (1980).

Either in the development of the Personal Learning Contract or during
another part of the session, Zoe tries to get the person she’s working with to
articulate and write down a vision statement for themselves.

I usually ask a visioning question. I try to do that because I think it’s important for
people to spend some time articulating where they’re headed in their life, both
personally and professionally. So with some clients the core of what the work we do
together is in a visioning process. So that question may be the beginning of that
journey. But if not, if they have come to solve some immediate workplace dilemmas, I still invite and encourage people to spend a little time exploring their vision so then as we dive into their dilemmas, it’s in the context of their own direction.

I believe that leaders must have a vision. That they’re not a leader without one. So to encourage via the Visioning Step people to explore and develop their vision is one of the core building blocks of this work. And that has values underpinning it, and so on, of the core building blocks … people use this experience to do some values clarification for themselves and to look at how they might be living their life so that they are doing that in congruence with their values.

The next step, the Dilemma Step, is the core of every session, and people can bring to this relationship and this process anything they choose. I don’t believe there’s any inappropriate boundaries or parameters around that. If it’s just a straight professional issue, fine. If it’s a personal thing getting in the way, that’s just as appropriate. Short term, long term, it doesn’t matter.

So we explore the chosen dilemma or dilemmas using the learning cycle 12 to make sense of and do some learning from whatever it is. We will explore it. We hope to get some fresh insights and then they will choose what they are going to do in terms of experimentation. I think coaching, leadership coaching is a learning process. We not only have insights, but we experiment with action.

I try and get people to reflect and move from diving in to: Here’s a problem. How do we solve it? to: Here’s a problem. Let’s really discover a lot more about this situation to give some fresh insights to it that will probably link to different action, rather than going straight from experience to action.

It’s about reflection. There’s no time to reflect [usually] and this is a place where people inevitably reflect. They can’t get out of it. You know, some of them will start with small talk and various deviating tactics, but in the end they get it. Reflection leading the insights is a core part of the process – and when they reflect they realise they discover and then they can apply a new action. And then an action learning loop has happened.

The Feedback Step, the dilemmas really get explored for the bulk of the session. The Feedback Step is the place where I get to put my old counselling hat on and do some generous listening, and it is where I am observing contradictions. So it’s that thing when we say one thing, but we are actually doing something a bit different from that. There was a woman who every session used to say, ‘I want more balance in my life,’ and every session she would come and she had done nothing about it. There’s a contradiction here. So to really identify that there is a contradiction here, what is going on here, can often be a useful unsticking device and gives people some real learning.

So that’s the Feedback Step. Now the Teachable Moments Step. As much as possible I say to people: this process (leadership coaching) is an advice free zone. Know the answers are inside you. I’m the catalyst and facilitator of your discovery, of your answers. This is about process rather than content. Like I had a guy here this morning, an academic. He’s a mathematician and I can hardly add up, but I can help him explore his dilemmas. The only time I’m allowed to share is under the heading of Teachable Moments. The things I share are threefold. Working with women at senior levels in organisations I have a database of what it’s like to be a female operating in a very male culture. I will share information with women from

12 See (Kolb 1983).
that database. The second area I share are visualisations that Kent has come up with about things that happen in organisations. And the third area is some very simple models of conflict resolution, self-esteem increasing, assertiveness, stuff like that. So simple models to make sense of what’s going on. Again, to help them decide what they are going to do.

We get towards the end of our two hours together when we get to the Planning Step and that’s where they commit to some action. I have a tool that I get them to fill in so that they have a reminder of what they want to achieve. We fill it in together. I help them do it. So Planning Step, then Checking Out. How did we do? And hopefully they say that was good. I feel clear. When it’s a trial session I’ll sort of say: Where do we go from here? How was that? Hopefully they say yes, let’s put a time in the diary. And certainly when people are in an ongoing contract with me we just set the next appointment and start the process off again.

So that’s how I explain the map and that’s the pure way of how I use it. Sometimes we hardly even look at it. Ha! Ha! You know, I think it’s almost a security blanket for me because I am a person who likes a bit of structure. And for those people who do like a bit of structure it means that we start with something.

For Zoe an effective coaching relationship is founded on and continues because of good conversations. At the core of her practice is what she calls ‘the art of generous listening’ and of setting things up so that conversations take place. She meets with her clients in surroundings that are relaxing and comfortable to be in – ‘we work hard at creating an environment’. There’s good fresh coffee or tea available and her ‘trademark shortbreads’ are always offered. The furnishing is comfortable and smart without being over the top, the décor attractive and welcoming. There are fresh flowers. There is always soft background music playing and she likes to have fragrant oil burning. There is no clock and Zoe does not wear a watch during sessions. The time is the client’s and Zoe never looks like she is focusing on anything except what her client is saying. At least one client has figured out that she must use the background music as a guide to the passage of time during the sessions.

Zoe believes that getting people out of their normal environment and into something quite different and comfortable assists in the coaching/mentoring
process. She has made few exceptions to her rule of getting people to meet her ‘off their turf’ and she’s been disappointed with the results.

When I was in Sydney last, I had an appointment with a couple of women who wanted to suss this out and they were coming to the Pott’s Point apartment with the harbour view and then they ran into back to back meetings and I agreed to go into their office in the city. It didn’t work. Ha! Ha! … It didn’t go nowhere. It was a meeting. It was a tell session. It was a report session. The thing that Kent got me to realise was, you know, that we were on their turf, in a building, a room where meetings happen. That it was just too loaded with what usually happens. And to encourage reflection, to take people out of their usual environment, my insight from that session was that context is powerful. I would never, ever try to do coaching in someone else’s building ever again. Because I have done it a couple of times and it doesn’t work.

Zoe has some very definite views about helping people move forward by taking them out of their usual context.

What is it about context? It has to be – it’s safe. It’s anonymous. It’s pleasant. And also, they can leave their work hat back in that building. They can come here and flop into … It’s not like their home, but it’s closer to that so they can let themselves down a bit. But, and it seems to me that people sort of disclose. This process only works if people disclose. I can think of probably only two examples of people who didn’t disclose and only had a cup of coffee and said goodbye.

Disclosure is important because it leads to the areas where people need to be doing some work. People find it hard to disclose. Senior managers especially seem to have difficulty, at least to start with, in admitting that there’s a problem that might have something to do with them or the way they behave. Zoe can think of two clients who said that they had no problems of any sort. When Zoe tried to get them to surface and explore their dilemmas one said, ‘I haven’t got any,’ effectively terminating the conversation. ‘What do you mean?’ said the other.

So it was the same thing. I could get to there. I could do all my preamble and once we got to there that was it.

How people come together is important to Zoe. That’s why she always has a free introductory session so that both she and the prospective client can get
a feel for each other and for how things might work out. Zoe thinks that’s why a lot of coaching/mentoring relationships don’t work, especially many in formal mentoring programs in organisations.

I think the reason the formal mentor program doesn’t work is the chemistry, the nature of the chemistry. You can’t match people. People need to choose each other. And I suppose, getting back to what makes this work, there must be a piece of core chemistry, and I don’t know what that is frankly.

While she is not able to pinpoint the nature of the chemistry of a good relationship, Zoe is aware that there are elements of her practice that seem to help the relationship function. These include the already mentioned ambience she creates in the room and her manner when she’s working with clients. She actively works to help people relax during her sessions, especially those who come to her in a very agitated state. She thinks that being a kind and gentle person also helps along with the safe structure that she has developed for the sessions, along with her high emotional intelligence (Goleman 1999).

So my capacity for empathy and intuition, and capacity to read people means I can intuitively kind of match them or, I don’t know, put them at ease. I know I have good people skills and I think that’s a big advantage. So, I think that the people my process and I don’t work so well with are the highly analytical people who love the conceptual stuff, and more probably only get around to disclosing once they trust me to know things too.

I think empathy is a core competency of a coach, and I trust my gut feel – when to push and when not to push.

But being able to coach effectively is not just about being able to make people feel at ease.

Quite aside from a sound methodology, good tools and models, a lot of open-ended questioning, generous and active listening and all the things that go with contributing to a learningful experience for clients in the leadership coaching relationship – all of those are important. The icing on the cake and it’s a very thick icing, I’ve come to believe, is the essence of what you bring as the coach. And you can only take anyone else in their learning as far as you’ve been yourself in your
own learning.

So, perhaps it’s no accident that I took until 45 to discover what I wanted to be when I grow up, because it was only then that I started to know me well enough to be able to bring that knowing, self awareness, insight, a bit of wisdom, if you like, about myself as a human being. It was only by age 45 and here I am at age 55 with another decade of it. That’s the icing on the cake that we bring to this work.

I’ve had a colleague say to me, and I think she’s right, that 80% of what we bring to this work to our clients is ourselves. Ourselves in a state of wellness, ourselves in a state of personal knowing, of course continuing to learn, but with enough of our shit together and worked out that we can not only provide that unconditional positive regard to the other by attending well, but indeed an aspect of that unconditional positive regard is not bringing any of our needs into the relationship because we’ve done the work on ourselves. And personalising that I’ve done the work on myself.

Like other coaches and mentors I spoke with, either at length or briefly, Zoe knows when she had her first mentoring experience – and in her case, it is also her enduring experience.

I’d never had a mentor until I met Kent, and as well as becoming my lover he was my first ever mentor. What I learned from that was the value of someone who listens to me, someone who supported and encouraged me, and someone who confronted me. Because I was ready for all of those [things]. I made a career shift with that mentoring support and so I became and advocate of the mentor relationship from that moment. That was 1983, ’4, ’5. So, you know, in every career development program I ever ran I used to talk about you need mentors, you need supported conversations. Kent then started doing what he called leadership coaching around 1987, ’88 and I had been getting it for free as his lover!

…He was struggling and I was getting an enormous amount of free support from him as my mentor and he came to me one day and said, ‘I would like to formalise this and I would like you to pay for it.’ High-risk stuff, but I agreed and became his first ongoing long term paying client. He would dress for the session, set up the ambient environment. All of that as he did for any of his other clients. So that was the beginning of me having regular coaching.

Eventually, their lives and business merged and the payment stopped, but the coaching continues and Kent coaches Zoe on a regular and formal basis using the process they have developed and refined together.

It’s sort of on demand now. Although we both agree to a monthly coaching session, you don’t have to have a dilemma to have a coaching session. We put aside the time. Put the answering machine on. Put the learning map down. We do it. I get enormous value from that, and I think it is essential that I can say to people, “I do this too.” I’m not just saying it’s a good thing. I’m living it!
‘Living it,’ being a good and consistent role model, in other words is very important to Zoe. She’s conscious of the dissonance created when what people say about themselves doesn’t appear to have much congruence with what they actually do (Argyris 1990). She is also very aware that at different times in any of the relationships that she has, her clients will look to her as a role model.

This gets uncomfortable because it involves me saying positive things about myself. Another reason why I think people come back is that what they say is they find me an inspiration. That I truly live my work. I walk my talk. I’m someone who has managed to achieve a truly balanced lifestyle. So I’m utterly authentic in what I say and what I do. It’s not that I talk at length about it, but that they watch it happening.

Zoe has a passion for what she does and a solid commitment to doing it. Although this is the way she earns her living there’s a sense that much of the reason she does it transcends making money.

I absolutely love it. I’m passionate about this work and it took me to age almost 45 before I found out what I wanted to do when I grew up! And it’s this, the leadership coaching. I love to see people learn.

...[It’s] learning happening and that’s where I get the buzz from.

I just love people-observing. Or being part of people doing self-discovery, taking responsibility, committing to experimentation, coming back and saying, ‘Hey that worked!’

I really get a buzz out of experiencing people learning. The real bit is the human interaction factor.

**Reflections: Is that what mentoring looks like?**

What immediately strikes me here are the last couple of sentences. It’s about ‘human interaction’ and it gives her a ‘buzz’. But people come to her and pay her for what she calls ‘leadership coaching’. Does the money aspect change things? It's not evident one way or the other.
What is clear is that she is not helping people with technical aspects of their work, but helping them to engage with and work on themselves. Despite having a well-honed process to follow there is a focus on her clients and their immediate needs which dictates where and how sessions proceed. A safe, anonymous and pleasant environment is created in which to do the work. There is a two-way aspect. Zoe ‘lives’ her talk – she’s a role model.

For me there is a connection with the archetypical nature of mentoring when she says, ‘there must be a piece of core chemistry, and I don’t know what that is, frankly.’ Words that went through my head were that she is kind; caring; aware; takes her work seriously; is a role model; acts in line with what she says; has high self-understanding. She ‘listens generously’; understands ‘the value of someone who listens to me’; enjoys and is passionate about her work. She tries to make the place and people feel special. And she is not perfect – she makes mistakes; is open and self-revealing; models being a learner.

Story Eight

Jenny is a very busy senior manager – old enough to have climbed well up the corporate ladder, but young enough to be managing a couple of very young children as well as her career. The industry she is in is undergoing constant change and realignment. While Jenny is not the main person driving that change in her organisation she has a critical role in its implementation through changes to systems, practices and information technology. Much of her role is taken up with trouble-shooting problems as
they arise day to day. For a large part of her work she is not able to predict from one day to the next what she will get involved in.

Jenny has experienced ‘coaching/mentoring’ over a number of years both within her organisation as well as from a professional coach whom she pays for sessions from time to time. Jenny’s first experience with coaching/mentoring came with her transition from a front line job – a ‘technical job’ as she describes it – to her first real management job where the big picture was more important than the technical detail. Her most satisfying relationship is with the professional coach whom she identifies as her mentor. She feels this is the ‘cleanest’ relationship she has had.

I actually like the fact that I pay her. I know there will be no ask back of me, whereas when you do it on a professional colleague type of thing there’s a sense of “What does this person want from me?” I actually like the idea of paying. I think I’m more disciplined in the time that I use it for, and it means I can ring up at any point in time and say I need a session … and get that time.

Jenny emphasises that trust needs to underpin any coaching/mentoring relationship. The safer she feels to discuss anything about herself, her work or her organisation, the deeper the work she is able to do through coaching. That’s another reason why she prefers the professional coaching relationship she has with her paid coach. Despite the integrity of coaches/mentors she’s had in the workplace, at work the relationship doesn’t feel quite as safe. She gives her coaching/mentoring relationships at work a score of eight out of ten which is pretty good for a lot of the kinds of discussions that happen, but they are not the ‘hermetically sealed’ relationship that she has with Zoe where she feels she can do or say anything she pleases without the least sense that it might come back to haunt her.
I guess with her I feel absolutely no barriers whatsoever. I can talk about everything there is to talk about including people who might be shitting me, getting under my skin a bit. Talk about absolutely everything. Very, very safe.

For Jenny, coaching provides an opportunity to unhook from her work and to stop. The process of stopping begins with the drive to the session with Zoe. During this time she focuses down on the issues that she wants to deal with – the things she thinks she might need to work on.

So going to Zoe is an opportunity to slow down ... when I get to Zoe to actually stop and to talk about where I am. So, just to stop and describe to her what's happening now ... [D]oing that often reveals things to myself that I wouldn't have [realised] and I make an observation or some observations. And then it's usually an opportunity, out of that summary of the current, to work out what the things are [that] I want to do differently or want to have happening around me differently.

The stopping to reflect is a very important part of the mentoring process for Jenny, perhaps even the most important part.

I think probably the most significant out of all of that is the time to stop. It's like taking a photo. So, OK stop at this point and let's take a photo of what's happening.

When she arrives she enters an environment that has been created to help her quietly talk and reflect. Her coach creates a very pleasant and relaxing environment. The seating is comfortable. The room is quiet with relaxing mood music playing. There is good ambient light. There is always good coffee and tea available as well as something to eat. Zoe’s demeanour is always calm and helps to get Jenny to relax and focus.

Zoe creates a very relaxing environment. She’s a peaceful person herself so that you know no matter what day it is or what's happened for Zoe you’ll get there and it will be very serene. The surrounding will be very serene, very calming, very elegant which helps you to stop ... [T]he environment is very conducive to walking in and being able to take that snapshot straight away. And Zoe’s whole demeanour is the same – it's always a very calm, very grounded person that greets you. So I don’t think it’s just the environment, because a different person wouldn’t create that environment to which you’re walking in. So someone that was very agitated, very rushed themselves, all those kinds of things, wouldn’t be able to create that peacefulness as you walk in the door that allows you to stop and feel very comfortable.
So she creates an environment. She allows you to go your own way. So you can talk about absolutely anything.

It’s not just the environment that is special. Jenny says that in her experience good mentors have always made her feel special and this is particularly so with her paid coach. Not that good mentoring is always ‘cosy’.

Often the real value can lie in the confrontation and challenge that occurs.

I found with people I consider to be good mentors that they’re good at provoking those instinctive extreme reactions, but not having an opinion about your extreme reactions and giving you the space to make your own observations and learn [for] yourself.

Zoe listens attentively to her and is able to give her feedback and to make suggestions that stimulate her thinking differently about how to approach her issues. And she does this in a non-judging way. Her body language, her tone of voice as well as the things she says are not judgemental in any way. Jenny feels that this comes about because Zoe is from outside her workplace and so does not have a view on what she is describing that might distort things. The conversation has a cleanness that could not be achieved by an internal coach/mentor no matter how hard they tried. Zoe’s distance from the issues gives her an ‘objectivity that comes from [her] naïvety’.

The process starts by leaving to one side the day to day problems and issues while a vision is developed. The problems and issues are then revisited in as systematic way as possible and strategies for actions developed. The process then follows a spiral of reflection, plans for action, taking action, more reflection, and so forth. It’s a process that Jenny finds has become embedded in her daily life.
At times when I am feeling frantic and pulled from one side to the other I [am] consciously able to say ‘Well sit down and [think about] what’s happening.’ So I [can] see myself actually learning to coach myself. Learning [Zoe’s] skill of how you stop and reflect and work out what’s going on, that sort of thing.

Jenny understands that learning happens through that systematic reflection and that she’s not the only one who’s learning via the relationship. She knows that Zoe is learning too through her work with her and other clients; and that learning helps Zoe to change and improve and be a better coach.

Some of the learning for Zoe has been about Jenny’s work situation. It means that although Zoe is an outsider she does not have to be brought up to speed each time they have a session together. The genuine effort Zoe makes to learn about and understand Jenny’s situation is very important to Jenny.

She knows about my environment … and she appears conscious of the need for her to know that so that she’s never stuffed up on someone’s name or whatever. She [has] a good mind for the detail in terms of who I [am] working with and that sort of stuff.

There is also a level of equality in the relationship based on two-way respect, communication and feedback. Jenny feels empowered by the process and never feels she is being told what to do. Suggestions are made, sure – but they are suggestions and whether she acts on them or not is always clearly Jenny’s choice. The only repercussion of the choice she makes is a conversation that helps her to reflect on why she did or didn’t do something and could there have been another way of achieving a result.

Jenny couldn’t work with a coach/mentor whom she didn’t respect and it goes without saying that she has a deep respect for Zoe as a person and for
her values. In fact she admires some of Zoe’s values so much that she is hoping to be able to develop strongly in that direction.

Reflections: Is that what mentoring looks like?

Despite Zoe calling what she does ‘leadership coaching,’ Jenny identifies her as her mentor. The non-judging safety of the relationship seems paramount. Anything can be discussed without repercussions. Also, paying gives freedom from obligations – this is not possible with colleagues and there is also some suspicion around motivation with them. This relationship is ‘clean’ and ‘hermetically sealed’. Jenny is made to feel special/important: ‘she’s never stuffed up on someone’s name’ or other details. She shows care and concern, but it is not always cosy; there is confrontation and challenge. Her body language and tone of voice are congruent with her confronting in a non-judging way.\(^{13}\) There is focus on the client and her needs. It’s clear that the client has choice when acting.

There is a connection with the mentor ‘as a person’ and in relation to her values that the mentee admires and wants to develop for herself.

Jenny’s mentor Zoe comes across as calm; unruffled; peaceful; someone who leaves her problems/agenda outside the relationship. She is trustworthy; makes Jenny feel special; brings something personal to the relationship (‘a different person wouldn’t create that environment’). She is non-judgemental (‘allows you to go your own way’) makes an effort and is open about herself and her values.

\(^{13}\) Mehrabian (1981) found that it is difficult, if not impossible, for people to fake the non-verbal components of conversations. When these are out of alignment with
Story Nine

Helen describes herself as a professional helper saying that her practice is essentially about helping individuals and groups to work things out. What they might be working out could be a business strategy, or how to implement a major change in the organisation, or some life issue that needs to be resolved. She can’t remember exactly when, in her three-decade career, that mentoring started to seem important professionally. One thing just led to another and over time it just emerged as part of her practice. An organisational psychologist by profession, her career has spanned private practice as well as management and organisational consulting in the public and private sectors. Her training as a psychologist gives her a firm theoretical basis for the work she undertakes with individuals and groups of people. Her life experience gives her practical approaches to grounding the theory in ways she thinks can make a real difference.

I think there is such a thing as human encounter. I think there is a moment when people have a significant encounter that ends up changing one or other or both. That kind of encounter can happen between complete strangers in the brief encounter type of scenario, it can happen in the context of friendship, it can happen in the context of things that other people would say are mentoring, coaching or counselling. The frame for it doesn’t matter. I think those conceptual frames we put on it are to give ourselves an excuse for encounter.

It’s whatever intellectualisation an organisation or a person has got to put around something to explain what’s going on to others. So that they’ve got a language for talking about it. So they might say I’ve got a mentor or I’ve got a coach or I’ve got this or I’ve got that. Not many people wander around saying, “You know, this is a person with whom I have had or I am having significant encounters.” It’s not in our vocabulary, but the process is one of encounter for me.

the words spoken, the credibility of what is being said is determined by the non-verbals, by a ratio of around 9:1.
Critical to the process of encounter for Helen is a high level of what she calls meta-awareness where, for some part of the process, whether there is discourse happening or not, one or other or both the people ‘encounter themselves in a different mode’. While meta-awareness can and often does happen in other circumstances it is an essential element of what she describes as encounter.

Encounter is one of the ways that the state of meta-awareness is triggered. You might have a conversation or read a book and you may not have the meta-awareness experience in real time while you’re having the conversation or reading the book, but it might stay in your brain and trigger some experience of that kind much later. So mentoring and coaching and all that is not about telling me about what happens in real time. It’s about what it can trigger. What it can set up that you make some connection with later on.

Creating this kind of experience deliberately or professionally takes time, effort and serious, deep thinking. Helen would say that she has been developing her skilled helping capabilities since she began studying psychology in the 1970’s. She has learned from books and from others, from being supervised and from supervising, but most of all she has learned through observing good practice, trying to put it into practice for herself and then reflecting on how successful or otherwise she has been. Helen is very clear that while she has learned from a number of sources and along the way adapted what she has learned, giving it her own flavour, there is a firm foundation on which she has built her practice.

There are a number of frameworks that have helped me develop my practice. The first was deep exposure to the work of Carl Rogers. In On Becoming a Person 14 he describes what the state of meta-awareness is actually about. It’s a very particular state of compassionate self regard that is also not judgmental in which you are receiving or able to receive data from yourself as well as from the other or from what’s going on outside yourself. In that state then you are not likely to screen out anything and you don’t put any restriction on what the other person might think or

---

14 Helen is referring here to Carl Rogers’ work A Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy: On Becoming a Person.
feel. You just track them and go with them. I believe that that’s a foundation skill for what I would call encounter. And, ironically, I think we listen best to the people we know least.

I’ve always said, and I don’t listen to my own advice enough, every professional mistake I’ve ever made in my life ... every single one of them has been a failure to listen. I cannot think of any time that went wrong using my own judgements about what’s right and wrong, or any time I’ve got myself into hot water that couldn’t be traced to a failure to engage with the other person’s data for long enough, or at a deep enough level. Can’t think of a time when it wasn’t about listening.

By listening deeply to another with unconditional positive regard, she believes that we are modelling for them what they need to do to listen to themselves. In Helen’s view this is exactly what Rogers was doing in his therapy with his clients. He didn’t talk about it. He didn’t give them things to read. He just did it and she thinks that over time many of them then started to do it for themselves. In listening to others we open up the possibility that they might be able to listen to themselves.

It’s not just being listened to. I think that when someone listens to you like that they are actually implicitly role modelling the need to listen to oneself. When Rogers was doing his stuff he was an embodiment of the active compassionate witness and for many people that triggered the same capacity in them without words being said.

Rogers never said, “I’m sitting here to give you unconditional positive regard and here’s how I do it. And read page 37 of my recent publication on it.” He just did it and I think for very many people experiencing him do it over time, he hypnotised them into doing it for themselves. It was catchy.

He was one of the first people to find the words to actually take what is a tacit skill in the known sense of tacit wisdom and write about it, and it was ground-breaking stuff.

While listening to others is something we do so regularly that we might take it for granted as a common skill, it’s not as simple as it might sound. It takes practice and attention to achieve and hone good listening behaviour, and much of what many people would understand to be attentive listening can have a negative effect on the person being listened to as well as on the nature and quality of the conversation.
I don’t think that somebody sitting silently and staring at you is active listening. It can be pressure. I’ve watched people work at times who thought that because they sat there with a blank look on their face being silent and that the other person was talking … that that somehow said something about the quality of their listening. I think silence is a great social pressure and most people respond to it eventually. I don’t think that’s listening. It’s not what I’m talking about because people fill the silence with something.

It is more about finding words that let the person know that something is happening and that it is your pleasure, if you like, to play back to them what they think is happening.

Helen maintains that ‘listening well means encouraging the other person to talk by giving them the space to do that’, but also by giving them appropriate feedback that they are being heard. She says that while minimal non-verbal encouragers can help at the start of conversations, it’s important to be able to deeply acknowledge what is being expressed by the other person. That deep acknowledgment goes to the very heart of what she believes Carl Rogers was offering to others. Still later in the process it may be appropriate to be doing more than just listening to the words and acknowledging what’s been expressed.

There comes a moment when you cross over from what you might call “measure for measure” type active listening and you start to get into the non-verbal. So a person might be saying, “Oh well, I’ve always been happy with Janine,” but they’re looking like death and you might say, “Well, I’m hearing it. The voice is saying I’m happy with Janine, but your body isn’t.” So you start to feed back the incongruities in the data.

Helen says that she finds that the person she’s with usually signals through their body movements when it might be the right time for her to take this sort of approach. For example, it may be when a very extroverted person who has been talking without drawing breath for an hour and a half, finally pauses for a microsecond and becomes aware that the other person is there and listening. Then they might say something like, ‘Do you know what I mean? Is this making sense?’ Or something might happen and they
interrupt themselves. At this point the energy shifts and they might raise their head and create an opportunity for some kind of encounter to happen where the challenge is to work with their data. At a moment like this Helen will focus the conversation by asking something along the lines of, ‘Where does that leave you?’

Which is almost the most powerful thing, I think, you could say to somebody else. “How are you left?” and see how they respond to it. And you will almost always see a shift in the body. There will be something. They’ll either go, “Hmmm” or they’ll sit back or ... Their body will shift and at the moment the body shifts then that’s the opportunity for some felt sense of difference, and that’s the opportunity when you’re trying to get that sense of meta-awareness.

While focused, active listening can trigger meta-awareness, it can also be triggered by a wide range of things and events. Meta-awareness, Helen maintains, can be brought about by things such as a vivid recollection of something from the past, by listening to a piece of music or by watching a parent age and lose their previous capacities. Heightened awareness of our behaviour and ourselves can come about in many ways, only one of these is encounter with another and in Helen’s view most encounters do nothing to bring about meta-awareness because they lack the essential ingredient of attentive and active listening.

Think of how many millions of encounters people have in their lives where fuck all happens and where, in fact, the encounter shuts them down or is deadening because there was a failure to acknowledge. So no wonder when it happens to us in mentoring and coaching we say, “Gee, that was life changing.” Because it happens, if you’re lucky, two or three times in your life under normal circumstances. Some people, shocking though that it is, live a whole lifetime and never ever have the experience of being acknowledged beyond a “Hello. How are you?” Now that’s a pretty frightening thought. So when it happens by people doing instinctively, or naturally, something that triggers it, we are inclined to remember it and say, “What a great gift!”

While Helen contends that many people do not have, or perhaps have lost, the skills of listening and acknowledging, she also believes that the skills
can be learned. This learning can have a profound impact on the quality of many relationships, whether they are day to day working and life relationships, or ones such as mentoring and coaching.

For people who are not instinctive ... You see, there are some people who just do it instinctively and it’s part of who they are and it’s part of the magic. For those of us who have to learn it, I think you learn it by watching people who are very good at it, but you deconstruct it. To me it’s like the martial arts. At the end of the day you have to practice with a master. I’m very fortunate that in my time I have learned from two or three people who were absolute masters at this. They’re not necessarily people I would want to be around a lot of the time. So this is not some nice guru or Jesus-type person, but at the moment when they do this it is absolutely breathtaking to watch. So it’s not something you read about or hear about. It’s something you watch and work with someone else.

Helen is concerned that many people who are now seeing themselves as coaches or mentors do not have the types of skills she believes are necessary to raise or focus in another person a heightened awareness of themselves, the way they behave and the consequences for themselves and others. Finding the right person(s) from whom to learn this craft is not an easy quest.

I suppose why it’s [coaching/mentoring] such a confusing field is that it’s possible to learn technical skills from people who don’t care about you. I learned a huge amount about diagnosis and organisational issues from watching X. Now in a technical sense you could say he was a mentor to us in that he took us under his wing and he shared his knowledge. I didn’t like him as a personality at all and I don’t think he much liked us. There was no relationship, but what was there was the joy of a craftsman and in his case, the generosity. There was some generosity there. He went the extra mile in doing it, but we watched him and we read what he said about it and he corrected our drafts and did all that sort of stuff. And, by God, we learned diagnosis and we learned from a master practitioner. Now that was around technical skills that we wanted to learn. Trust was present to the extent that this man wasn’t going to bullshit. I guess I could learn gardening the same way. But the apprenticeship method is actually a hard, long way to learn, so at some point it is helpful if somebody does the deconstruction and says, “Well, you just saw a masterly performance there. What do you think was happening? Let’s talk through what that was about so that you might practice it.” Now at that point maybe the word coaching is good for that. Sort of technical skills coaching. It can happen in football. It can happen in consulting. X taught me the technical skills around diagnosis. He didn’t teach me to be a great consultant. Learning those technical skills didn’t do anything for my meta-awareness because I could charge around using the skills he gave me and I would create great havoc in an organisation. Even though I knew how to do diagnostic work, I wouldn’t necessarily have much
awareness. It’s like giving a scalpel to a homicidal maniac. They’re not necessarily going to do fine work with it even though it’s a fine tool.

Her concerns are heightened when she sees coaching and mentoring being ‘packaged and turned into a commodity for the benefit of organisations.’

While she believes that organisations can gain a lot from their staff being involved with coaches or mentors, she feels that mentoring is not what happens most of the time in organisational programs.

The organisation requisitions everything for its purpose now. Work and the organisation is the paradigm that drives our lives. It’s total and comprehensive at the moment and if it can it will requisition your family, your soul, your spirit, your heart, your emotions, your brain, whatever. Coaching and mentoring, we’re desperate to package it up in the business books. What is the secret here? Tell us the secret? Turn it into another commodity. Turn it into a saleable transaction. And so the curiosity about it to me is to approach it with discipline and mystery and to say, “This is an art and a science that is noble in its own right.” We want to turn it into another engine for corporate life and it makes me sick!

Helen talks about meta-awareness as being a life skill that leads to change in the ways people interact with others and operate over time. To illustrate this she retells the well-known story about the two approaches we can take to alleviate hunger, feeding people and helping them to feed themselves. By taking the more immediate approach and giving a person a fish we leave them dependent on us for their meals. But by investing the time and effort to teach them how to fish we ensure that they can feed themselves independently. For Helen, the highest levels of helping others must involve helping them to develop their meta-awareness rather than simply ‘handing over’ solutions to their problems or issues. By taking that approach, she finds that people are able to learn very quickly that they can do their own work and don’t have to keep coming back to her for help. In other cases, it takes longer.
It is the job of the helper to keep creating the possibilities for that. It almost doesn’t matter if you try it and now is not the right time. That’s data! Maybe it has sown a seed. It’s done something. But the job of helping is not to get the timing right. The job of helping is to create the kind of container in which eventually the meta-awareness will happen.

If the ingredients are there, it happens. I notice that what happens when a person is telling a story, there is a moment, and I call it the lifting of the head moment, where they look at you and it’s kind of like, “Well, what do you make of my story?” It’s the invitation to engage. Now if I don’t respond quickly to that, that’s data for them and it’s interesting to see what they do with my silence.

While Helen prefers to work with people one-on-one out of their normal environment she’s happy to work in any office or room where she feels encounter can take place. For many of her clients, meeting in a restaurant or deli for a meal or a coffee is the preferred option and Helen is relaxed about working under these circumstances as long as they don’t impact negatively on the quality of the conversation. If Helen has concerns about the location inhibiting the conversation or impacting on the client’s freedom to connect with issues, she will endeavour to arrange to meet with the person at another location. Clients who visit her at her office are made comfortable in an environment which is airy and light, is tastefully decorated and provides a number of areas for sitting and talking.

Helen always offers her clients something to drink and nibble on and will usually engage them at a social level as a way of getting things started. She is as relaxed and informal with her clients as she perceives the situation allows her to be and she will joke and make personal conversation with people with whom she feels it appropriate to do so.

Believing encounter is at the epicentre of her practice she continues to hone her skills by challenging her practice through reflection, in many instances with others, so she can improve the effectiveness of the encounters she has
with others. While she strives for meaningful encounters with her clients she is sanguine enough to acknowledge that their lives are complex and demanding and that there are times when encounter is the last thing they are looking for from her.

But like everything else, life is not, in my view, meant either personally or professionally to be lived in a state of deep encounter all the time. Like Freud said on his deathbed, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. It’s not a regressive, infantile, oral fixation. A cigar is just a cigar. Well sometimes when I meet with you, I just want to have breakfast!

She then told me a story from her own practice, which I have reproduced in her own words.

Well I was working with somebody on Friday, a young woman who has been professionally successful. She is now 37. She knows what she doesn’t want to do from here on, but she’s not sure what she does want to do.

So we were sitting, and I’m supposed to be coaching her, so we were sitting having a cup of coffee and I was just paying deep attention, not to the story and the content, but to the way she was telling her story. Because it’s the mode of story telling that’s important, not the content so much.

While she was sitting there and telling me her story I noticed that she wasn’t particularly energised about her own story. She was going through all the options and giving me the dutiful stuff about what she should be doing, but she was about as excited about her own story as I am a Martian. So I just said to her, “You’re not really sounding all that energised about any of this.” And she just stopped and looked at me – a sort of inward look and said, “No it is pretty boring isn’t it?” And then she said, “I wonder if that means that I’m boring.” My reply to that was, “Well it might mean that you’re bored rather than that you’re boring. So where does that take you?”

She talked for a while after that about how she needed everything to be fairly neat and compartmentalised and that taking that approach had worked for her up to this point in her life, but it wasn’t producing the answers that she needs now. I said, “Well, if you’re feeling bored with yourself or not energised by your own options, maybe there’s an issue here around finding ways to... just to get excited again or noticing what that might be about, or doing things that are different from what you normally do.”

Her awareness came at that moment when she acknowledged that she was kind of bored. She was even bored with the process of thinking about the options. That’s how boring it was. It was as if it had become a job of work for her. When your own checklist becomes a problem to you, you have to say, “There’s something going on here.” So she just stopped and didn’t talk for a bit and just drank her coffee and ate her cake. Then a while later we started to talk about right brain stuff because maybe her intuitive self wasn’t getting into the act and therefore wasn’t creating anything exciting or interesting for her. We finished and she went away. I think the outcome
of our session was that she was going to go to an art gallery. I think that’s where we got to. Which had nothing to do in a content sense, on the surface of it, with what she came in with. Ostensibly what she had come to talk about was, “Do I want to stay working for the organisation I’m with, living happily ever after and being a good girl? Or do I want something else to turn up?” So she went away to give the something else a bit of a chance to turn up. Maybe it will, maybe it won’t. Now I would regard that as a good outcome. She seemed to. I mean, she came in bored and I think that she went away intrigued. So there had been some shift in her presenting energy in that conversation, because the kind of listening I was doing was deep listening to the sub-text. I was not just listening to the content.

When I’m working with people who are trying to gain or improve their skills in working closely with others I usually will tell them a story to illustrate what it means to get someone to reflect in a way that raises their level of awareness about what has really been going on. It’s a simple story I tell them. When someone is telling you a story about something that really matters to them, you will usually be able to tell. It’s a pivotal moment.

You can sit and listen to me tell you a story about Fred for a long time but no work will happen until Fred turns up in the room. By that I mean that we’re not just hearing about something in the past that is my cerebral construct or whatever about what happened. Work happens when Fred is actually here with us now. So I’m not just talking about Fred in retrospect or at a distance. Because it’s really important to me, my sensation or experience or feeling about Fred is palpable in the room, to you and to me.

When I put it in those terms to people, I don’t have to use any fancy words or anything else; most people know what I’m talking about. So when we’re reflecting on a session that they’ve been involved in I say, “Did Fred ever turn up?” And they sometimes then know that they’ve just spent an hour or more with somebody and what they have been hearing was a crafted reconstruction of a story, but at no point in the story was a deep thing happening. There was no deep connection with what was really going on. Fred didn’t show up in the room. But at other times they get to notice when Fred does turn up because when Fred turns up something changes. The person might stop talking. Or you see some genuine feeling come into what they are saying. You see some emotion in real time. Or you see the person’s lack of satisfaction with the way things ended or how they seem to be going. Once that happens you’ve got something to work with. If it doesn’t happen ... without it, you might as well be reading a novel.

A lot of skill in doing this work is about making sure that or creating the possibility for Fred to turn up in the first ten minutes of the conversation and not the last three and a half seconds, or not at all. There is skill involved in helping that to happen and in knowing when it’s actually happening. So when I’m with people who want to improve their practice I focus on getting them to pay close attention to what’s happening during the conversations they have with people. You have to look for and listen for very subtle shifts, to notice when Fred is actually there and not just being talked about at arm’s length. And to learn to create opportunities and space for Fred to turn up sooner rather than later.

**Reflections: Is that what mentoring looks like?**

A professional paid helper. Connects with the idea of mentoring being different from her work as a psychologist or counsellor. Also differentiates
coaching from mentoring – coaching is about the technical and does not rely on relationship, whereas mentoring involves ‘encounter’ between people. Mentoring is about people. Mentoring just emerged in her practice over time, so again it is recognised in retrospect. Like Zoe she tries to meet people in comfortable surroundings, but place is not specifically important as long as it is somewhere that people can reflect and engage with the issues and themselves.

Transformation happens infrequently in a person’s life.

Mentoring triggers meta-awareness that ends up changing people. We know what we mean in terms of these encounters, but we haven’t an adequate vocabulary – people put on it the label that seems to work for them.

It’s about being able to listen to oneself. Being very attentive to the other and listening at a deep level with no distractions; role-modelling; making a space; no pressure; tuning in to the other person as a whole, not just to their words. This sort of attention is a ‘great gift’. Some people do it instinctively and it’s ‘magic’.

There’s something here about how we learn to do this if we are not instinctive. ‘It’s something you watch and work with someone else.’ So we learn it by observing it in action – given everyone seems to be able to recall their first experience does this also mean that they are not just passing on the ‘gift’ when they are mentoring but also passing on some of the practice they have learned from their mentor?
Finding someone to learn from is difficult, as it is neither packageable nor saleable. The mentor despite their level of skills can only help to create a container or the possibility for the meta-awareness to happen – there’s no guarantee that it will.

In a relationship mentoring – deep encounter – doesn’t happen all the time, sometimes people ‘just want to have breakfast’. But when it happens ‘you will usually be able to tell. It’s a pivotal moment.’

There are issues of genuine feeling here; depth; subtle shifts; emotion; engagement with another. Considers it important to have compassionate self-regard before extending that to others; to be non-judgmental internally as well as externally.

Helen seems to be a keen observer of nuances in people – pays close attention. She is angry at the idea that mentoring can be appropriated by organisations.

**Story Ten: The one that was almost left behind**

A moment of truth or ‘critical incident’ (Flanagan 1954) that triggered important sense-making for me occurred late in the research process when I was revisiting a story that I had found attractive from the moment it was told to me, but that I had discounted and put to one side because it did not seem to be about mentoring. It was about ironing, dresses and the relationship a young woman had experienced with someone else’s ‘unsophisticated mum’. But this story stayed with me and I found it always
raised a warm smile whenever I read the transcript or when I went back and listened to the person effusively telling their story on tape. On the day I returned to the story as an outtake for the last time I finally understood that here I had someone telling me about a relationship that was significant to her. It was my ‘gut feeling’ rather than a conscious research perspective that had drawn me back to it.

It was an experience from an important transition in her life (high school to university; girlhood to womanhood; dependence to independence). The other person in the relationship had had a profound and enduring impact on her life that continues to this day.

Although my storyteller did not define the critical elements of mentoring through her words, she was telling me a story that held the very personal definition of mentoring that she holds inside herself. She offered this story in response to my asking her about her experience of mentoring, and yet because it did not fit my preconceived ideas of mentoring I put it to one side and almost rejected it.

So as a way of beginning the presentation of the stories, I now present verbatim the story that eventually shifted my thinking and opened my eyes to the true possibilities in all the data that I had collected.

An early piece of mentoring I got was from Linda’s mother who was not ... I mean, Pearl was a hairdresser and she was a very ... it’s hard to describe. For a not well-educated woman she had a high level of ironic wit which she used to play between herself and her husband all the time. And this ironic wit came from, I don’t know, her own life experience or something. But anyway I won’t speculate about that, but

---

15 An expression used in film, television and radio production to indicate material that has been recorded, but has no place in the final product.
somehow or other Pearl’s ironic wit gave me a way of transforming my own life experience which did not have a lot of ironic wit in it at the time. It was a new art form for me, and I found it remarkably transforming.

I met her when I was about 17, I guess, and I had not had strong mothering myself at that point. This was not about mothering at all, though she used to iron my dresses and hold them up to the light. Those were the days of the mini where I had skirts up around my bum and she’d say, but this is a singlet, surely? This is a dress?

And she would show me things and teach me things that I didn’t know about and which most girls of that age probably would have known, but she had this kind of witty, ironic detachment which made it OK. So instead of feeling inept and like, oh God, I’m a goose, Pearl’s way of doing it was to make it all very funny at some level. And I don’t mean hilariously funny, not rolling about funny, but she could deal with my fragile, adolescent, teenage, unformed ego in such a way that she could teach me things without me feeling dumb.

It was a great gift and not one that I really appreciated until years later, actually, when she was dying and her ironic wit was still there. She was smoking heavily even though she had emphysema so she was not a wise woman in that respect, but yeah, there was that capacity for wit and detachment through which to view the hard things in life. And that was a kind of mentoring. It was the first time I experienced an adult who behaved like that around me.

So that came at quite a formative time and I think Linda and her Mum turned up in my life at a very good time around that. So that was one form of mentoring, even though I wouldn’t have put that word on it. So she was a very early mentor.

She was a very interesting woman. She really was and it’s only in retrospect that I realise what Pearl represented. It was just a very different way of engaging with the world. I have never met anybody quite like her.

Reflections: Is that what mentoring looks like?

This is a story of mentoring that for me resonates with my conceptualisation of Athenic mentoring – indeed, in the way it was told as much as by the words used in the telling. The mentoring is recognised in retrospect at a deep level that the storyteller finds ‘hard to describe’. The mentor is in the guise of an ordinary mum doing the ironing and yet she had a profound impact on the young woman: ‘I found it profoundly transforming.’ I doubt that she intended to do this or that she was employing special skills at a conscious level. The gift she gave was of herself, her ‘ironic wit’ which came from ‘her own life experience’ – perhaps what the young woman’s
mother had been unable to provide for her – and her human qualities were
unique, ‘I have never met anyone like her.’ She helped a teenage girl whom
most likely was ‘feeling dumb’ most of the time to feel different about
herself, even feel special. Through her ironic wit she opened up a different
way of looking at and engaging with ‘the hard things in life’.16

I am struck by the sense of generosity in this story; something freely given,
with a humour that seems to have made it so ‘easy’ and without shaming
the person. A gift given beautifully and simply.

16 Given the richness of this story in relation to my conceptualisation of mentoring I
now find it quite ironic that it was the story that was almost left behind.
Chapter 6—making sense of things

In everyday use, learning has come to be synonymous with “taking in information.” Yet, taking in information is only distantly related to real learning. It would be nonsensical to say, “I just read a great book about bicycle riding—I’ve now learned that” (Senge 1990, p.13).

Introduction

In this chapter, in keeping with my original commitment, I try to be transparent about the way in which my thinking was developing. Because it was informed by the stories I was writing down, my reflections on them, by my earlier reading about Athena, by very limited and sporadic forays into the contemporary literature, it may ‘bounce around’ to some extent. At all times, though, I will try to be clear about how I got from one piece of thinking to the next.

Reflection on my reflections—what the stories suggest mentors do

Some long while after writing them, as I re-read the stories of others in the previous chapter and my reflections on them, I noticed that my own focus had been very much on the behaviours of the mentors and that, in the light of these behaviours, I had made some judgements of my own about what was really happening in the situations described.

This focus on what the mentor was doing was influenced by the way I had originally framed my research. I was keen to know what good mentors did and what worked. As I believe my reflective comments show, I was clearly more drawn to some approaches to mentoring than to others. Despite this,
when I was able to ‘stand back’ a little from those personal preferences I found that I was able to prepare a list (see Diagram 9 below) of the behaviours or actions that the mentors and mentees in the stories described themselves as taking into the relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mentee Doing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Mentor Doing</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work hard</td>
<td>Listen actively/generously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give it a go</td>
<td>Don’t ridicule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think out loud</td>
<td>Help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share misgivings</td>
<td>Encourage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dump</td>
<td>Coax/cajole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take risks</td>
<td>Give feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self disclose</td>
<td>Don’t “tell”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop to reflect</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give feedback</td>
<td>Provoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel special</td>
<td>Challenge and stretch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Push the boundaries</td>
<td>Self disclose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect the mentor</td>
<td>Explain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust the mentor</td>
<td>Make space and opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deal with mentor as a human being</td>
<td>Spend time/make time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate talent</td>
<td>Protect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stick around</td>
<td>Negotiate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show commitment</td>
<td>Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t abuse mentor’s faith/trust</td>
<td>Teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk openly</td>
<td>Put in energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show signs of being independent</td>
<td>Stimulate thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions/curious</td>
<td>Suggest/show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge mentor</td>
<td>Like the mentee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open up</td>
<td>Laugh/joke</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Diagram 9: Typical Doing Components for Mentee and Mentor*

The words in each list are not paired with or directly connected to the words in the opposite column. Each column is simply a list of behaviours and actions; and not all mentors and mentees will enact all of them.
My overall reflection was that there was nothing surprising in the behavioural descriptions used by those I interviewed. And so while I was initially interested in systematically comparing those descriptions with the findings and conceptualisations found in the literature, I was not convinced that this approach would add very much beyond confirming that, when asked, both mentors and mentees are able to outline and label behaviours that they either espouse as helpful to their practice (for mentors) or have experienced as helpful (for mentees).

To be quite frank, I was actually quite disappointed with my stories because, with a couple of exceptions I felt that they were not very compelling or interesting. After my initial frustration with the literature, and my feeling of being tossed about in a rickety boat, I had enjoyed reading and writing about Athena and the Sorcerer’s apprentice along with the feeling of ‘doing something’ that came from the activity of interviewing people, writing stories and reflecting on them. But when that was done, I felt very flat, thinking along the lines of, ‘is that all there is?’ Then I began to feel quite anxious. ‘Is this going to constitute a doctoral work?’ My usual behaviour at times like these is to withdraw into myself and to think. That is what I did at this time, which I will describe next.

**All models are wrong, some models are useful**

When I wrote down what I was now thinking, I concluded that mentoring is a developmental process which at its core is about creating opportunities for insights which lead to major changes or transitions in how a person thinks; how they operate day to day in their interactions with issues, problems or
others; and, what they know. I devoted a substantial effort to differentiating between mentoring (as I understood it to be) from related activities such as counselling, coaching and instructing, as suggested by Megginson and Clutterbuck (1995). Over time I devised what I came to call the *Mentoring Continuum* (see Diagram 10 below). The continuum was framed around the idea of low or no contact on the left, moving to closer, longer-lasting relationships across to the right.

![Diagram 10: The Mentoring Continuum](image)

I conceived *Role Modelling* as a situation where a person may gain some insights by observing another either close-up or from a distance – an example of this was someone who told me that Tina Turner was their role model although they had never met. I was not aware at the time of concepts like ‘a purely symbolic mentor whom they never meet’ (Levinson et al. 1978), ‘unsuspecting-hero role model’ (Phillips-Jones 1982) and ‘remote role model’ as mentor (Merriam & Thomas 1986), but even if I had been, I doubt that I would have seriously considered this to be mentoring at the time of constructing the continuum.

*Teaching/Instructing* involved some ‘one-on-one’ contact, but was essentially ‘one way traffic’ with the learner being the recipient of the instructor’s knowledge of a subject – technical knowledge about the world and the way things work. *Training* I saw as being less one way, with the trainer inviting
input and participation from the trainee(s), but still as being about the imparting of technical knowledge.

*Technical Coaching*, in my mind, was where one-on-one work began in earnest, albeit with a focus on the transfer of technical knowledge. The technical and knowledge transfer aspects started to fall away for me in my notion of *Leadership Coaching*. Here I saw personal development in a close relationship taking precedence over the acquisition of technical skills acquisition.

In *Mentoring*, the focus was on personal development through insight, leading to major changes or transitions for an individual, in the context of a relationship developed over a longer period of time, and reaching levels of understanding and rapport that could not occur in shorter-term relationships. At the far right of the continuum was *high order mentoring*, the closest and longest lived of these relationships, in which the deepest transformation occurred for the learner. My conception was that to reach this stage all the others had to be traversed in a similar fashion to the ‘patrons’ of Shapiro, Haseltine and Rowe (1978, p.55).

Much later, during the final phases of writing this thesis when I was trawling the literature looking for points of confluence and disagreement with my ideas, I discovered that the ‘higher order’ nature of some mentoring had already been discussed by Garvey and Alred (2000), among others (to whom I will try and do justice in Chapter 8).
In mentoring, the quality of the relationship is all important, which means that mentoring is essentially about learning in a social context and the learning which takes place, because it is social and all-engaging through a high-quality relationship, is of a higher order (Garvey & Alred 2000, p.218).

However, without the help of Garvey and Alred and still struggling to make sense of mentoring in my own head, I found that I was not able to explain my notion of high order mentoring to others in ways that made sense to them. Different individuals connected with most aspects of the model or what I was saying, but, almost invariably, they would disagree with some part or wish to add something to the model based on their own understanding of mentoring.

It also became obvious to me that the internal logic of the continuum was flawed. For example, in the case of role modelling, I realised that some people have role models who are most definitely distant like the unmet and ‘purely symbolic mentor’ of Levinson et al. (1978) and the ‘unsuspecting-hero role models’ of Phillips-Jones (1982), yet others are in close relationship with their role models over long periods of time. In my conversations I began to notice that some people would talk with great passion about someone being their mentor and changing their lives, but it was someone with whom they had only fleeting contact. Apparently a transitory, even a chance meeting could have profound impacts. So where did this leave my model?

The temptation was to disregard the data that didn’t seem to fit with my paradigm. However, I began to ask different questions of the data, of myself and of my thinking. Were other people’s stories any less valid than the ones that fitted well with my ideas and experience? How could I account for the differences? What did the differences say about my own rigidity about what
might be admissible data and what was not? Were there other ways of conceptualising mentoring that might account for the differences or help me incorporate these differences into my work?

I ended up with so many disconcerting questions about my precious model that I could only abandon it and seek another way to frame the new and different understanding I was slowly coming to develop about mentoring. At this point I was attracted to English and Sutton’s (2000) distinction between coaching and specialist mentoring:

…[W]e found a wide range of approaches to mentoring, including mentors who saw their role primarily in terms of the coach helping the mentee to develop their technical knowledge and intellectual understanding of the organisational environment. At the other end of the spectrum were those who focused principally on the mentee’s inner world, concerned with issues of “emotional intelligence”, and what one mentor described as the development of “character”. We have described this as specialist mentoring (English & Sutton 2000, p.211).

English and Sutton’s spectrum, showing the relative position of what they identify as Specialist Mentoring in relation to coaching, is shown below in Diagram 11.

*Diagram 11: Specialist Mentoring (English & Sutton 2000, p.212)*

They add an extra layer of depth and complexity to their model with their notion of the holistic mentor who is not only able to assist on a wide range of
issues such as the ‘learning out there’ – ‘learning in me’ spectrum, but can also ‘call in specialist help’ from either end of the spectrum, if there is a need which the holistic mentor does not feel able to fulfil (English & Sutton 2000, p.214).

English and Sutton’s framing of mentoring resonated for me because I had been influenced in my own thinking by Cherry’s (1995) formulation of reflective practice. She suggested that learning can occur in a range from ‘Out There’ to ‘In Here’ with the less technical and more personally transformational learning relating to the latter. The relationship between these elements is shown in Diagram 12 below which suggests that as a person moves in their reflective practice from ‘Out There’ to ‘In Here,’ they work more and more with what they are bringing to any relationship or situation, their ‘personal scripts’ or characteristic ways of operating.

In reflective learning the learner is charged with doing the work – nobody else can do it for them. The more deeply they are prepared to work, the more ‘in here’ (Cherry 1995) or ‘in me’ (English & Sutton 2000), the closer they get to making contact with their ‘true self’ at the deepest levels and the more likely it is that they will achieve some transformational change.
Diagram 12: Levels of Diagnosis and Learning (Cherry 1995, p.309)

I was attracted to this formulation because it calls up the possibilities for change that touch human beings at a more deeply personal level. I was starting to think harder now about the sort of transformative experience that is facilitated by the sort of mentoring that people understand as important, but find so difficult to define in very precise ways. I asked: Is it possible for the mentor to touch a deep part of ‘self’ in the other person in ways that may not necessarily be conscious for either of them and may therefore be understood and recognised only in retrospect?
A new insight

At the Mentoring for Diversity Conference in Sydney, in May 2000, I presented a modified version of the *Learning Spectrum* (see Diagram 13 below) which attempted to highlight the difference between learning as a conscious transaction between the learner and another, and learning as deep, transformational change which may be ‘unconscious’ or ‘uncontrived’.

![Diagram 13: The Learning Spectrum](image)

The development of the model continued to have a profound impact on my understanding of mentoring and also on my thinking about how it might be defined. At the conference, I declared that I had come to the position that each mentoring relationship is intrinsically different because it is shaped by the individuals involved and their conscious and unconscious interactions. Emphasising that learners are individuals, I found myself repeating that each individual learns in a ‘unique way’ (Daloz 1986, p.xviii) and that this needs to be taken into account when we are trying to capture the essence of mentoring. I had not yet encountered the work of a more recently published author who maintains that:
...the relationship is personally and affectively grounded, and governed by ethical requirements of voluntarism and mutuality, therefore not reducible to quantifiable measures (Samier 2000, p.93).

I used a metaphor of ‘soup’ in my presentation to explain my view of the infinite possibilities in the individual ‘flavour’ of mentoring relationships. Just as there are infinite possibilities in the nature of the soup that can be made by different cooks using the same ingredients, and even the same recipe, so too are there infinite possibilities for mentoring. My proposition was received enthusiastically by the participants and for many months after the conference, believing I was close to an explanation that would allow me to move forward, I continued to try and fine-tune my model by considering the elements or ingredients of the mentoring ‘soup’.

This soup metaphor allowed me to acknowledge the complexity of the mentoring experience, and helped me to step out of the frustration that I had experienced when grappling with the attempts in the literature to ‘define’ mentoring. Quite paradoxically, it forced me to revisit that literature. Just why is it so difficult to pin down this phenomenon? And why do so many people continue to try to do just that? Time and time again attempts at definition have been made. Why is it that something so commonly and profoundly understood (and one could say archetypically understood) proves to be elusive when it comes to capturing it in words?

I need to emphasise that it was primarily as a result of hearing, analysing and writing actual stories of mentoring that it gradually dawned on me that one of the reasons we struggle to define mentoring (although more readily ‘recognising’ it) might be that it is not necessarily a conscious process that
we can label and identify as it is happening in real time. The recognition that someone has been a mentor might come to us much later, when we can see more clearly the contribution that has been made. Well after the event, we can discern that another person has touched our lives deeply, in ways that have transformed us, changed the paths we travel and deeply altered our lives. This is reflected by the many people I talked to who used phrases like, ‘I didn’t know it at the time, but X was my mentor.’

This unconscious, but deep, aspect of mentoring is perhaps one of the reasons that it can be recognised by so many people. In this respect, it shares some of the archetypical recognition that we give to parenting, another aspect of the human condition that would also elude neat labels and comprehensive definition.

It occurred to me that like parenting, mentoring shapes us at a deep unconscious level, in ways that we can only understand and appreciate in retrospect. But a mentor is someone who ‘can stand in a special creative relationship to us – not as father, mother, friend or lover ... but as a peer and self-possibility’ (Burton 1979, p.512). Hillman (1996) maintains that parents, as primary caretakers, cannot be mentors as well because of the multiplicity of caring tasks that parents must perform.

Freed of these tasks, the mentor has only one: to recognize the invisible load you carry and to have a fantasy about it that corresponds with the image in the heart. One of the most painful errors we make is to expect from a parent a mentor’s vision and blessing and strict teaching, or expecting from a mentor shelter and concern for our human life (Hillman 1996, p.163).

I noticed that Levinson et al. (1978) also make this distinction between parents and mentors. For them '[t]he mentor is not a parent or crypto-
parent. His primary function is to be a transitional figure.’ They argue that while parents can perform some mentoring functions, parents are too closely enmeshed in their children’s pre-adult lives to be ‘primary mentor figures’. They go on to argue that where mentoring becomes ‘symbolized in parent-child terms’ it can lead to feelings ‘that interfere with the mentoring function.’

I found myself agreeing with Thomas (1993) that mentoring does share the characteristics of some familial relationships (such as parent-child or younger-older sibling) since mentors and mentees experience emotional attachment and intimacy. Indeed, Viator and Scandura (1991) suggest that mentoring falls along a bipolar continuum with intense, paternalistic (classic mentor-protégé) relationships at one end, and at the other very weak mentoring relationships where the mentor is little more than a helper.

However, I was very attracted to the reasoning of Hillman (1996) and Levinson et al. (1978). I liked Gehrke’s (1988) idea that unlike parenting, mentoring is a ‘gift’ given consciously or not, by someone with no obligation to do so. In that sense, mentoring cannot be bought and sold despite the efforts of some ‘to discern the value of a mentor in one’s career through a kind of cost-benefit analysis’ (Gehrke 1988, p.193). It might happen in the context of a ‘paid’ relationship, but it cannot be packaged up and commodified in a program. As Clawson (1980), an early researcher in the business field, noted:

Since the roles of mentor and protégé are products of relationships, they cannot be legislated or structurally created. From an organizational viewpoint, much can be done to foster their development, but in the end they are the result of the
interpersonal evaluations of two individuals who see opportunities in their relationship to fulfil very personal objectives (Clawson 1980, p.151).

It has been argued that the development of mentoring programs over the past two decades and its increasingly high profile in most professions as a way of advancing a career have contributed significantly to the definitional maze. In fact the argument has been made that this phenomenon has had an impact on more than just the definition of mentoring.

The popularization of mentoring as a ‘quick fix’ for advancement in the workplace has blurred the definition, devalued the concept, and done little to advance the understanding of the process or the relationship (Wunsch 1994, p.27).

In distinguishing between what he calls classical and instrumental mentoring, Colwell (1998) has highlighted for me the distinction between ‘commodified’ and what I have framed as Athenic mentoring. In classical mentoring, Colwell suggests that the mentor guides the protégé on a journey leading, potentially, to personal growth for both, as well as the acquisition of knowledge by the protégé. A key aspect of the relationship is that it is a ‘qualitative’ or personal relationship.

...[W]hether that is a journey directly associated with more formal learning in education or training, or whether it is a journey towards the personal growth of the individual.

...The relationship is therefore a qualitative one and each person in that relationship has to be there because they choose to be. If the protégé or the mentor were to have such a role ‘forced’ upon them it would cease to be classical and, indeed, would be an example of instrumental mentoring (Colwell 1998, pp.314-315).

In Colwell’s lexicon, instrumental mentoring is what happens in formal organisational programs where pairs are matched or when people are paired with a mentor or coach with the expectation that something needs to be ‘fixed’ or improved. He maintains that while it may be useful, this sort of mentoring ‘appears to dilute the qualitative ideal of mentoring’ (Colwell
1998, p.315) because it diminishes the importance of the personal aspect of the relationship.

Hay (1995) is equally clear that it is not a position or role in an organisation that makes a person a mentor.

Once the characteristics of the mentor are framed in this broader way, it becomes clearer that anyone can be a mentor, irrespective of role. It is not the role itself which is important, but the fact that people make ‘a real connection with each other’ (Hay 1995, p.40). Writing from an organisational and business perspective Hay (1995) outlines a list of roles from which mentoring might be offered:

Personnel officers, training officers, facilitators, consultants, trade union officers, staff representatives, nursing and other medical staff, teachers, counsellors, sports coaches, supervisors, team leaders, probation officers, social workers, therapists, outplacement counsellors, career counsellors, small business advisers, BS 5750 consultants and assessors, action learning set members, welfare staff… (Hay 1995, p.30).

What is important is that when a ‘real connection’ is made mentoring can happen between people and in a flash – ‘spot mentoring’ to use Hay’s terminology. This resonates with Phillips-Jones’ (1982) view (mentioned earlier) that mentoring can occur in a ‘brief encounter’.

The characteristics of the mentor

If mentoring is not a definable ‘good’ that can be traded, is it possible to at least conceptualise the characteristics of a mentor? Is that feasible given the unique characteristics and needs of the individual receiving the gift? By now, as the reader can probably sense, I felt that I had a better navigational chart and so was better able to find my way around the contemporary
mentoring literature. Certainly I found attempts in the literature to outline the characteristics of a mentor, but my sense was that those attempts were divided along the same lines as the attempts to define mentoring. On the other hand, I noticed those like Burke (1984) who capture something of the ‘classical’ nature, describing a mentor as faithful, wise and experienced – characteristics echoed by many writers (for example, Ragins 1997; Mullen & Noe 1999; Smith, Smith & Markham 2000). Gibb (1994, p.32) epitomised this perspective in defining a mentor as ‘an accomplished and experienced performer who takes a special, personal interest in helping to guide and develop a junior or more inexperienced person.’

Then there were those such as Cox (2000) who characterised a mentor as:

...someone who is open and accepting, supports and encourages, uses their own experiences in a positive way, empowers people to do things for themselves, helps people through an important transition (Cox 2000, p.202).

There is nothing here about the person being wiser or more knowledgable or higher up the totem pole or more powerful, although Cox might have described mentoring differently if she had been working in a corporate rather than a community setting.

Anderson and Shannon (1988) allowed for friendship, and the ‘nurturing’ and ‘caring’ qualities associated with both the mother archetype (Jung 1992) and the goddess Athena in their definition of mentoring as:

...a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development. Mentoring functions are carried out within the context of an ongoing, caring relationship between mentor and protégé (Anderson & Shannon 1988, p.40).
These more ‘Athenic’ qualities also form part of the definition of mentoring in Shea’s (1995) exploration of whether supervisors are able to mentor effectively.

Mentoring at its core is a developmental, caring, sharing, helping relationship where one person invests their time, knowhow and effort in increasing and improving another person’s growth, knowledge and skills. Therefore, in a supervisory sense, a mentor is one who invests in another person by going beyond their managerial job requirements (Shea 1995, p.3).

But it was at this point that I had one of those encounters with the literature that both jolted me and redirected my attention. It was as if Athena herself had stepped into my path.

A pioneering researcher in this field, Kram (1980) had neither used nor tried to define the word mentor in her initial research because she was unable to arrive at a coherent definition which she was confident would be understood by all her interviewees. Finding and reading her later work, though, I realised that she had eventually defined mentor in the same way that I had by drawing on Greek mythology.

Derived from Greek mythology, the name implies a relationship between a young adult and an older, more experienced adult that helps the younger individual learn to navigate in the adult world and the world of work. A mentor supports, guides, and counsels the young adult as he or she accomplishes this important task (Kram 1985b, p.2).

Even though I cannot explain it, there was now a strong ‘pull’ to go back to my stories because the world of abstract conceptualising seemed to be disconnecting me from my own data. So back I went.
Back to the stories: What they say about what mentors are like

I have already said that I was disappointed that I hadn’t turned up anything very special or unusual that would broaden and enrich our understanding of mentoring. That sense of disappointment lingered still. So I asked a Reference Group member who had found them interesting and stimulating what it was that had piqued her interest. She looked at me in a strange way and said something like: ‘Look at them again. Listen to your gut. Find the bits that attract you or stick out for you.’

Before I went back to reading the stories of others, I reread the transcript of the first of my Reference Group meetings. And I am embarrassed to admit that that Reference Group meeting contained a key insight into the data in the stories of others that I was blind to at the time. Not only was that insight offered in that very first meeting, it also happened almost from the moment that the meeting got under way. Because my focus was on things more concrete my polite acknowledgment of what they were saying was to continue for a long time before finally it made sense to me and I connected with the wisdom. My only saving grace, as it was with other data that did not make sense to me, was that I kept returning to it throughout the research process.

It would appear that unlike me the Reference Group had looked beyond the descriptors of what mentors do to what might be going on at a much deeper and less accessible level. While I did not understand the significance of what they were saying at that time, I remembered that there had been much energy and ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1997) during that part of the meeting as
they engaged with the data. I was feeling a little confused at the time, as I could not understand what they were seeing that was eluding me.

When I started to read the stories through their eyes, I found myself quite easily compiling my own rich list of what mentors are like.

‘Real’ mentors care. They have made a choice to ‘be there’ for the other person.

They have made an emotional investment, although not necessarily at a conscious level. They have some feelings for the mentee.

They are generous and give of themselves.

They may even take risks on behalf of the mentee.

They confront as well as support.

They see a future for the mentee and will take action to help them to achieve it, but do not impose their own needs and expectations on the mentee. The gift is given without obligation.

They often convey the sense that ‘you are special’, ‘you matter’ and ‘things can be different’.

They are not perfect or complete people, although, consciously or unconsciously, they are wise in the way that they engage with the other.
They are prepared to engage in the difficult area of ‘inner’ transformative work rather than just focusing on helping the mentee to acquire ‘technical’ or professional skills and knowledge.

Clearly, as is quite evident in a number of the stories, other people can easily describe and identify as ‘mentoring’, behaviours that do not fit the above criteria. But it was through the hearing, writing and reading of these stories many, many times that I came to recognise, understand and acknowledge my own deeply and emotionally held notions of what mentors do and what mentoring can be.

I also found myself wondering, yet again, why the stories of Athena and the Sorcerer’s Apprentice held so much appeal for me. There was something about those two stories that I had not quite been able to put my finger on and so I went back to them after having engaged deeply with the stories of others. I then revisited the stories of others and the term Athenic mentoring came to mind. When I looked again at the list of behaviours that for me had the resonance of ‘real’ mentoring, I noticed that they described something deeply personal being offered by the mentor – not a set of activities or constructs that could be prescribed in advance or achieved by just following the right recipe. And I became intrigued by the possibilities for transformative or deep personal growth that were implied in the stories of others. Just as great power is at the core of the story of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice or in the sudden appearances of Athena, so the potential for powerful change seemed to be lurking somewhere in these stories. As a result, I found myself understanding this as the possibility for personal
transformation – a deep and sustained change in behaviour or outlook that follows when mentees transform the way they think about their world and, more particularly, themselves. What Mezirow (1981) has called ‘perspective transformation’.

Although I had not fully pulled together my ideas about Athenic mentoring at this point, I was conscious that I was framing the concept as a personal encounter that had the potential to result in something quite special. I had started to shift my thinking from focusing on what the mentor does or knows to how the mentor is or allows to be in themselves or in the other; and from what the mentee does or knows to what they are or allows themselves to be. The further development of these ideas is expressed and explored more deeply in Chapters 8 and 9. But at this stage in my journey, after comparing the stories of others with my accounts of Athena and the Sorcerer’s Apprentice I was prepared to consider some tentative ideas about the notion of Athenic mentoring. And this is what I understood about it:

It is often recognised only in retrospect.

Athena(Mentor) often arrives unannounced and in disguise.

Mentors possibly do what parents can’t (or don’t).

The mentor might be using conscious or unconscious skills and knowledge.

Athenic mentoring is a ‘gift’ without obligation; the ‘Dream’ (Levinson et al. 1978) to be fulfilled is that of the mentee, not the mentor.
Athenic mentoring is about specialness – ‘you matter, things can be different.’

The mentee might be consciously ready (even to the extent of paying for help), or not.

At some unconscious level there is a deep resonance and ‘recognition’ that something important is happening that can later – maybe, much later – be identified and acknowledged.

Athenic mentoring might occur in a relationship over time or in a moment of time.

The context of mentoring can be life, education, organisational, management, helping, formal coaching programs and counselling.

In Athenic mentoring some contact is made that is transformative, deep and archetypical in character: the metanoia.

The ‘transformative’ power of the contact might or might not be consciously recognised for what it is at the time – by either party.

Since much of the framing was my own intellectual and intuitive response to the stories, ancient and modern, that I had been engaging with over a long period, I realised that I would need to further refine my thinking and test it against the literature and the thinking of others. This is done in Chapters 8 and 9, but before reaching that point, I have one more story to tell.
Chapter 7—Stories from my own experience

La vida no es la que uno vivió, sino la que uno recuerda y cómo la recuerda para contarla. – Gabriel García Márquez (2002).

Things my father taught me

My father worked hard to support the family and help us get ahead in our new home. For much of my childhood he was working shift work repairing and servicing sound systems in movie theatres. When he wasn’t doing that he worked around the house or grew things in the garden. He was always very active and seemed to thrive on hard, often physical, work. Like most children I would watch my father doing things and generally ‘tag along’ as he worked in our garden or did maintenance around the house. I was often given tasks to do to ‘help out’. Generally the tasks that I was assigned were run of the mill – weeding, watering the garden, sweeping up, that sort of thing. But as I grew older I became much more directly involved in what my father would be doing, either because of my own curiosity and wish to be part of the activity or because my father needed an assistant for a particular task, another pair of hands to hold something steady or help him to do something that he couldn’t achieve on his own.

During my childhood and even as a teenager my father was not my mentor, nor has he ever been. His model of learning was very much one of passing on knowledge and expertise. There was little room for exploration in his way

17 From the flyleaf of the first volume of García Márquez’ autobiography Vivir para contarla (Living to Tell the Tale). It translates: ‘Life is not what one has lived, rather what one remembers and how one remembers it to retell it.’
of doing things and there was certainly no room for ‘fooling about’.

Instructing

was a serious business and things had to be done properly.

Typically, the way I learned things from my father was to watch him doing the task. I could ‘help’ by holding ladders and passing tools, but actually being involved in doing things before I had been assessed as competent was not permitted. To this very day I’m stunned when I see young children being allowed to explore doing things like painting, well before they have developed the ability to wield a brush competently enough to do a ‘proper job’.

After watching and listening for some time, I would be asked to explain to my father how I would go about the particular task. If I was able to demonstrate that I had a good grasp of how things should be done I would then be given an opportunity to try the task myself under his very close supervision. I very quickly learned that it was not a good idea to make mistakes or to ‘play’ with the task. Any assigned job had to be done correctly or I would be admonished, often quite harshly but never physically. When I was not able to do something in the way my father wanted, he would most often show impatience – sometimes snatching the task away to complete it himself. Whenever that happened I would feel small, incompetent and ashamed.

Working with my father meant that I had to be ‘seen and not heard’. The reply, ‘Just pay attention and watch’, did not encourage my asking too many questions. Making suggestions when he encountered a difficulty would often
generate a response of, ‘Just wait a moment! I’m thinking!’ That is not to say that a good solution was not welcomed by my father, but I knew that I had to do all the problem-solving in my head first and then assess very carefully the merit of my solution before offering it. My father was the master, the expert, and I was very much the pupil or apprentice – there was a clear delineation of who had the skills, knowledge and expertise and who needed to acquire them.

Thus my learning took place in a very controlled and systematic way – the right tool was used in the right way to achieve the right result at the right time. This way of operating is embedded in me and I have to work very hard to allow something different to happen. I am very skilful with tools and at working around the house, but when it comes to cooperating in these endeavours with someone who does not have the same skills or the understanding necessary to do the work, I am not very good at helping them to learn. I behave very much as my father did with me, taking on the role of the impatient expert and using a command and control method of working with the other person. While I am experienced enough to know that this is neither a helpful nor sensible way to work with another person, I am not able to easily break this pattern – even when people give me feedback that clearly indicates that I’m not behaving in a way which includes them and helps them to contribute and to learn.

My father gifted me with an abundance of technical skills to help me through life, but he has remained remote from me and I from him, in a human sense. To this day our conversations tend to be focused on a task or
a problem. Talking about what needs to be fixed, how a certain thing might be built or what materials would be best for a job gives our conversations meaning and purpose. If there is not something of a technical or ‘handyman’ nature to discuss then our conversation is sparse and meagre. We have talked only rarely about feelings or personal issues, mostly on the few occasions when my father has been very ill. We have not developed the habit of just talking together without having to have a practical focus. We do not seem to be able to make the space nor find the right words. Sometimes it seems as if we don’t have hearts.

My father is quite old now and having had a stroke is very frail compared with the person in whose shadow I grew. Physically he has shrunk and I now tower above him, as I do in life achievements – having attained the levels of success and security he and my mother dreamed of for me when they migrated to Australia a lifetime ago. With the passing of the decades my father and I have reversed roles and now in relation to fixing things he is often very much the ‘child’ in the relationship, his lack of strength and loss of ability often confining him to a watching and asking role. Sometimes he will make a suggestion, but seems resigned to the fact that there’s an excellent chance that any suggestion he might make will not be up to the mark. When we are in this situation the lessons he taught me haunt us both. I can be impatient, abrupt, headstrong and controlling and it is a discredit to the two of us. I have tried hard to break out of the vortex, but I have only succeeded infrequently and for short periods.
On reading this story it might be easy to conclude that my father has been some sort of ogre. This is far from true. He has always had the capacity to be a difficult man and I believe that he has not been able to express himself easily when it comes to his feelings and emotions, but he has loved me and my sisters deeply and has shown it by his readiness to make sacrifices for us and also to do things to try and help us. To this day, and frail as he is, he will drop everything he might be in the middle of doing to try and help any of his children if they need his assistance. Despite age and infirmity providing him with what many people would regard as legitimate excuses for taking it easy and not doing some of the things he has always done for his family, he frets a lot about not being able to help us as he once did, but he mostly does this in silence. He does not want to talk about how he feels with me or with anyone else.

I have learned at least one life skill from my father that I don’t think that he set out deliberately to teach me. I think my sense of humour and ability to tell stories in a funny way was honed throughout my school years, but has its roots in the behaviour and example of my father. Throughout his life my father has been a hard-working, busy and serious man, but on some family occasions he would reminisce about his life back in Egypt or on his early experiences here in Australia by telling stories that one of my sisters once described as being ‘so funny that the tears ran down my legs!’

The stories he would tell were often about him and his mates getting into major mischief. Their elaborate and detailed planning almost always contained a fatal flaw that would bring them undone at a crucial moment.
Dad’s stories were always intricately embroidered with the details of the impending tragedy. Our laughter would build and build to what would turn out to be a bizarrely hilarious and cathartic conclusion that would leave my father almost speechless mopping the tears of laughter from his eyes with one of the many handkerchiefs he always seemed to be able to produce from his pockets. Sometimes I laughed so much that I had a sore ribcage for days afterwards. While I always enjoyed these times they highlighted even more starkly that my father’s usual demeanour was much more serious, focused on working hard and not on frivolity.

My father has certainly had a profound impact on me. But I can’t find it in my head or heart to call him ‘mentor’. Is this because of a lack of openness and intimacy between us? In this hard earth what could take root and flourish between us? Has there ever been a moment of reciprocal growth, of mutual recognition or must we always diminish one another?

Odysseus went off to fight in the Trojan War and was absent for twenty years. He left his son Telemachus in the care of his mother and Mentor. Over a comparable time period my father too fought his battles with language, prejudice, unemployment, loneliness, fear, and cultural and metaphysical dislocation. Both my father and mother had to work long hours (in what I have just realised is an ironic parallel to Odysseus’ wife Penelope, in my mother’s case in a woollen mill spinning yarn!) to support and make a home for our family. In migrating to Australia they left behind anyone and everyone who might have fulfilled the role of Mentor for me and so the job fell to others whom I encountered on my journey to adulthood.
What I learned at school

From the first day that I attended my local Catholic primary school I felt that I was very much an outsider. During my first year at the school there were no other children from what nowadays would be described as an ethnic background. This changed a little as the years passed and I climbed from one grade to the next, but attending school was an alienating experience for me. Despite not quite fitting in, not understanding the rules of the games and not having developed the skills or the understanding to play them, I achieved sufficient academic progress to ‘skip a grade’ at the end of primary school. This leap forward resulted in me leaving all my friends behind and finding myself in a class that was taught by the head nun. The main purpose of this class was to drill high potential pupils to maximise our chances of gaining scholarships for study at Catholic secondary colleges.

The Mother Superior was a formidable and harsh woman when it came to teaching and learning. Her pedagogical model seems to me to have been founded on regular episodic violence and sustained fear. This is by no means an exaggeration as hardly a day went by without pupils being systematically punished in various ways, some of them harshly physical, for making mistakes, not remembering something they had learned previously or not being able to perform under pressure.

I can recall a child writing something on the blackboard. They must have got something wrong because, quick as a flash, ‘Reverend Mother’ had their hand in hers and was pounding it on the blackboard, all the while repeating something over and over. Contrasting sharply with the black of her robes
and the white of her wimple the nun’s face was red and contorted with effort and rage. Luckily, it wasn’t me who was in trouble. I was part of the audience for this tableau of anger. On another occasion she thumped a student’s head repeatedly into the blackboard – again, for making a mistake or not answering her question quickly enough. I’m not sure, but it might have been me on this occasion. The physical harshness punctuated a backdrop of verbal abuse that was almost a constant. Hardly a day went by without someone feeling the lash of that woman’s acid tongue. Over time we all were held up to ridicule or caused to feel deep embarrassment in front of the whole class.

For two extra hours each day, we were drilled in the ways of passing the scholarship examinations. We went over and over the questions from previous years’ examinations. We repeated the answers by rote. We were quizzed remorselessly on what we had learned and punished when it seemed that we had not learned thoroughly enough. There was homework and more homework and woe betide anyone who did not complete the allotted tasks. On one occasion I suffered the wounding embarrassment of having to tell the teacher in front of the whole class some very personal family reasons for not having been able to complete my homework. It was a painful and tearful experience and while my excuse was accepted as valid, I felt mortified that I had had to disclose very private family matters to be absolved.

There must have been good times during that year. After all I was a child and in my experience children, except in the most desperate of circumstances, seem to be happy at least some of the time. I do not easily
recall those happy times nor do I easily remember the friends I must have had. What I recall more readily is the fear, the apprehension, the harshness, and the constant tension of needing to have the right answer all of the time.

That year eventually passed and so did I, winning the coveted scholarship that took me to a Catholic secondary college. While others might judge the circumstances in the college as being a bit repressive, for me it was a free and wonderful place. Teaching was what happened and most of the time we were taught in quite large classes. Broad conformity was the name of the game, but within that conformity, paradoxically, there existed a range of freedoms to be explored and boundaries to be pushed – except in the area of sport.

Again I found myself in a class that involved work to help us win scholarships. The brother who was the class teacher for this ‘scholarship class’ was young, friendly and did not go out of control like the nun from the year before. Although discipline was strict it seemed to me to be reasonable and fair. It was mostly focused on maintaining order in a class of around 40 adolescent boys and not aimed at punishing students for making mistakes.

In the main most of the brothers taught most of the time. Given that classes were almost invariably large and filled with pubescent and prepubescent boys whose behaviour would vary erratically between almost angelic to the stuff of *Lord of the Flies*, it was remarkable that any teaching was possible and that any learning, no matter how perfunctory, occurred. The best of the teaching staff kept us under control and moving forward with very deft
hands on the reins. Of all of them, I best remember Brother Candidus and ‘Big Tone’ (big Brother Anthony, there was a Little Tone as well). Over the years they both taught me Latin and French, and occasionally, they both tutored me ‘one-on-one’. This didn't happen often and it didn't happen for everyone, but it did happen for some.

Brother Candidus was a tall, quiet man with a receding hairline, a benign, shiny face and an uncanny ability to hear a whispered conversation through the background roar of conversations which seemed to build up as soon as he turned his back to us to write something on the chalkboard. Brother Candidus, or Candy as we all called him secretly, taught us patiently, but firmly. He was humane in his style and quite open in relation to his thinking and beliefs in some instances. He, and others, encouraged us to question aspects of the religion we had been taught. I don’t know how the other students felt about this, but it made me feel good to be in the care of the brothers and of this one in particular. At the time I would not have used these words to describe my experience, but I can say now that there was scope to have conversations: two-way, actual conversations where it was safe to speak your mind, and the brothers would listen and not shut you down, even if they disagreed. This was a very great contrast to the one-way harangues that I had experienced to that point in my education.

For an inexplicable reason I felt that I had a special relationship with Brother Candidus. He seemed to give me a little more leeway in class than was usual and he would often help me with my handball game (he was an extremely good and aggressive player) when I was on the courts before or
after school. Perhaps he had figured out that I was attracted to handball because it was a classic case of the ‘level playing field’; we all learned to play it from scratch. Early one morning, well before school time during my second or third year at the school, I had been playing handball when a fellow student did something that incurred my wrath and I chased him around the yard quite near to where Brother Candidus’ sleeping quarters where I yelled out, ‘I’m going to fucking kill you, Jones!’ In the middle of Latin class that afternoon I whispered some wisecrack to the boy at the next desk.

Continuing to write on the blackboard, Brother Candidus in his quiet firm voice said ‘That’s interesting, Lippi. Would you like to share it with the class?’ I said that I’d rather not and then he said, ‘By the way, you were dropping your “Gs” this morning.’ He said nothing else, but it was clear that he had heard the early morning fracas. He never mentioned it again.

Big Tone was more rambunctious than most of the other brothers. He was a giant of a man with a ruddy complexion, heavy build and red hair clipped very short. In his flowing, black cassock he could kick a football a very, very long way. He carried a strap that was cut out of a bald tyre and was happy to use it, but did not do so indiscriminately or too frequently. He had a formidable presence. I once saw him pick up a boy by the front of his suit coat and lift him into the air and say, ‘I could have you sonny!’ inches from the boy’s now ashen face. That’s all he said or did before putting the chastened boy down so he could return to his seat minus the arrogant smirk that he’d had when he had gone ‘out the front.’ Brother Anthony’s approach was to be tough, but fair – he was going to help us learn and wasn’t going to take any rubbish from us in the process. I was a good student of Latin and
French and, again, this seemed to earn me a little more room to manoeuvre in class than those who were not as interested. One-on-one this frightening mountain of a man would coax, cajole and encourage me. I always felt safe revealing what I knew and what I didn't know. In class it was a different matter. If Brother Anthony sensed that we were being a bit smart, that we were distracted, or not paying due attention, we were given a taste of his sarcasm and irony. Not too painful, but enough to give a jab to our pride so that we tended to rise to the next challenge that he presented.

As I grew older and became more proficient and fluent in French, Brother Anthony seemed to take more interest in my progress and would often engage in banter with me in French even in other classes or out in the playground. He would also ‘take the mickey’ out of me in French whenever he wanted to keep me in line. Through his efforts to make French the normal or usual way of communicating, I came to enjoy learning the language, continuing past the point where students in the science stream would normally abandon it.

**University**

I was 21 years old and had enrolled to study Spanish at university when I met José María Sangiau. He was a language instructor in the Spanish Department at LaTrobe University. ‘Joe’, as he was known throughout the University, was a bright eyed, gregarious, good-natured mischief-maker.

I didn’t study Spanish because of some burning passion. But simply because I thought it might be handy some day for travel. As well, the
Spanish Department seemed to be a lively place and was renowned for holding very good ‘fiestas’ or parties where students were encouraged to steep themselves in Spanish culture as well as food and drink. In a very short time I found that I not only enjoyed learning the language, but I was very good at it and so it became my major. After three years of undergraduate study I was fluent to native speaker level – I could read and write proficiently, was able to argue prodigiously and swear effectively. In 1974 while travelling in Spain on a scholarship with my professor I experienced some difficulty with a police officer in Madrid who would not believe that I was Australian as my Spanish was too good for a non-native speaker.

The Spanish Department at LaTrobe University used a pedagogical model of ‘learning by doing’ and so from day one we were encouraged, some would say ‘forced,’ to speak in Spanish at all times. In his role as senior language instructor, José was a fierce defender of the teaching and learning methodology and would only converse with students in Spanish, regardless of whether they were newcomers or old-timers in the Department. Many students found him tyrannical in this aspect and tried to fight against it. Resisting did them no good – they either complied and began to stumble through rudimentary conversations or soon left to follow other interests. The approach to teaching the language made sense to me and I always made the effort to communicate in Spanish, even if it meant asking how to say certain English words in Spanish along the way. At the start of the course, at least, that meant behaving linguistically as if I were a child.
I still don’t know why I attracted José’s interest and attention – perhaps he liked it that I was prepared to always ‘give it a go’ even if it meant making a bit of a fool of myself. Whatever the attraction, I very soon found myself spending a lot of time in José’s company. He would seek students out in the coffee shop, sit down at the table with them and, often regardless of the fact that they were sitting with students of other disciplines, immediately take over by speaking only in Spanish. If non-Spanish speakers wanted to understand they would have to get someone to translate. Very occasionally he would make a concession to make a point in English, but on those few occasions he would speak a thickly accented parody of the language that was much worse than the English he was actually capable of speaking.

The coffee tables were where many others and I learned most. We drank buckets of coffee and smoked – and in those unenlightened days, around José smoking was almost compulsory! The conversations improved as we practiced. The Vietnam War, politics, religion, life and sex were discussed from every angle – always in Spanish when José was present and eventually even when he wasn’t. During these ‘round tables’ he would provoke, make jokes, and pass comments on what was happening around us, encouraging us to do the same. As we spoke he would coach us and correct our mistakes, sometimes gently and benignly and at the times when we made fundamental errors with a ‘you know better than that’ tone in his voice. In the language laboratory as we worked through our set exercises he would follow a similar approach. Listening in to everyone in turn in the laboratory and then intervening to correct, encourage and sometimes to criticise he would make sure that he had discharged his obligation to take us through the lesson,
but he was at his best as a teacher in the language laboratory of the outside world – especially the coffee shop.

José would start a conversation with ¿Qué pasa? ‘What’s [been] happening?’ It was a way to get us talking and as we talked he would continue asking questions to keep us talking. That’s not to say that he didn’t speak himself or express an opinion. He did, but often it was a very controversial or exaggerated opinion designed to get us to argue vehemently with him. His approach was not necessarily obvious to us at the time, but with me, and I’m sure with many others, it got me focused and passionate and worked very effectively.

Those of us whom he regarded as ‘the best’ were invited to his home to spend time with his wife and daughters eating, drinking and talking wildly about whatever held our attention at the time. Because I lived in the same block of flats, I was to be found in the Sangiau’s home at any time of the night and day. During private moments, he toned down his larger than life persona and there was a much more equal exchange of ideas and thoughts, much more openness on both our parts about things that would usually be very personal and private.

I was a non-custodial father and a lot of the conversations we had were about how hard I found it to be separated from my son and only have access to him every fortnight for a few precious hours. Often José would catch me returning home on a Sunday evening after I had dropped my son off at his mother’s house. ¡Lippi, venga! ¡Venga! (In the Spanish tradition we were
rarely called by our first names) – Lippi, come! Come! He would wave me in and before long I was talking about the kinds of things I didn’t really want to talk about. He knew what to ask and what to say as well as when to shut up and listen.

And he shared his life with me. He told me about how he came to migrate to Australia, how he had studied Medicine in Spain, but had focused more on having a good time than studying – with predictable results. Occasionally he would talk about the concerns he had about his teenaged daughters. When I was in my final year he would very occasionally discuss Departmental and academic staff issues with me, giving me his views on what was happening and asking me for my thoughts.

An incident that happened right at the end of my final year typifies a lot of our interactions. The final written examination for the language component of the course was three hours long and was an opportunity for students to demonstrate how sophisticated was their knowledge of Spanish grammar. A Spanish-Spanish dictionary was the only aid permitted. A new lecturer from Spain had been in charge of this component of the course and had spent the year terrorising students with tales of how difficult it would be to pass. A number of written assignments throughout the year contributed to the final mark. On at least one occasion I recall not handing in the assignment on time and failing that component. I had had a personality clash with this lecturer – he seemed to go out of his way to make life hard for me and I certainly did my best to annoy him in every way possible. It was a potentially explosive mixture and so different from my learning experience to that point.
So despite having dominated an oral examination that consisted of a ‘grilling’ by a panel of three examiners, I was very concerned about my performance in the final written exam.

Reading the examination questions I found them very much to my liking. I wrote furiously and was finished in around an hour and a half. I then checked my paper over and over and when I felt I could do no more I stood so that I could leave. There was still one hour to go and the invigilator who came to me assumed I wanted another examination booklet. When I said no and that I wanted to leave he whispered, ‘Are you sure, Julian?’ I said that I was and was allowed to leave the examination room. As I walked out I could see the faces of my fellow students raised to me in concern. They told me later that they thought I was abandoning the examination. I went straight to José and he debriefed me excitedly firing question after question at me about how I had answered the questions. The more I talked about how I had answered various questions, the more excited he became and the more his dark eyes sparkled. I asked him why he seemed so happy and he said that it was not only because I had done very well, but because I had done it in two thirds of the time and that would really rub the other lecturer’s nose in it (he used a much more colourful Spanish phrase). I felt like a victorious co-conspirator in a plot to dent the ego of the other lecturer. We never spoke about it again. I received a perfect score for the examination and afterwards on occasions when the three of us were together and the other lecturer was being a little arrogant or pontificating about how rigorously he worked with students, José would sometimes just look at me and I could see the twinkle in his eye.
To me José was someone who challenged and stretched me, encouraged me, berated me when I was lazy, laughed and joked with me, conspired with me, helped me, explained things to me, supported me. With José, if there were any adverse consequences they related to not trying, rather than to trying and making a mistake or failing in an attempt. Someone once said to me that he treated me like the son he never had, but that’s not what being a son felt like to me.

I believe that although José was happy with my progress through life there was always a tinge of disappointment for him that I did not go on to an academic career in Spanish. When he died, unexpectedly, at the age of 57 his family asked me to be a pallbearer. Carrying the coffin down the nave of the church, I could see family and friends, but the many, many students with whom he had shared his life outnumbered them.

The transition to the world of work

My first real job was as a tutor in the Spanish Department while I studied for my Masters Degree. Because of problems in getting a suitable supervisor I did not pursue my studies after the first year and left to take up a position at the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), the Australian Government owned television and radio broadcasting service. José did not try and dissuade me from following this option. He did spend quite a lot of time asking me questions about the track I was opting to take. I believe now that he was making sure that I had thought about all the possibilities and all the consequences of my actions – that I was working through the issues.
He never once said anything discouraging, but he did challenge some of my naïve thoughts about what it might be like to work in broadcasting.

At the ABC in both radio and television I had many opportunities and challenges to learn and to grow. Because of the way I was recruited I missed out on doing the Basic Broadcasting Training Course that new recruits were given and I always felt I was ‘on the back foot’ technically because of that omission. I observed, I asked questions and I learned by actually carrying out assignments. Some of my bosses I respected more than others and some of them encouraged me and gave me more opportunities than others.

My immediate boss was an experienced and clever man, but his people handling skills were typical of what I understand passed for management in our part of the journalistic world at the time. He would tolerate discussion on a topic, but in the end would instruct people to carry out his orders. If questioned past the point of his tolerance as to why a certain approach was preferred, he would reply forcefully, ‘Because I’m the boss!’ He was a good role model in technical matters, having a wide ranging knowledge and experience, and he was delighted to respond to questions and to explain things, but in relation to getting the best out of people I felt his approach left a lot to be desired. I left the job and the ABC largely because I felt that his style of operating was typical of what I could continue to expect in that environment and I was dissatisfied with its implications for me.

When I left the ABC in many ways it was ‘out of the frying pan and into the fire’ because I quickly learned that the person I was now working for had
even fewer redeeming features than my previous boss. Working in this new environment made the ABC look like a doddle. I felt very alienated from the organisation and the people around me and as time went on things went from bad to worse. I became intensely depressed and found it difficult to drag myself into work every day. The work itself remained interesting and diverse, but the way my boss managed me and how I found myself interacting with him made the situation intolerable. We never had conversations about work or associated issues, he would just tell me what he wanted done and that was about it. There was not much room for discussion or input. The situation was made worse for me because my wife worked in another part of the organisation and not only was she having a good time, she was being noticed and was successfully climbing the corporate ladder while I felt my career was grinding to a standstill.

**The Sorcerer’s Apprentice: Take 2**

A friend of my wife’s decided to act as a circuit breaker and offered me a short term position in an area of the Human Resources Department that she was managing. Would I like to get some broader experience for six weeks or so taking the place of one of her staff who was going away on a trip?

The person who had made me her protégé was Nita Cherry. I had met Nita socially some years before, but our relationship was cemented during the period that I worked for her. Initially she was dealing with damaged goods as I had lost a lot of confidence, was depressed and was generally ‘hard going’, but she gave me space and opportunities to develop my skills in the job and spent a considerable amount of time and energy coaching me around the
technical and political aspects of the work. She did so under what were at times exceedingly difficult circumstances. Still angry at how I had been treated in my previous job I would often rail against the organisation and its many flaws as I saw them, completely ignoring any contribution I might have been making to any of the problems I was often experiencing. As a senior manager, Nita sometimes represented the organisation to me – she was the organisation – and when that happened she would sit patiently, listening to me while I ‘blew myself out’ on issues that were concerning me. Even with a strong ally like her in the organisation, I needed more support, encouragement and wise counsel than someone at my level would usually require. Despite me sometimes being ‘difficult,’ Nita stuck with me and continued to challenge my thinking and stretch me to change, grow and develop.

As time passed she encouraged me to try myself in some operational roles, but even when I moved into these areas she maintained contact with me and offered me her support as much as ever – even after she eventually left the organisation to establish her own consulting practice. She encouraged me to study for a management qualification, and although I resisted the idea for a while I eventually applied for a course and began a journey of learning through systematic reflection which has continued for me ever since.

During the second year of the course and with much encouragement and support from Nita, and from my wife Sue, I made the decision to leave corporate life and start up my own business. My original intention was to use my communications experience and produce corporate and training
videos, but an economic recession meant that organisations were cutting spending on video production and I had to find other ways of making a living.

I became Nita’s apprentice, working with her to learn how to operate and build up a successful consulting practice. With her help and guidance I was able to experiment with putting into practice some of the theory that I was being exposed to through my studies. Over a long period Nita worked with me to open up opportunities for me to gain experience and learn. She would help me to talk through the challenges and issues I was facing in particular assignments. Whenever possible, Nita would take me along when she was having briefing meetings with potential clients so that I could get more experience of what needed to happen in such meetings. For much of the time during the early stages of my new career, I was Nita’s ‘helper’ doing things for her that would free her up to do higher value work. For example, she was developing a lot of her intellectual product during this time and would use me as a sounding board for her ideas. And I would help her by turning sketches and handwritten words on a page into professional looking documents and training manuals.

As time went on and as I became more confident and competent my roles became more significant and I would often share the facilitation of larger and more demanding assignments with her. Nita was always in charge, planning the intervention, reviewing its success, making adjustments for the future, but I was increasingly given more and more responsibility and allowed much more of a free hand to try my own way of doing things. That’s not to say that
I always welcomed her encouragement. For a lot of the time I was feeling very much out of my comfort zone and I tended to resist the attempts Nita made to stretch me even further. But stretch me she did, in both subtle and very blunt ways, until I was doing mainly ‘up front’ work with her and with clients of my own, and the back room work fell away.

Nita helped me to build up my business by systematically providing me with opportunities to learn and to develop my client base and, most importantly, to hone my practice and develop myself as a practitioner. She would refer clients to me as well as involving me in work that she was doing. I always knew that I could go to her at any time with questions about how to design a workshop or an intervention, about how to write a proposal or to get her help on anything else. Sometimes that help was just listening to me talk about my fears and insecurities about tackling a particular assignment. At other times, her help was focused on getting me to see things in a different way from my usual practice, to reframe issues and to surface and challenge my assumptions. We worked and travelled together and on trips she would get me talking about whatever it was that was of interest or concern to me at that time. In the course of these conversations she learned much more about me than a colleague would ever usually know, and vice versa.

Nita always gave me her time and her energy even when she had precious little of it for herself. I knew that I could always count on her to hear me out and while she was patient and very supportive, her conversations with me could sometimes be quite confronting. Many of these ‘warm’ confrontations
were to do with behaviours or ways of thinking that I did not want to acknowledge, let alone ‘own’ and actually do something about changing.

My competence and our working relationship grew until I was no longer the ‘apprentice’, but much more a partner with a degree of mastery of my own. I had developed my own style and way of doing things and was able to stand on my own two feet. Now when we worked together it was as equals. As my business grew and as the market changed there were fewer opportunities for us to work together, but whenever we did it always felt right and the teamwork was seamless.

During this period I completed my initial management qualification and then, with Nita’s encouragement, undertook and completed a Master’s degree. My doctoral research began after my ‘apprenticeship’ came to an end. Increasingly I had found myself working ‘one-on-one’ with clients and the idea came to me that, perhaps, it would be useful to undertake some research into mentoring. The first person I spoke with about my thoughts was Nita. She was very enthusiastic helping me overcome my anxiety of being rejected and working with me to develop my initial ideas for a proposal. And eventually she became my second supervisor.

However, I found myself rarely wanting to seek her advice or even talk with her about my thesis journey. Often when we saw each other for a cup of tea and a catch up, Nita would bring up the subject of my research and inquire how I was progressing. Almost invariably I would try and get off that subject as quickly as possible. Sometimes I would engage with her in a perfunctory
way and talk a little about the mechanics of what I was doing. Less often I would talk about my frustrations and my struggles with doing the work, but I limited talk of frustrations after a while because it became clear that Nita was not about to let me off the hook. She would challenge me hard. ‘If you’re having such a hard time and not liking it so much, why don’t you just stop? No one is making you do this’, she said to me on more than one occasion.

In the face of these strong challenges I pulled back more and more. I also found her intellect more challenging than I could cope with at the time. Nita has a very fine mind for processing issues and asking the right questions to challenge mindsets and assumptions. I had seen it in action many times with groups and individuals in our work together. Out of a confusion of ideas and assertions she has the skill of being able to pull out the two or three key questions that will get people focused and moving forward. When I would talk with her about how I was progressing with my doctoral work she almost invariably had questions for me that went directly to areas where I felt I had soft spots. They were the right questions to ask, but instead of engaging with them and finding them helpful I found myself resenting that she was focusing on my weak spots. My lack of discipline, my highly refined ability to procrastinate, talking instead of writing, fear of exposing my ideas, anxiety about potential lack of rigour in my approach – you name it, she was able hit my ‘hot buttons’ with uncanny accuracy.

I think I found myself in a position I did not feel comfortable being in again. In the scholarly arena, I was the apprentice and she very much the master. During my consulting apprenticeship with Nita I had not always welcomed
the ‘stretch’ that was required of me to learn to do things differently. But somehow I managed to deal with it and move on until I was capable and confident enough to deal with the challenges of consulting in my own right. This scholarly apprenticeship was different and it took a long time for me to be able to engage positively with being supervised by Nita.

**Things I didn’t teach my son**

He’s thirty years old and I’ve known him all his life, but despite this he’s sometimes a stranger to me. I was there when he was born and even though his mother and I separated when he was only a few months old and I watched him grow up through the staccato rhythm of weekend access there is a bond between us that is stronger than anything I have ever experienced with my father. For many years I was saddened by not being able to be there all the time as he grew up from fortnight to fortnight.

As he grew I tried to be mindful of how I had felt as a child in having to deal with my parents and their expectations and demands. Looking back and comparing myself with my father I can see that I was significantly different in my behaviour in many ways, but chillingly similar in others. While I had suspected that in some ways I was too much my father’s son, it was not until Jesse and I went away for a few days’ retreat together when he was in his mid-twenties that I realised that being a ‘weekend dad’ when he was growing up might have been advantageous. While we were away for those few days we spent time each day going for a ‘walk and talk’ along the beach. As we rambled we would talk about whatever came to mind. Jesse would talk about and ask questions about what had happened when he was small.
We each told our stories and like the waters of a large river passing through a delta before coming to the sea our stories would join and separate and then join again. He knew what he’d been told had happened. Now he was getting my story of the same events and I could tell that sometimes he was shaken by what he was hearing.

I shared my feelings with him and he with me. He asked me what I knew about a couple of things that he had guessed were ‘family secrets’. I told him what I knew from my perspective and that I would do this to the best of my ability without trying to put ‘spin’ on the stories – adding that maybe there was no right story, just lots of different ones about the same event.

A disturbing discovery for me from our conversations was that when Jesse was small he was often very frightened of me. It pained me to hear this, as I had no idea that he had been so scared of me as a child. I knew that he would have felt uncomfortable and even fearful at the times when he might have been in trouble for doing something or behaving in a way that I thought was inappropriate, but what shocked me was that he indicated that sometimes he was fearful even though he wasn’t in trouble. He was fearful in anticipation of being in trouble. He had also interpreted the shower and clothes washing that used to happen when I first got him home each weekend as meaning that he wasn’t good enough for me. When I explained that he was usually carrying the dirt of at least one day’s play on his body and in his clothes he was able to see what had happened from a different perspective. But I had never thought of the implications that getting him cleaned up for dinner might have had for his self-perception and self-esteem.
When he told me that he felt that I was a very harsh and demanding teacher it resonated for me immediately and his description of me teaching him how to do different jobs around the house or on the car came as no surprise. His descriptions of my practice as an instructing father are a very good match with the recollections I have of my father teaching me how to do things. Congruent with my own experience of my father, Jesse’s experience of me was that of the dumb, impatient apprentice being firmly kept in check and instructed in great detail by the all-knowing expert.

Jesse’s talking about his experience with me and how he felt about it created the opportunity for me to tell him about my experience with my dad, not by way of excusing what I had done, but so that he would know that I had had a similar experience and understood very well the type of situation that he was describing. Towards the end of this conversation, I found myself telling him that maybe it was for the best that I had only been able to see him once a fortnight because if he had been with me all of the time things might be quite different between us and he might have learned the very habits that I had found so suffocating in my father.

We became a bit teary and hugged each other in the pale afternoon sun – father and son, comfortable together on a chilly winter’s beach. It felt good to have been able to talk openly together about things that had been troubling us both for a long time. Our conversations raised a significant question for me: Why couldn’t I help my own son when I seem to be able to do it so well with strangers?
It’s too easy for me to say that I’ve inherited a way of doing these things from my father. That might well be true in some spheres like handyman work, diagnosing and repairing faults in electronic circuits, working on my car and so forth. But what about areas where my father and I have never interacted or have only had minimal interactions? Do I apply the template I have learned to use in the more practical areas of my life right across the board or are there other factors operating? Reflecting over time on what he had said and comparing it with other relationships, I have come to the understanding that the closer the relationship the less able I seem to be to be truly ‘helpful’.

Looking back over serious conversations with Jesse about issues which he saw as being very important for him, or that I believed were significant, I can think of very few instances where I behaved as I would have liked – that is, not trying to tell him what to do, not pointing out the error of his ways, not attempting to ‘steer’ him to an outcome that I thought would be best for him, not bringing my ‘wisdom’ to bear on the situation, but rather just paying attention to what he wanted or needed to say and letting him have the space to draw his own conclusions.

There was an occasion (when he was about fifteen years old) when I was able to be there for him in a way that was at least a little different. I had a hunch that he was trying to raise something with me, but couldn’t quite do it. I had seen this sort of behaviour before when he wanted something or he was feeling uneasy about an issue and so I probed a little as to what might be on his mind. After a little ‘dancing’ around he told me that he wanted to leave school and become a chef. It came out as a mixture of calm and trepidation
with him working hard to tell me what he wanted to do while at the same
time appearing to study the carpet as if he was trying to commit to memory
ever nuance of the pattern.

I had always assumed that he would follow in his mother’s and my footsteps
and go on to university after completing secondary school. I had never been
much concerned with what area of study he might have pursued, but I had
wanted him to have the experience and the benefit of going to university. I
can remember sitting quietly, asking questions and listening as Jesse told
me in fits and starts why he was interested in cooking as a career. He had
just about talked himself out before I began asking if he knew about the
hours he would have to work, the pay he would get, the difficulty of working
in hot, cramped kitchens, and so on. At the time I didn’t know that he was
well versed in most of these things as he had done work experience in a
couple of restaurants – neither his mother nor Jesse had mentioned it to me.
Until this conversation he had kept secret from me his keenness to become
an apprentice chef. At the time I felt annoyed that I had been left out of his
life once again, but in the light of the conversation we had many years later
on the beach it makes sense that he would try and avoid what might have
turned out to be a confrontation with someone he feared.

I told him that if he was serious about following this path he would need to
go and find someone who would take him on as an apprentice. He replied
that he had already approached a number of top restaurants and had been
offered apprenticeships at two venues that were very highly regarded at the
time. Despite being acutely aware and hurt that he had been keeping a lot of
things from me, I felt proud that he had shown the kind of initiative that I never had at his age and I told him so.

Jesse went on to become a very talented and passionate chef who is well respected by his peers for an innovative and fresh approach to food preparation and presentation. I have always been pleased that he has been doing something he likes and that he is very good at what he does. I remember telling him at the time we talked about him leaving school to be apprenticed that I didn’t care what he did as long as he made the effort to be good at something. He tells me that despite this assurance from me that he felt that I was disappointed with the choice he had made. I have been very disappointed by some of the choices he has made in his life, but, ironically, not this one. I was anxious that he might have been making a mistake that he would regret, but I was not disappointed either in him or his choice of career.

But even now, when Jesse has a dilemma and asks for my help I usually find myself moving very swiftly into giving advice, trying to solve his problem for him and telling him what to do rather than helping him to explore what the issues might be for him. I am not sure why I have this response. My practice as a facilitator, coach and mentor focuses on helping people to work on their own issues. I do not try and step in and ‘fix’ things for my clients. I have very clear ideas developed through experience, observation and reflection about how I should be behaving and what I should be doing. Most of the time I am able to behave in appropriate ways with total strangers, but when it comes to giving the best help possible to someone I care for very
much, when there is much ‘at stake,’ I fall into the ‘telling’ trap and find it hard to climb back out.

The life of a loved one is the most precious thing that I can envisage being at stake, and that is the position I found myself in with Jesse when he was in his late twenties. I had less and less contact with him once he was old enough to get his driver’s license and buy a car. It was to be expected and I was resigned to it. On the occasions he would visit, often for very short periods, I would experience great joy at having him around and talking with him. The most frustrating instances during this period were the times when he would just drop by without calling first and I would return home from a short errand or an outing to find a note saying that he’d dropped past. These were times of great sadness and I would call him to explain what had happened, talk for a while and also entreat him to call in advance so that I could make sure I would be home for him.

It turned out that he was angry about this because he thought I was saying that he needed to make an appointment to see his father. This was not my intention, but it served to distance us even more. He dropped by less and less frequently. But one night he arrived on the doorstep without warning. He said he wanted to talk and appeared distressed. Wisely, when I realised the gravity of what he had to say, I suggested we walk and talk together. As we walked he told me what had been happening in his life. I just listened as he walked me down the staircase into the blackness, out again into a pale light, back in again and then out to where he was standing next to me in the dark on the grass of a local football oval. He had wanted to tell me what was
going on when we went away together, but his courage had failed him. He wanted to go north to the warmth and light and away from the cold winters that he couldn’t handle. He wanted to get his career back on the rails and a good friend of his who had stuck by him and helped him out with work and support was offering him more of the same if he could get up to the north coast. Finally, and as if he was having to pull his own teeth to do it, he told me he needed money. ‘How much do you want?’ I asked him. He replied that if I could see my way clear to giving him two thousand dollars it would be a great help. I had given him money before to help out when he seemed to get behind with rent or whatever.

A pandemonium of ideas and feelings had been swamping my mind like waves crashing onto a beach since the conversation had begun. Perhaps this overload had helped me to stay quiet and only ask questions that were aimed at keeping Jesse talking, but now I needed to be clear and steady and I didn’t know if I could manage.

After a long, long pause, and Jesse may well have seen this as me trying to make him stew, I decided on a course of action to follow. I told him that I loved him very much and that I was upset about what he had been telling me. I said that from time to time Sue and I had suspected something was up, but could never quite put our fingers on what it was. I told him I was not angry with him but very, very sad and upset. When I addressed the issue of the money I could see it had a serious impact on him. I said that I was in the position to give him that amount of money, but that I would not. I said that instead I would lend him five hundred dollars to cover food, accommodation
and petrol for the trip. I added that I would make the cheque out in his girlfriend’s name and that he would have to commit to paying it back when things were going well for him. I’m guessing that to him all this probably sounded as if I had my act together and that I was being the calm and firm father, but inside I was hollowed out. He agreed to my conditions and I gave him a hug.

Walking back to the house we just talked together. I can’t recall exactly what all the conversation was about, but I know I did a lot of the talking and I think I was trying to help him to understand that he had to do what needed to be done. No one else could help him; he had to help himself. I also spent a long time trying to reassure him that Sue and I would be there for him to support him, but that only he could do the work. At home I wrote out the cheque and gave it to him reminding him that it was a loan. I hugged him and wished him luck and with tears in both our eyes he left. Two days later Jesse and his girlfriend pointed their car north where they have settled and he has turned his life around. Despite living his life in a different way to the way I live mine, he seems content, is moving forward and I’m very happy for him.

Because of injuries Jesse has had to give up cooking for the moment. He now has a job as a surf coach working with small groups and individuals teaching them how to ride a surfboard or working with them to improve their surfing prowess. Through his own initiative he has been able to work his way in a short time from a part-time position in the company ‘running group sessions for backpackers’ to a full-time position that involves him in ‘private
work’ over longer periods. The last time we spoke he had just finished working with a Canadian merchant banker who had hired his services for a week and he was keen to tell me all about it. It was interesting to hear him say that he is finding that the coaching is taking him right out of his comfort zone and that he feels that even though he’s meant to be the expert coach and instructor he finds he is learning all the time from the people he works with.

**Reflections on my own stories: first take**

My original intention in writing about my own experience and myself was to be ‘transparent’ so that readers might have a better idea of me and my potential biases as a researcher. I felt that it was necessary to do this because of the nature of my research and my approach to it. It was a way of building rigour by giving readers the information and opportunity to critique me and, as a consequence, my work. The initial background or biographical piece, over time, took on a life of its own as I realised that my own experience contained a wealth of data.

When I later engaged with the notion of archetype, my story became even more important as I came to understand that what I was writing could be a vehicle for connecting with my own notion of the archetype. So I did a ‘first take’ reflection on my own stories in the same way that I had for the stories of others. To emphasise their status as ‘first cut’ I have presented these reflections in the same format as the parallel reflective pieces at the end of each of the stories in Chapter 5.
When I consider this story in the light of the qualities of *Athenic mentoring* that I outlined at the end of Chapter 5, I am struck by how many of these qualities are exhibited in this story. And yet I can say that my father has not been a mentor to me. This recognition is certainly retrospective. It is clear to me now, having experienced and explored what I recognise as mentoring, that I would not describe the relationship with my father or with my mother, for that matter, as one of mentoring.

Despite his often-austere ‘teaching style’ my father was certainly a skilled and proficient practitioner in the areas of knowledge he imparted to me. Most times the knowledge he was using would have been conscious to him, but he also passed on to me things that would have been tacit knowledge to him – hunches when problem-solving; how ‘tight’ is ‘not too tight’; and, perhaps, even a sense of humour. I did feel special around him and while there were responsibilities I had regarding chores, doing them was not a condition of getting his attention or love. In contemplating his style I would now say that a very negative aspect of it was that his approach made me feel inadequate and ‘dumb’ and that somehow I felt that this condition was my fault.

And yet, he possesses all the characteristics that I suggested mentors would have. He exhibits care for me to this day and has emotional investment in me even though he has not been able to articulate it. He certainly has taken risks for me. I cannot think of a greater risk than to come to a country half way around the world, giving up the comfort and security of the society you
inhabit, to provide greater opportunity for your children. And that’s just for
starters!

Dad is certainly not perfect, but he is the keeper of his own wisdom and is
generous and gives freely of himself. He has supported me through many
challenging episodes, but he has also confronted and challenged me – if not
always in a manner that helped me rise to the challenge. He always saw a
future for me and tried to make it happen through taking whatever
facilitating actions he was able to take.

In spite of having all these qualities and despite the fact that we must have
shared some ‘mentoring moments’\textsuperscript{18} together – for example, I can think of
many times when our usual way of tackling things failed us and we sat
together trying to ‘think out of the box’ to develop new ways of
understanding what confronted us – the relationship never developed a
mentoring aspect. Perhaps this is because the future he saw for me was not
about my ‘Dream’ (Levinson et al. 1978), but more about his dream for
me. This might go some way to explaining why parents and mentors fulfil
different roles, as most parents have dreams for their children. In some
cases, the dreams of parents and child converge and the ‘lessons’ make
sense in a different way. Maybe these children do eventually identify one or
both parents as mentor(s). This might well have been the case with
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart whose father gave up his own career in music
to support and promote the talent of his son. But if the dreams of parents do
not converge with the ‘Dream’ of the child then I doubt that ‘mentor’ would
be a word that child would use in relation to their parent(s).
This story tells of someone who had a major impact on my life. Had I not gained the scholarship that took me to the secondary education I was privileged to have, who knows where I would be now. But I have great difficulty in identifying this nun as a mentor to me. She does, in fact, hold some of the characteristics of a mentor and some of what she might have done fits into the range of things a mentor might do, but I think it is fair to say that I learned in spite of her and not because of her! The dream, if there was one, was hers and not mine – and my guess is that it was about maintaining her status, her reputation, and so forth. It had little to do directly with the children she ostensibly had care of.

Also, and this is a connection that I have only just made, everything about her was alien to me – in fact, she might as well have been an alien. I did not know anything about her as a person. She lived in a convent, isolated from the outside world by walls and a front door that opened ‘by itself’ when you rang and let you into a small waiting room where you would be greeted by a disembodied voice from behind a grille. She wore a habit of black that changed her shape, perhaps even her gender, and emphasised her terrifying qualities. She was not of this world – my world. And her teaching was about transfer of information. There was no room for experimentation or wonder. She ran the scholarship factory and I was just one more in an assembly line of ‘one more’ over the years – the dumb apprentice to be

---

18 I would offer this a variation of Havinghurst’s (1970) ‘teachable moments’.
19 Her class was, it seems ironic now, known as ‘scholarship class’.
lashed with words, or punished more physically, for his slow and burdensome stupidity.

My experience with the brothers at secondary college was different and I have warmer feelings towards them and the time that I spent with them. Again, I wouldn’t classify any of them as my mentor, but certainly there was some form of rapport and connection with Brother Candidus and ‘Big Tone’ that went beyond the pupil-teacher relationship. There was caring, sometimes in a gruff sort of way and I did feel very much to be special in some ways. I think now that they even might have encouraged me to have a ‘Dream’, but that I was not ready, yet, to have dreams beyond wanting to be popular or brave or strong or rich or just someone other than who I was – in the main the childish dreams of a future where one could escape the present.

**Story: University**

This is the story by which I have come to judge all the others – it is my benchmark. I recognised José as my first mentor during the process of my research. I had always felt we had a good relationship and he held a very special place in my heart, but it was not until I engaged with him again as part of this work that I had the insight that what I had with him was something special and that he had been my first mentor. And eventually, that what I had experienced had precipitated a transformation in me and in my life.
José María Sangiau could well have been Athena in disguise. He certainly had ‘flashing eyes’ and would often appear as if by magic and when he was least expected. He guided and encouraged me often ‘walking beside me’ as I went forward. In the time I knew him a key part of the transformation he oversaw in me was that I was able to bring myself fully to whatever we were doing together without fear of being ridiculed or shamed. For the first time, learning was fun and I was allowed – no, encouraged – to be myself. He was my teacher, but we were closer than that. When we were together there was an equality in the relationship that I had not experienced before with an adult. At those times it was all of him and all of me. I felt that I could say and do anything without being judged or put down – as long as I did it in Spanish! I think he, too, might have had a vision or a dream for me, but I was not aware of this until I had chosen to follow my own ‘Dream’ and move away from what he might have preferred for me. Despite this he never once indicated in word or deed that he was disappointed in my choice of career.

José oversaw my transition from youth to adulthood, all the while allowing me to be myself. I see now that part of that process was the hours we spent together talking. While much of the time was spent in idle chatter and some of it was dominated by spirited arguments, there were spaces in there for what I would now classify as dialogue and reflection. Of the many things he nurtured in me during that time, my ability with the Spanish language has remained high despite decades of neglect. Two weeks ago, after almost thirty years, I began to read a book written in Spanish. Despite his linguistic intricacies and prodigious lexicon, the autobiography of Gabriel García
Márquez is still accessible to me not only linguistically, but also culturally, intellectually, philosophically and emotionally – speaking to me not only from the head, but also from the heart. I am aware that I learned more than just the language from José I also learned something about the ‘Latin soul’.

In looking back now, it seems clear to me that there was not a specifically identifiable moment when something special happened. I was in a special relationship with someone who cared for me in a way that was over and above what would be the norm between a language student and teacher – over time that relationship led to changes in me that I can now recognise, but can’t pinpoint what caused or set them in motion.

**Story: The transition to the world of work**

My relationship with my boss at the ABC might well have involved coaching and there may have even been the opportunity for some ‘mentoring moments,’ but it was hierarchical and I usually did not need to be reminded that he was the boss. We socialised and certainly had a fine time doing that, but my feeling is that the relationship remained the way it did because we did not ‘connect’ at some fundamental level. I suspect, even to this day, that he was not comfortable with the fact that I had had the opportunity of the education he was not able to have because of his family circumstances. Whether this was a fact or just my imagination – even my having that perception would have placed a barrier between us and would have inhibited the possibility of mentoring occurring.
During this time I grew in technical expertise and confidence through the experiences I had and through the technical coaching I received, often from peers and even from talented subordinates. I had good and sociable relationships with many people during this period, none of whom I would think of as a mentor. One person stands out for me as a dear friend. While we were never ‘in each others’ pockets’ we shared an intimacy that I did not experience with anyone else. We rarely see each other these days, but when we do it is as if the gulf of years between sightings does not exist. Despite this close emotional connection and many hours spent together this man was and is a friend, but not a mentor.

Story: The Sorcerer’s Apprentice: Take 2

This is another example of what I consider to be *Athenic mentoring* in that as a consequence of the relationship a transformation occurred in me that changed my life.

In the classical mentor-protégé approach, Nita took me under her wing to protect and nurture me. She made me feel special while stretching and confronting me. The relationship was not always ‘cosy,’ but it was robust and she took risks to give me opportunities that would develop me not just in a technical sense, but as a person – as myself. A lot of what went on in this relationship day to day was instructing, coaching and also friendship, but Nita became my mentor and caused me to change the way I looked at things and to alter my behaviour and the course of my life.
When I wrote the story I thought that it captured my transformation, but I have now realised that the transformation that was begun then continues to this very moment. Undertaking my research, writing this thesis and the learning that has come out of the process are the latest flowerings of that transformation. Some of the deepest changes in me have occurred only recently. These have involved me bringing more of the real me to what I do, be it this thesis, or my coaching or my life in general. The deep roots of those changes run back to what was begun long ago in my relationship with Nita – even though the ultimate sense-making came about more recently.

As with José, the Athenic mentoring I have experienced with Nita did not happen in one unrelenting stream or even a quick flash. Inside both those relationships it was made safe for me to look closely at myself and for change to happen as and when I made sense of things in my own time. At times, I know, it must have been frustrating for both of them, but in the end, despite my best efforts, I grew to be more like ‘me’ and to like the ‘me’ I was seeing.

**Story: Things I didn’t teach my son**

When my son gave me feedback about the story I had written about us he said that he thought I was doing ‘a very hard thing’ and he also told me that it had inspired him to speak to his boss about some issues he had had difficulty raising with him previously. So am I his mentor?

In the past few minutes, again, reflection has led to some sensemaking.

Why have I included this story? Ostensibly because I was trying to show
that I had not been able to be a mentor for my own son – just as my father
was not a mentor for me. And at the end of it all, it doesn’t matter what I
think. Only Jesse will be able to say whether or not I have been his mentor.

What I can say with conviction is that I have to be able to recognise and
hold some sense of his ‘Dream’ and to encourage him to achieve it. Like
most other parents what has inhibited and will continue to inhibit me in
being a mentor to Jesse is the dream I have for him. He is living his
‘Dream’ as a surfing coach in the Maldives while I dream of him having
security and owning a house. I’ve been working on letting my dream for
him go and I think I have made a better job of it than I thought I could, but
too often I still want him to see the world the way I do, value what I do,
have the same sense of urgency I have. To be a mentor means not doing
that, but focusing on the ‘other’ and their ‘Dream’ and helping them to
make it happen, if that’s what they want.
A mentor's mentor establishes a climate of trust in which creative exploration can occur, but self-trust is an inside job (Sinetar 1998, p.39).

**Introduction**

At the end of Chapter 6 I shared my tentative framing of *Athenic mentoring*. In this chapter, I will revisit that conceptualisation, illustrate and enrich it by referring to stories from both Chapters 5 and 7. I will also draw on the Jungian literature that guided the development of my framing of *Athenic mentoring*.

I will start by outlining again the key elements of *Athenic mentoring* as I was starting to define it:

- It is often recognised only in retrospect.
- Athena(Mentor) often arrives unannounced and in disguise.
- Mentors possibly do what parents can’t (or don’t).
- The mentor might be using conscious or unconscious skills and knowledge.
- Athenic mentoring is a ‘gift’ without obligation; the ‘Dream’ (Levinson et al. 1978) to be fulfilled is that of the mentee, not the mentor.
Athenic mentoring is about specialness – ‘you matter, things can be different.’

The mentee might be consciously ready (even to the extent of paying for help), or not.

At some unconscious level there is a deep resonance and ‘recognition’ that something important is happening that can later – maybe, much later – be identified and acknowledged.

Athenic mentoring might occur in a relationship over time or in a moment of time.

The context of mentoring can be life, education, organisational, management, helping, formal coaching programs and counselling.

In Athenic mentoring some contact is made that is transformative, deep and archetypical in character: the metanoia.

The ‘transformative’ power of the contact might or might not be consciously recognised for what it is at the time – by either party.

And as to what mentors do:

‘Real’ mentors care. They have made a choice to ‘be there’ for the other person.

They have made an emotional investment, although not necessarily at a conscious level. They have some feelings for the mentee.

They are generous and give of themselves.
They may even take risks on behalf of the mentee.

They confront as well as support.

They see a future for the mentee and will take action to help them to achieve it, but do not impose their own needs and expectations on the mentee. The gift is given without obligation.

They often convey the sense that ‘you are special’, ‘you matter’ and ‘things can be different’.

They are not perfect or complete people, although, consciously or unconsciously, they are wise in the way that they engage with the other.

They are prepared to engage in the difficult area of ‘inner’ transformative work rather than just focusing on helping the mentee to acquire ‘technical’ or professional skills and knowledge.

I would argue that many of these characteristics are present right across the stories I have presented. Even the ‘Mother Superior’ shares some of these characteristics. Perhaps in her own mind she would share all of the characteristics and she might justify her actions in the same way that people are able to advocate ‘tough love’ as a way of helping young people to get back onto ‘the straight and narrow’. But my sense of it now is that it does not matter what she or any other person thinks about themselves or their qualities. It is the potential mentees who will ‘make the call’ – consciously or unconsciously – and if they find them wanting, the relationship cannot provide the foundation for mentoring. That’s not to say
that much cannot be achieved and that development cannot occur. Clearly, it can. But I would argue that deep transformation does not happen in situations where the learner feels ‘at risk’ if they expose their innermost vulnerabilities, their doubts and their dilemmas about themselves.

So as the saying goes: the proof of the pudding is in the eating. An individual cannot just decide to be a mentor. Something is offered of a deeply personal kind and something is accepted – with varying levels of conscious awareness of either side. Nor, despite my admiration of the goddess and the apprentice magician, are mentors ‘larger than life’ – even though they might be described as such in retrospect by mentees (Missirian 1982). They are ordinary people, often doing very ordinary things, but somehow they are able to connect with another in ways that facilitate transformational learning in that person. That they are able to do this once does not mean that they can make a life’s work of it – transformation is no easy thing and it depends on both the mentor and the mentee being able to create the conditions to bring it about.

For many of us that ‘mentor connection’ (Zey 1984) happens only once or on very few occasions. That is certainly the case when taken from the mentee’s perspective. While mentees with whom I had contact were able to immediately identify a mentor, only a very few mentioned having had more than one or two. This idea is certainly consistent with the thinking of a number of researchers – perhaps best typified by Levinson et al (1978) and Levinson and Levinson (1996) that there are certain times of major transition in our lives and careers when we can benefit from the help of
another. Since we have few of these major transitions it is likely that we will have few mentors who help us through them. However, there may be some extraordinary ‘ordinary’ people who have mastered the ‘art’ and are able to be mentors for many different people. I am mindful that Zoe, for example, has a number of clients who say that their work with her has dramatically changed their lives. So has Zoe been able to mentor many people? I feel that it is possible given my data, but I also suspect that this is not a capability that is easily built up and certainly would not occur as a result of a quick training intervention. It is noteworthy that she does not work with people around specific ‘technical’ content, but rather on themselves and their ‘vision’ – their ‘Dream’ (Levinson et al. 1978).

So how have my own stories influenced my thinking about Athenic mentoring?

The notion that mentoring is recognised in retrospect, I believe, is strengthened by my own experience. I have only recently recognised my mentors, many years after the relationships flowered. In the case of José around a quarter of a century passed before I had the conscious recognition that he had been my mentor. I use the word ‘conscious’ because I now am of the opinion that I recognised what was happening all along at the deep archetypical (or unconscious) level. Consciousness of connection with the archetypical happens after the event when we try to put into words what we understand or ‘know’ about an incident. Also, my transformations while they have been deep and lasting did not happen in a ‘flash,’ as a single life-
changing event where I could say, ‘There! You've just experienced mentoring!’

So does mentoring occur only over time as I experienced it or can it happen in a moment? This is where I have difficulty because it is not what I have experienced and does not appear in the stories of the people with whom I spoke. There were others who, along the way, mentioned what I would now recognise as ‘flash mentoring’ in line with the ideas of Hay’s (1995) ‘spot mentoring’ and the brief encounter of Phillips-Jones (1982), but my all too narrow field of view at the time prevented me from considering what they were offering as a form of mentoring.

My view now, and this is obliquely supported by some of my data, is that ‘flash mentoring’ can occur in a brief instant if a connection is made with a person and in that short period some sense-making occurs that is based on a foundation built previously. In these circumstances the mentee might identify the ‘flash mentor’ as their mentor, when that person is really the catalyst for work that was begun a long time ago. They have helped the mentee turn over and align the last piece of a puzzle before dropping it into place – to finally make sense of their dilemma, rather than working with the mentee over a longer period of time on the solving of all the intricacies of the puzzle.

My stories also indicate that the mentee feels that they are special in some way. As I indicated above, I did not know that I had a mentor until after the event, but in both cases I was certainly aware of being special. In the case of
José I just felt that he liked me, but there was more to it than that: the confidences shared, the joint mischievousness and so forth. With Nita there was also a feeling of being special because she was giving me time and advice to try and make things better for me – to help me work through my frustrations and to learn to operate in a new and alien environment.

In both cases there was certainly no obligation, that I am aware of, placed on me by either of my mentors. I never felt that they were saying, ‘I’ll only help you if…’ Obviously there had to have been some conditions. The easiest for me to identify is the condition of speaking Spanish all the time with José and there would have been similar conditions in the relationship with Nita. But I never had a sense that I had to do something in return for the time and effort they put in. I wasn’t under an obligation to ‘pay it back’. I don’t believe anyone else’s story reflects anything different from this. In fact, as came out in the stories of others, if there is a sense of obligation in mentees it seems to manifest itself in people feeling that they should carry on the tradition by mentoring others. But none of their mentors said that ‘carrying the torch’ (Gehrke 1988) was part of the ‘deal’.

Another issue that my own story highlights is whether parents can be mentors or if mentors do things that parents can’t do. When I compare the story of my father with the story of my son I feel that with Jesse I have been able to move a lot closer to the realm of possible mentoring than has my father with me, but there is still inhibition both in myself and my son that gets in the way of mentoring happening. I argued earlier that the main difficulty in the way of parents mentoring their children is the high
probability that the parents’ dream for their children does not correspond with their children’s ‘Dream’. For mentoring to occur, the focus must be on the mentee’s ‘Dream’ (Levinson et al. 1978). If this is not the case then a lot can happen, but it certainly won’t provide the conditions for Athenic mentoring. For this reason alone, I believe that most parents are excluded from the role of mentor with their children – a point made strongly in the original work of Levinson et al. (1978). However, the psychodynamic and Jungian literature suggest other, more powerful reasons why parenting and mentoring are difficult to combine and I will be turning to that theme a little later in this chapter.

My own story also supports the idea that some contact is made between mentor and mentee that is transformative and deep. In the situations in my life that I identify as mentoring this is certainly the case. At a critical time in my life when I was moving into adulthood, the impact of José changed the direction of my life and how I thought about myself. Later, when I was in a career and life tailspin, Nita helped me to see things differently and to take actions that reshaped my life and reinvented me professionally and personally.

**A visit to the literature: some help from a Jungian perspective**

I should make it clear that to this point I have been trying to make as transparent as possible the ideas about Athenic mentoring that surfaced from the hearing, telling, writing and editing of stories – my own as well as those of others. To summarise these key ideas I am suggesting that in Athenic mentoring some contact is made that is transformative and deep; and that
the ‘transformative’ power of the contact may or may not be recognised for what it is at the time – by either party. The mentoring is recognised in retrospect and is ‘in the eye of the beholder’ who connects with the concept at a deeply archetypical level and feels special as a consequence. Mentors give a gift without obligation and in the process might or might not be using skills consciously. Mentoring happens in relationships and can happen over time or in just a moment. Generally, parents can’t do what mentors can and so parents are not usually mentors to their children. Mentors are ordinary people who help other ordinary people by connecting with them at an archetypical level to help them learn and develop.

Again, though, I find that my words are inadequate to describe this phenomenon. And I am not alone in this quandary. In Chapter 1 I outlined how over more than three decades researchers and practitioners have struggled to define and describe mentoring. I suspect that many of them, like me and the people that I spoke with about their experiences of mentoring, had an archetypical understanding of what the phenomenon was, but were unable to articulate it.

At this point I took heart from the wisdom of Jung (1958; 1978; 1992; 1996; 2002) who maintained that true archetypes cannot be described and that in trying to describe them we achieve only pale and foggy facsimiles that convey only a small part of the richness of the archetype. Nevertheless, many, including Jung (1958; 1978; 1992; 1996; 2002), have tried to find words that convey at least something of the nature of the archetypical experience and functioning, as well as the great potential of the
transformational power that comes from constructive engagement with the archetypes.

If the primordial images [archetypes] remain conscious in some form or other, the energy that belongs to them can flow freely into man (sic). But when it is no longer possible to maintain contact with them, then the tremendous sum of energy stored up in these images ... falls back into the unconscious (Jung 1982, pp.122-123).

My tardy recognition of the different levels at which ‘mentoring’ may be conceived and plays out impelled me at quite a late stage in the writing of this thesis to read more and more about Jung’s notions of the unconscious, and the archetypes of human experience and functioning that characterise its dynamic role in the development and functioning of the person. It is not surprising that there is a vast amount of literature that explores his ideas in the realm of therapy.

I am not concerned with therapy, but I am very interested in how those ideas might inform our understanding of mentoring. Because of this, there are some key concepts that I believe it is important to outline briefly, simply because they influenced the conclusions I have reached.

In Chapter 3 (pp.89-90) I outlined some introductory framing of the notion of the archetypes. It is helpful to revisit and amplify that framing now to ‘ground’ the notion before going forward. The advantage of such a deeply generative construct is that Jung’s conceptualisation of archetypes grows and is reframed across the breadth of his prodigious work. The practical disadvantage of that for someone like me is that there is no definitive framing of it. This is entirely consistent with Jung’s idea that descriptions or
representations of particular archetypes cannot capture the archetypes themselves.

*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993) defines archetype as:

The original pattern or model from which copies are made; In Jungian psychoanalysis, a primordial mental concept inherited by all from the collective unconscious; A pervasive or recurrent idea or symbol in legend, etc.

Jung (2002) postulated that archetypes are elements of the human psyche and are the containers that hold the essential structure of a universal idea – ‘the contents of the collective unconscious’ (Jung 2002, p.4). But their interpretation occurs through the unique lived experience of the person interpreting them. As Jung describes it:

[t]he archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear (Jung 2002, p.5).

From the unconscious there emanate determining influences which, independently of tradition, guarantee in every single individual a similarity and even sameness of experience, and also of the way it is represented imaginatively. One of the main proofs of this is the almost universal parallelism between mythological motifs, which, on account of their quality as primordial images, I have called *archetypes* (Jung 2002, p.58).

...archetypes are not disseminated only by tradition, language, and migration, but they can rearise spontaneously, at any time, at any place, and without any outside influence (Jung 2002, p.79).

The archetype does not proceed from physical facts, but describes how the psyche experiences the physical fact, and in so doing the psyche often behaves so autocratically that it denies tangible reality or makes statements that fly in the face of it (Jung 2002, p.154).

It is altogether inconceivable that there could be any definite figure capable of expressing archetypal indefiniteness. For this reason I have found myself obliged to give the corresponding archetype the name of the “self”—a term on the one hand definite enough to convey the essence of human wholeness and on the other hand indefinite enough to express the indescribable and indeterminable nature of this wholeness. The paradoxical qualities of the term are a reflection of the fact that wholeness consists partly of the conscious man (sic) and partly of the unconscious man (Jung 2000, p.18).
The archetypes powerfully influence how we operate in the world and with others and in so doing define who we are now and who we might become – for better or worse (Jung 2002). The archetypical dimension of our experience is usually well out of our consciousness – often playing out at a deeply unconscious level. This can be a very confronting concept, as Jung himself frequently acknowledged.

The unconscious is commonly regarded as a sort of incapsulated fragment of our most personal and intimate life—something like what the Bible calls the “heart” and considers the source of all evil thoughts…. Hence, it is generally believed that anyone who descends into the unconscious gets into a suffocating atmosphere of egocentric subjectivity, and in this blind alley is exposed to the attack of all the ferocious beasts which the caverns of the psychic underworld are supposed to harbour (Jung 2002, p.20).

One of the most intimidating archetypical dimensions of the unconscious is that of the ‘shadow’ – often very much thought of as a ‘ferocious beast’. Yet many writers and thinkers in the Jungian tradition conceive the shadow as not only a normal and necessary aspect of being human, but also a powerful source of development and transformation. Zweig and Abrams (1991) assembled a collection of writing by a wide range of people who have engaged with and enriched Jung’s conceptual legacy over many years. In their introduction, they elaborate a very focused description of the shadow:

The personal shadow develops naturally in every young child. As we identify with ideal personality characteristics such a politeness and generosity, which are reinforced in our environment, we shape what W. Brugh Joy calls the New Year’s Resolution Self. At the same time, we bury in the shadows those qualities that don’t fit our self-image, such as rudeness and selfishness. The ego and the shadow, then, develop in tandem, creating each other out of the same life experience (Zweig & Abrams 1991, pp.xvi-xvii).

They go on to say that the shadow behaves like a ‘psychic immune system, defining what is self and what is not self’ (Zweig & Abrams 1991, p.xvii). In different families and cultures, what is encouraged to be expressed and
developed as ego, and what is pushed into shadow, will vary a lot. But whatever is pushed into shadow plays a dual and powerful role in our lives nevertheless. It is a dark source of unresolved infantile and neurotic behaviours as well as being a reservoir of potential transformative energy.

Quoting a student of Jung’s, Lilane Frey-Rohn, Zweig and Abrams (1991, p.xvii) refer to the shadow as a ‘dark treasury’ holding our undeveloped talents and gifts because as Frey-Rohn argues, the shadow ‘retains contact with the lost depths of the soul, with life and vitality—the superior, universally human, yes, even the creative can be sensed there (Frey-Rohn cited in Zweig & Abrams 1991, p.xvii). The shadow, they suggest, is seen mostly indirectly in the qualities and behaviours of others that we find confronting or we reject – it being safer to observe it in others than to see or acknowledge it in ourselves. What we reject most vehemently in others may, therefore, be elements of our own shadow at work – the dynamic of ‘projection’ (Jung 2000, p.10). Those elements that are not developed in us or even expressed remain as potential energy that can play out in distorted ways or, if we dare engage with them, in more constructive and helpful ways. The danger for the conscious personality lies in those things the shadow ‘does not acknowledge and therefore neglects, forgets and buries, only to discover them in uncomfortable confrontations with others’ (Zweig & Abrams 1991, p.xviii).

I was very interested in what has been described by Tuby (1963) as the common ways we meet the shadow every day: in humour that expresses emotions or ideas that we cannot ‘own’ in any other way; in exaggerated
feelings about or towards others; in negative feedback from others who,
sometimes unintentionally, hold up a mirror to us; in encounters with
different people where we repeat the same unhelpful behaviours or trigger
the same negative responses in them; in ‘accidents’ or impulsive acts; in
situations in which we are ashamed or humiliated; and, in ‘over the top’ or
exaggerated anger about other people’s faults.

Despite my interest, this was all quite confronting for me, and it was made
even more so when I read about the ‘family shadow’ that is supposed to hold
‘all that is rejected by a family’s conscious awareness, those feelings and
actions that are seen as too threatening to its self-image’ (Zweig & Abrams
1991, p.xxi). Since the telling of my story has been a means to an end rather
than an end in itself in terms of this thesis, I will not pursue the train of
thought that this reading triggered in me. Suffice to say that I certainly was
challenged to ‘look again’ at my reactions to the Mother Superior, to the
colleagues who challenged me at the ABC and Australia Post, and to
consider the ambivalence in my relationship with Nita.

And when I went to the story of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice, I could see the
giant shadow of the Sorcerer on the wall of the underground chamber as a
projection from my shadow, just as the Sorcerer’s Apprentice represents an
essential, unacknowledged dimension of myself at all stages of my life. An
important departure point for therapeutic work, if I choose to revisit it.

Much seems to have been written about how we can positively reclaim the
creative energies of the shadow. Again, because my interest here is
mentoring and not therapy it is not appropriate to do more than just ‘nod in passing’ at the literature. I was, however, struck by the metaphors that have been used in the literature to describe the process of constructive and transformative engagement with the shadow.

Jung called the process ‘individuation’ (1958; 1992; 2000; 2002) and compared it with the process of alchemy, making the point that

One stage of alchemy is the melanosis, where everything turns black inside the vessel containing all the alchemical elements. But that black stage is absolutely essential. Jung said that it represents the first contact with the unconscious, which is always in contact with the shadow. The ego takes that as a kind of defeat (Miller 1991, p.23).

It struck me that the alchemical process has implicit within it the notion of great power and the need for a vessel that can withstand great turbulence and ‘heat’, because

[I]t takes nerve not to flinch from or be crushed by the sight of one’s shadow, and it takes courage to accept responsibility for one’s inferior self (Whitmont 1991, p.15).

Bly (1988) speaks of ‘the long bag we drag behind us’ and suggests that the bigger the bag, the less energy we have to engage constructively with the world. The bag, Bly suggests, can contain the creative energies that we deny ourselves – mental, emotional, physical and spiritual. Sanford uses two different metaphors in relation to the shadow: that of ‘Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde’ and the comparison of the sun and the stars.

When the sun goes down, the stars come out—and then you discover you’re just one of the stars in a sky full of stars. That’s the soulscape, which is invisible in our waking life (Miller 1991, p.24).
Jung himself was quite explicit about the difficulty and the challenge of individual and collective development in the face of the archetypical dramas that play out in the unconscious:

…it is not sufficient to just to know about these concepts and to reflect on them. Nor can we ever experience their content by feeling our way into them or by appropriating other people’s feelings. It is no use at all to learn a list of archetypes by heart. Archetypes are complexes of experience that come upon us like fate, and their effects are felt in our most personal life (Jung 2002, p.30).

The Jungian writers also confirmed my intuitive sense that Athenic mentoring is something that most parents are unable to do, although ironically, it is possible that they might be able to be a mentor to someone else’s child. Sanford expressed the challenge of parenting in a way that really resonated for me.

If parents are to deal successfully with the shadow personality of a child, they need to accept and be in touch with their own Shadows. Parents who have difficulty accepting their own negative feelings and less than noble reactions will find it difficult to have a creative acceptance of the child’s dark side...

It can be seen that being a parent calls for unusual finesse, conscious patience, and wisdom if the problem of the Shadow is to be dealt with creatively. One cannot go too far in the direction of permissiveness or in the direction of being overly strict. The key throughout is the parents’ own consciousness of their Shadow problem and their capacity to accept themselves and, at the same time, to develop their own ego strength so that they can cope with their own affects. Family life, in general, and being a parent in particular, is a crucible in which the Shadow problem can be met and worked upon (Sanford 1991, pp.59-60).

Seen in the light of all this and if ‘the personal shadow contains undeveloped, unexpressed potentials of all kinds’ (Zweig & Abrams 1991, p.xviii), Athenic mentoring takes on a very interesting dimension, especially in the context of the workplace. In exploring the notion of the shadow in the workplace Shackleton (1991) asks what it is that stops us from achieving all that we think we can, what undermines our pursuit of our dreams and aspirations, and how we contribute to that undermining.
Although it is less recognised as a key factor in shadow-making than the family, the school, or the church, the workplace influences us greatly to behave in certain ways in order to fit in, adapt, and succeed... For many, psychological and spiritual compromise comes about when we throw so much of into the shadow... (Shackleton 1991, p.105).

Is it possible, then, that a boss can ever be an Athenic mentor? If an individual’s workplace can be powerful in terms of shadow dynamics, does a boss as a mentor run into the same sorts of difficulties as does a parent as mentor, at least to some extent? And could Athenic mentoring ever be ‘arranged’? This is difficult territory, since much of what is happening in Athenic mentoring might be outside of the consciousness of both mentor and mentee. In therapy, as I understand it, the journey of deep transformation and individuation may involve conscious and deliberate engagement with what seems frightening and negative – here the engagement is deliberately sought out and is, indeed, ‘arranged’.

But Athenic mentoring, perhaps, represents a kinder, less consciously chosen and more gradual path to engagement with the shadow. Indeed, it can seem like an unsought, accidental ‘gift from the gods and goddesses’. There is something about the Athenic mentor that gives us a confidence that we cannot account for, an energy that we cannot quite explain; something shifts without our knowing it.

In the stories about Athena, her transformative power was sometimes overt and very obviously present. Zweig and Wolf (1999) tell this story about her power.

Just as Athena turned Medusa into a Gorgon, she also played a role in her destruction when Perseus, an arrogant young hero, vowed to behead Medusa, Athena offered help: She gave him a polished shield that served as a mirror, enabling him to kill the Gorgon without having to look at her and become petrified.
In creating a reflection, the goddess’ mirror shield enable him to see the shadow – an image of that which is too terrible to see directly (Zweig & Wolf 1999, p.28).

There may be mentors who wield and offer such mirrors, but I suspect that they are few and far between. Often the ‘warrior’ shield blocks and diverts from the shadow work. My contention is that the Athenic mentoring process is usually much more subtle because engagement with the archetypes is not a quick process that happens at the surface of consciousness.

As the archetypes, like all numinous contents, are relatively autonomous, they cannot be integrated simply by rational means, but require a dialectical procedure, a real coming to terms with them, often conducted by the patient [mentee] in dialogue form, so that, without knowing it, he (sic) puts into effect the alchemical definition of the meditatio: “an inner colloquy with one’s good angel” (Jung 1992, p.5).

Although arrived at slowly and painfully through my engagement with story, literature and life, the framing I offered of Athenic mentoring earlier has been confirmed by this exploration of the Jungian literature.

In the next chapter, I offer an integrated framework for thinking about the various levels at which mentoring can happen – a framework that places Athenic mentoring in the context of other kinds of mentoring. I also suggest ways in which one can at least be alert to the possibilities of Athenic mentoring and explore the dynamics that might allow for it to occur.

**Reprise: The Sorcerer’s Apprentice: Take 3**

Having said that I would not go there, I now find myself being inexorably drawn back to visit the tale of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice yet again to reflect on what it might reveal about the archetype that shapes my orientation to learning. It is the Child archetype – one that Jung (2002) describes as having ‘enduring vitality’ (p.159). I believe I have a strong connection with
the images of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice because what I see now (consciously) and previously (less consciously) are elements of myself, the dumb, impatient learner who could be fabulous if only he had the sorcerer’s ‘magic’. Like Mickey in Fantasia (1940), I had to hang around my father (the sorcerer) while he demonstrated how skilled he was at doing things and how unready I was to do the same.

Later, the nun (who I think was archetypical evil in some ways) towered over me and shamed me for not being smart enough. This can be compared with the shame the Sorcerer’s Apprentice feels at the end of the Tale. But then I begin to recognise some of the more positive aspects of the archetype in my experience with the brothers in secondary school.

Then José works his magic on me and I am no longer feeling the dumb apprentice, but a ‘partner in crime’ and I am having fun. My experience in the world of work takes me back to the more negative aspects of the archetype and over a series of incidents those dynamics are quite strong. Eventually, I make contact with Nita. I don’t really know what happened here, as certainly there was much reinforcing the idea that I was stupid and not ‘able’. But somehow that eventually took a back seat to me ‘connecting’ more constructively with my dark side. Certainly this was not happening in a conscious way. I have a sense that these ‘surreptitiously conscious’ encounters with myself became more frequent over time. But despite this, I doubt that I was aware of what was happening. If anyone had asked me, I would have said at the time that I was working on increasing my knowledge, competency and confidence and improving my practice by putting new ways
of operating into action. Another aspect of this transformation is that it never happened with a ‘flash’ or an attention-grabbing ‘bang’. In fact, as I was writing the last sentence the word that came into my mind was ‘insidious’ – but with a positive connotation.

The negative issues related to the archetype are still with me to some extent, but now that they have been raised to the surface I can work on them. I have had to do this a number of times throughout the production of this thesis. I was blocked from writing for a long time and then when I wrote I had a tendency to ‘hang on’ to the work for too long before allowing my supervisor to see it. My wife has only in the final stages of the thesis been exposed to the first few chapters. I know that ‘block’ is a common occurrence with PhD candidates, but I feel that in my case there was an extra dimension of difficulty due to reluctance to expose my ‘Sorcerer’s Apprentice’ flaws. Even in doing this now there is a powerful feeling that I should pull back and not be so open about my failings. The trouble is I know now that it is more important to be me than to live in the ‘shadow’ of some distorted notion of me:

It is a permanent principle that one has to work beyond one’s capabilities to change one’s level of being (P. D. Ouspersky in Hayward 1997, no page numbers).
Chapter 9—Athenic mentoring: out of the shadows of the archetype

I should like to point out one final characteristic of these individuals as they strive to discover and become themselves. It is that it seems that the individual becomes more content to be a process rather than a product (Rogers 1996, p.122).

Introduction

In this final chapter, I attempt to do a number of things. The first is the integration of the ideas that have been developed over the several years of this doctoral work. This integration generates conclusions in the form of a more complete framing of Athenic mentoring and its connection with the dimensions of Doing, Knowing and Being. The second is to use the conceptual framework I have developed to make a different, more discerning, use of the literature. The third is to share some of the literature that I engaged with in the last months of thesis writing – literature that I feel is more ‘classic’ than immediately contemporary, but that seemed to me to deal eloquently with the things that I have struggled to find words to express. The writings of Rogers (1996), Buber (1996) and Schön (1987a) all provide elegant ways of articulating the dimensions of Athenic mentoring. The fourth thing I attempt to do in this chapter is to explore possibilities for further reflection and development – some of which will certainly continue to engage my own effort and energy in the future. Some of the most intriguing questions for me continue to be: what are the conditions under which Athenic mentoring is likely to occur? Can a person set out to be an ‘Athenic mentor’ or consciously learn to be one? And can Athenic mentoring occur at any time in life? But I’ll begin by outlining the integration of my thinking.
Development of the meta-themes

It would be very convenient if the concept of Athenic mentoring that I have developed had come about as a result of a sudden, break-through insight, a flash of inspiration, that I could describe succinctly. But that is not what happened. The process was quite protracted, messy and unplanned – at many times seeming to have a life of its own. The account I will give of it is much ‘cleaner’ and more streamlined that actuality because it would be tedious and difficult for the reader to have to track every bend in the meandering and tortuous path to insight. The account is, however, accurate in the sense it conveys the overall sequence of events.

I had often revisited Diagram 12 (see p.200) to contemplate where the archetypes of human experience fitted into Cherry’s (1995) original ‘pyramid’. The model was presented by Cherry as a tool to help managers make a connection between the task and issues that face them ‘out there’ and the skills, attitudes and the ‘self’ that they bring to that task. Cherry (1995) maintains that the model is useful as it helps to ‘objectify’ the task of making the links between the actions taken and their drivers at the level of ‘self’– the ‘tacit’ (Polanyi 1967; Schön 1987b) elements that drive behaviour and thinking – and so helps people to reflect on them by making them ‘less mysterious and threatening’ (Cherry 1995, p.311).

The model drew me back again and again because from a different perspective it seemed to be outlining a process that could be helpful in framing Athenic mentoring. It struck me that the archetypes sat at the very bottom of the pyramid (under Cherry’s (1995) bottom layer of ‘personal
scripts’) and that even though they might have significant impact on behaviour and attitudes, they exist at such a deep level that connection with them is extremely difficult under day to day circumstances – and even if contact is made, that contact is immediately coloured by the individual’s consciousness of them (Jung 2002).

![Diagram 14: Levels of Diagnosis and Learning Outlined by Cherry (1995) with Archetypes Added](image)

**Goals and Tasks:** Your insight into what needs to be done. The things you need to do to achieve desired changes or outcomes

**Practice:** The methods or strategies you use to accomplish your tasks (your “praxis”)

**Competencies:** The personal qualities and abilities you need for successful implementation of your practice

**Learning Skills:** The way you learn new competencies and develop existing ones

**Personal Scripts:** The characteristic ways you do things which both help and hinder your success at all of the above

**Archetypes:** The containers that hold the essential structure of a universal idea or experience

*Diagram 14: Levels of Diagnosis and Learning Outlined by Cherry (1995) with Archetypes Added*

In the adapted model (Diagram 14 above), in the interests of brevity, I have described archetypes as the containers that hold the essential structure of a
universal idea or experience. Some have used the words ‘spirit,’ ‘soul’ and ‘daemon’ (Jung 1958; 2002) or ‘daimon’ and ‘acorn’ (Hillman 1996) to describe this kernel of self which holds, at what might be described as the archetypical level, our true essence as human beings as well as being the wellspring of our fears, hopes and dreams about and for ourselves. But, as indicated in the previous chapter, the notion of archetype is far more complex than this as the archetypes significantly influence how we interpret and act in the world. Conversely, we connect with them in the light of our individual, contemporary circumstances even though their essence is steeped in the universal and primordial.

**Doing, Knowing and Being: metathemes of Athenic mentoring**

When I started this project I was interested in finding out what good practitioners did and what they knew so that I could improve my practice (and, maybe, help others to improve theirs). The archetypical level is about the unconscious. So too are the ‘tacit’ parts of what we do and what we know. And it is these ‘tacit’ elements that are the focus of Cherry’s (1995) pyramid showing the levels of diagnosis and learning. In contemplating this model and my variation of it, it struck me that because it shows the levels at which change and development can happen in individuals, it shows the levels at which mentoring can have an impact on the mentee. The levels also have elements of *Doing, Knowing and Being* associated with them – for both the mentee and the mentor. This led me to yet another variation of the model, which I present in Diagram 15 below.
At the very top of the pyramid, the most ‘Out There’ or most ‘visible’ we have the elements of *Doing* – the things a person does whether they are aware or not of their actions and behaviours.

The competencies and learning skills are the elements associated with *Knowing* – this knowledge may be tacit or explicit, but it informs the actions the person may take.

---

**Diagram 15: Relationship of Doing, Knowing and Being to the Levels of Diagnosis and Learning Outlined by Cherry (1995): a Model of Mentoring Encounter**

- **Goals & Tasks**: Your insight into what needs to be done. The things you need to do to achieve desired changes or outcomes.
- **Practice**: The methods or strategies you use to accomplish your tasks (your “praxis”).
- **Competencies**: The personal qualities and abilities you need for successful implementation of your practice.
- **Learning Skills**: The way you learn new competencies and develop existing ones.
- **Personal Scripts**: The characteristic ways you do things which both help and hinder your success at all of the above.
- **Archetypes**: The containers that hold the essential structure of a universal idea or experience.
And finally, at the deepest levels – at the core of Being – we have both the personal scripts (the deeply characteristic aspects of self such as personal style and preferences through which I express myself in the world) and the archetypes that characterise the psychodynamics of the individual and reflect their individual connections with the universal Jungian dilemmas.

Each of the three elements of Doing, Knowing and Being has awareness and unawareness associated with it – an individual may be conscious or not of what is going on. The increasing difficulty in accessing and recognising the ‘unaware’ components of each of the elements has been highlighted by the fading away of the strong black background from ‘Out There’ to ‘In Here’. So while I might be unaware of my behaviour at the Doing level it is observable and even though I might find the feedback confronting and difficult to deal with someone else is able to observe it and can tell me about it. At the level of Being there is a lot that both mentor and mentee might be subliminally aware of or that might be out of consciousness altogether.

My central conclusion is that what many people call mentoring involves activity at the levels of Doing and Knowing, but that Athenic mentoring (with its focus on deep transformational change) plays out at the level of Being. Also I suggest that this helps us in two different but related ways. The first thing it allows us to do is map the level at which the mentee is being engaged and at which change is happening – whether it is their Doing, their Knowing or their Being that is the site of the change. The second thing it allows us to do is make sense of the mentoring literature, which I contend has been largely focused at the level of describing what the mentor and
mentee need to ‘do’ or ‘know’ in order to get a useful outcome. It has had much less to say about how the mentor and mentee might ‘be’ for transformation to happen at the deepest levels. Since engagement at this level very often will be unconscious for both mentor and mentee, it is challenging to articulate it in ways that can deliberately improve mentoring practice – an observation that makes sense of my own, earlier, intuition that mentoring cannot be contrived or ‘commodified’.

I have already described the possible ‘sites’ of the work of mentoring – the levels at which it can occur in terms of Doing, Knowing and Being. The previous chapter contained quite a detailed account of the nature of the analytical work at the level of Being that I won’t repeat here. What I will do is focus on the second use of the framework I am proposing – that is, its capacity to throw light on our understanding of the mentoring process itself.

Doing

Doing is, perhaps, the easiest element to capture in words as it is about the actions we take, both consciously and unconsciously. We are aware of some aspects of our Doing, but deeply unaware of most of them, including many of our most skilled behaviours, as Schön (1987a) has indicated.

The stories that I have presented are full of descriptions of Doing. Most of the Doing in them, though, is about what mentors do, seen either from the perspective of the mentor or that of the mentee. This is a direct consequence of my initial focus on trying to understand what mentors do that impacts on
the mentee and their learning. As I have already indicated in Chapter 4, a very large proportion of the literature in the field is similarly focused.

Open almost any ‘How to…’ book on mentoring and a focus on Doing is almost certainly what you will find. But the more scholarly literature also contains much about Doing because, I would imagine, it is the element that is most visible and, as such, is able to be described most easily. And so we have descriptions of how to listen, set goals and targets, give feedback and a plethora of other things that individuals need to be able to do if they want to be proficient mentors. And there is much advice in the practitioner literature for mentees and for organisations outlining what they should ‘do’ to ensure productive mentoring relationships.

All of the things that fall under the heading of Doing may be learned – mentors can learn to ‘do’ things that assist mentoring and mentees can learn to do things that help, too. Whether through education, work or life these are the methodological components of mentoring – the framework of actions that for both mentor and mentee define the externally visible and most easily discernible dimensions of mentoring. Following Polanyi’s (1967) observation that we can do and know more than we can say, it is important to note that in both the case of the mentor and that of the mentee, they may or may not be aware of their Doing. Indeed an important aspect of the mentoring process might be the articulation of, and reflection on, what was tacitly held by one or the other.
Knowing

The *Knowing* component runs as a subtext in my data and in the stories that I have presented. This metatheme is also to be found throughout the literature of scholarship and practice. *Knowing* is about our competencies and skills; what we know explicitly and tacitly, consciously and unconsciously that informs and underpins the actions we take – including the decisions we make. Encompassed by *Knowing* are the *epistemological* elements of mentoring. Components of *Knowing* for both mentee and mentor include things like the experience, the life skills, the content knowledge, the generic and specific professional capabilities that are needed to do what is involved in mentoring. This is a harder domain to map and describe, because it needs to be inferred (unless specifically assessed psychometrically).

There are some writers who have attempted to describe the generic skills involved in mentoring, notably Titchen (2001a). Examples of the skills involved include interpersonal competencies, self-awareness in real time and the ability to modify behaviour in the light of observations of what the other is doing, and emotional intelligence. While these skills can be learned, there may be a component of *Knowing* that (ironically) may be unknown to the mentor or the mentee. At the conscious level this, again, is the ‘tacit’ dimension of knowledge that Polanyi (1967; 1974) has outlined and is inductively derived according to Schön (1987b). Once raised to consciousness this element of *Knowing* can also be developed and passed on to others.
I would suggest that *Knowing* in this context will also include what the mentor and mentee ‘know’ or think about mentoring itself – what their ‘model’ of mentoring looks like. This will, in turn, shape their expectations of it and what they ‘do’ in context of it.

**Being**

Being is much harder to describe, but I was attracted to Sokolowski’s (2002, p.451) simple and elegant framing of it as that which exists in one person that is not able to be passed on to or ‘transported from one person to another’. It is a very operational description in comparison with ‘soul’ a word used by Jung (1958), Hillman (1996) and Kobor-Escobar (2000). While through my *Doing* and *Knowing* I might demonstrate aspects of my *Being* to another, and so (either consciously or – more likely – unconsciously) challenge or reinforce some aspect of another’s *Being*, I cannot pass my *Being* directly to them in any form.

*Being* comprises the **ontological** elements of a whole person as they are as well as what they might become physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. I contend that the components of the metatheme of *Being* are understood and held in each of us at the level of ‘personal scripts’ (Cherry 1995) and archetype (Jung 1958;1992). And as the previous chapter suggested, at the level of archetype they present a dilemma for us to the extent that undifferentiated and dysfunctional shadow dynamics are involved.
As mentioned previously, I find it embarrassing to have to confess that I discounted critical aspects of the notion of Being when it arose during the first of my Reference Group meetings. But I will now let the voices from that first night speak to the element of Being as they do it so much more eloquently than I could. And having ignored them for so long I don’t believe I have the right, in any case, to speak on their behalf.

...For the mentor to be effective they need to have a good sense of who I am and who you are. A good sense of self so that they are able to align with where the other person is going. This is how it works when “spirit work” is happening. It’s not planned. It “just be’s.”

...Spirit is at the heart of mentoring. A connection with spirit.

...Spiritual: a sense of who the person is. Self-consciousness. Self-awareness.

...They are trying to define who they are. It’s one element, an intangible component – like a hole or a gap in their knowledge of who they are. It’s more than “feeling”. People can talk about and describe their feelings. They can name them, but when it comes to spirituality there is something else there which is very difficult for people to verbalise.

...For me the mentoring is about the human journey working with spirit. Mentoring is about getting people into a state of being rather than the constant doing which occupies most of our lives.

Spirit is invisible, almost indefinable. The spirit in one is no different to the spirit in others. It’s that connectedness that helps us to suspend judgement.

...All of a sudden they will start talking about it. That there is “something” missing for them in their lives or work. They will go still and quiet and go down into themselves in a way they might not have done before. Or have noticed that they have once they have done it. It’s like they have accessed a resource that enables them to begin to talk about it. It’s very magical.

...If the mentee “turns up” that’s great. If they don’t, it’s their decision. This applies not just to physically being there, but also their head and heart.

...it’s a very exposing process. The more powerful, the more both parties are prepared to disclose themselves.

You can feel the difference when people are opening up....[The mentee] needs to have the intention to look inside, to be willing to explore their spirit.

I can only acknowledge and marvel at the journey of several years during which I wandered at times seeming utterly and helplessly lost and now find myself like Odysseus at the end of his long journey with the fog lifted, my
vision no longer obscured, back where I started from, seeing and hearing clearly.

**The dynamic connections**

Although it is a very simple, some might say crude, way to represent something so complex, Diagram 16 below tries to convey that *Doing, Knowing* and *Being* are deeply connected, even though I have described them as separate elements. Even in associating *Being* with the bottom layers of the pyramid, I need to emphasise that I am not suggesting that *Doing* and *Knowing* happen in isolation from *Being* – dimensions of *Being* still ‘show up’ so to speak, either because not a lot of constructive ‘spirit’ is present in the encounter, or it is dysfunctionally present (from the shadow) or it is present to some degree, but not in a sustained way that is reciprocated by both mentor and mentee.

![Diagram](image)

**Note:** Areas are shaded white and black to emphasise that *Doing* may be ‘aware’ or ‘unaware’, *Knowing* may be ‘explicit’ or ‘tacit’ and *Being* may be ‘conscious’ or ‘unconscious’
Diagram 16: Relationship of the Elements a Person Brings to a Learning Situation That May Become Mentoring

For example, our actions (Doing) and our beliefs about how to relate to others (Knowing) are underpinned by our values (personal scripts) and our integrated and less well-integrated archetypical selves (Being). So there will be limits to what I can do and know in a relationship in which mentoring happens – and that I can learn to do and know in that context or any other if my shadow self projects onto another my disowned and feared ‘capable’ self.

The three dimensions exist and interact in all relationships – and certainly in all relationships where learning can take place – no matter how close or distant those relationships. And they play out, as the Jungians suggest, for better or worse. It is this uncomfortable possibility, I would suggest, that makes it so difficult to define exactly what mentoring is and exactly how to make it work in a way that is generally accepted. Sometimes a relationship is not understood or intended to engage at the level of Being, but the Jungian framework suggests that Being is involved anyway – even if just operating in ways that make it easier for people to operate at the surface levels of Doing and Knowing.

As an aside, when I really contemplate an exchange between two people that does not allow one or other party to bring who they are to what they are doing (to paraphrase Bellman 1990), or how they are prepared to work with one another, I am very loathe to identify that as mentoring, preferring to use terms like coaching or teaching to describe that kind of interaction. I have to accept, however, that others don’t share my discomfort and that is one of the
reasons that I have used the term *Athenic mentoring* to identify a different level within the overall generally accepted domain of what mentoring includes.

At the very least, I would suggest that *Athenic mentoring* is impossible without a deeper connection at the *Being* level, as this is where the possibility for deep transformation is grounded. While the three elements work together, paucity of *Being* on the part of either or both the mentor and the mentee will inhibit the possibility of deep transformation happening.

There are, of course, encounters that are transformative, but which are not benign. While having the power of mentoring, these encounters take the person backwards and are regressive rather than ‘growthful’. From my own experience, I would offer here the example of the ‘Mother Superior’ compared with the Brothers who taught me in secondary school. My positive growth as a whole person was far more advanced by the approach of the Brothers. The nun who taught me algebra frightened me and probably connected very powerfully in me with the shrinking ‘Sorcerer’s Apprentice’ lurking in the shadows who could not connect, for many years, with the power available to him.

Whether *Being* is engaged positively or negatively, it is also helpful to acknowledge that more than one dimension of *Being* is involved in any interaction. So it is possible that some dynamics will be reciprocally growthful and others less so. Mikhail Bakhtin (reported by Holquist 1981; Emerson & Holquist 1986) who suggests that there are two tendencies in
dynamic interplay that characterise relationships: centripetal tendencies which are the things which unify and bind the individuals together and centrifugal tendencies which have the opposite effect as they are the forces generated by what is different in the individuals. Authentic relationships are characterised by the contradictions evinced by these tendencies. In this way development and transformation within a relationship will always carry with it an element of contradiction. Some even argue that a relationship without this contradiction has ceased to be a relationship (Baxter & Montgomery 1996).

I would add that the dynamics of difference in Athenic mentoring ensure that the mentee develops and transforms into what they can become and not some ‘clone’ of the mentor. This leads me to contend that deliberately surfacing and working with differences in the dialogue of Athenic mentoring allows for exploration and learning that leads to transformation, whereas attempts to suppress or ignore difference lead to stagnation. I feel that it is important to emphasise this point because otherwise one can be led easily down the ‘yellow brick road’ of believing that mentoring only happens in cosy, warm and fuzzy relationships – and that for Athenic mentoring, in particular, nothing could be further from the truth.

At this point I would like to return to the contemporary mentoring literature, because I believe my framework has given me – and hopefully others – a more discerning (or at least richer) way of engaging with that literature.
Back to the contemporary mentoring literature

I specifically want to start by revisiting my earlier conclusions that the literature on mentoring is largely grounded in the more visible levels of Doing and Knowing. To be fair, while it was difficult to find much in the mentoring literature that seemed to resonate with my specific conceptualisations of Being and Athenic mentoring, there were some writers and researchers who did at least allude to the dimensions of Being. And, on reflection, it struck me that there are many writers who, while not explicit about it, are describing dynamics in the relationship that cannot simply be taught or learned – that come, in fact, from the Being of one person to the Being of another. For example there have been some more recent doctoral dissertations that have explored the ‘spiritual’ (Kobor-Escobar 2000) aspects of mentoring.

Lambright (1999, p.75) defined mentoring as ‘a mutual love relationship in which a person ... invests his or her life in another toward that person’s comprehensive development.’ Wilson (1998, p.41) argued that ‘it is primarily the character of the mentor and the presence of certain core values that both initiate and guide the process.’ Moss (2001) maintained a significant element of the mentoring of women mentors is their ‘heart’ and suggests that when a heartfelt connection is made between mentor and mentee the relationship enters the ‘realm of spirit’ (p.172). It is interesting to note that all these works have two things in common: firstly, they are recent and secondly they are grounded in psychological rather than management or organisational literature.
More recently, in the nursing literature I discovered a friendship-based ‘Collegial Mentoring Model’ which puts ‘beingness’ at its centre and which does attempt a rich description of what could be those necessary if not sufficient conditions for mentoring to occur.

Beingness means that each individual is able to be who she is in that moment. The freedom to be one’s true self is only possible when safety and trust have been developed in a relationship. Beingness allows each individual to get to the core of her humanity and the whole of her being. The whole of our being encompasses the emotional, spiritual, and social facets of our essence. In turn, our own beingness allows us to experience the humanity of another (Thorpe & Kalischuk 2003, p.8).

As an important aside, I found this material after I had developed, slowly and painfully, my own conception of Athenic mentoring. Discovering it was very confirming. In other work, the friendship aspect of mentoring is sometimes represented as mentors and mentees trusting, being loyal to each other and taking care of each other (Missirian 1982; Collins 1983; Burke 1984; Kram 1985b).

In her work on the phases of the mentoring relationship, I found that Kram (1983) proposed that in a mentoring relationship ‘new attitudes, values and styles of operation’ (p.617) bring to life and legitimise ‘parts of self’ (my emphasis). Later, when Kram (1985a) studied the differences between mentoring and peer relationships which assisted career development she found considerable similarity between the two and also that ‘relationships with peers offer important alternatives to those with conventionally defined mentors’ whom she defined narrowly as guides or sponsors (Kram 1985a, p.110). However, what she described as occurring in peer relationships is certainly consistent with my notion of Being. She said that in these
relationships individuals learn about their own leadership style and how they affect others at work, and that peers:

...provide friendship, encompassing concern for each other that extends beyond work itself to the total human being (my emphasis) (Kram 1985a, p.118).

But I noticed that these sorts of relationships were not even considered to be mentoring because of the narrow definition applied to the concept in this instance. Kram’s (1988) identification of career functions and psychosocial functions is more directly helpful in creating a distinction between the more usual concept of mentoring (heavy on the career functions which are about experience, knowledge, seniority, networks and so forth) and Athenic mentoring (heavy on psychosocial functions that are about mutual encounter). In commenting on the latter, Baum (1992) made the point that when they are the focus of a relationship it will then include intense emotional content and the ‘risk’ of self-transformation and development for both individuals. He too made a distinction between ‘instrumental’ mentoring which he classifies as having a focus on cognitive learning and a more loving, intimate and risky interaction:

...intense, emotional relationship in which the protege is not only interested in learning about work but also willing to become a new person. The mentor will engage a younger person so intimately because the mentor, too, can and wants to develop, by passing on some of him-or herself to the next generation (Baum 1992, p.224).

Baum went on to suggest that it is possible that this represents a more complete description of mentoring because any human relationship has emotional components and mentoring should not be an exception. However, he made this suggestion in the context of elaborating the negative consequences (for example, sexual involvement, exploitation, aggression and
abuse of power) that can arise from mentoring. Phillips-Jones (1982) also highlighted this emotional intensity, likening it to falling in love, but also pointing out that if there is a falling out this can lead to feelings of frustration, anger and even depression.

And there have been other writers who have acknowledged that a human encounter is playing out in mentoring. It has been suggested that it is friendly, affectionate and intimate (Missirian 1982; Collins 1983; Hunt & Michael 1983; Burke 1984; Clawson & Kram 1984). Mentees also report feeling that they are somehow special, valued and worthy of attention (Collins 1983; Burke 1984; Kram 1985b).

Appelbaum, Ritchie and Shapiro (1994, p.8) asserted that ‘[m]entoring is an unselfish process.’ They also emphasised that it needs to be voluntary. This voluntary aspect has appeared in the work of many others (see, for example, Gehrke & Kay 1984; Gray & Gray 1985; Colwell 1998). While I had certainly concluded that this was a precondition for Athenic mentoring to take place, as both the data from others and my own experience indicated, it was not until the instant of writing this that I made the connection that ‘voluntary’ means being free to take part or not and as such it is something which goes to the heart of a person’s Being. Lack of freedom to choose whether one is ‘in’ or ‘out’ – and the conditions under which one is ‘in’ – will curtail the possibility of Athenic mentoring. Understandably, the fundamental aspects of Being associated with gender and race have been largely dealt with in the literature in relation to issues of power and, most tellingly, power imbalance – (Missirian 1982; Collins 1983; Auster 1984; Clawson & Kram 1984;

Eby, McManus, Simon and Russel (2000) who undertook research to develop a taxonomy of negative mentoring experiences, report that rivalry, sexual tension and abuse of power (not surprisingly) can all impact heavily on the quality of mentoring.

Recently, Laing, Tracy and Taylor (2002) undertook an empirical study of young women in mentoring relationships using an instrument they developed – Relational Health Index-Mentor – to study the growth-fostering qualities of the relationships, what they described as ‘the active ingredients of mentoring relationships’ (p.274):

…mutual engagement as defined by perceived mutual involvement, commitment, and attunement to the relationship, authenticity (the process of acquiring knowledge of self and the other and feeling free to be genuine in the context of the relationship), and empowerment (the experience of feeling personally strengthened, encouraged, and inspired to take action (Laing, Tracy & Taylor 2002, p.272).

This study focused on aspects that resonate for me as components of Being and reported that these components are very important in the achievement of developmental outcomes.

Another recent study (Darling, Hamilton & Toyokawa 2002), this time comparing naturally occurring mentoring of adolescents in Japan with mentoring of adolescents in the United States, found that four of the questionnaire items were common to both countries:

“I learned how to do things by watching this person do them”; “I acquired knowledge, information, or skills from this person”; “I got a lot of my values from
this person”; and “This person served as a role model of achievement for me” (Darling, Hamilton & Toyokawa 2002, p.253).

These items were used to build a measure of mentoring – that is, the researchers used them to determine if mentoring had or had not taken place. I would argue that the first item is focused on Doing, the second deals with Knowing, while the third and fourth are about Being.

In their classic work Levinson et al. (1978) touched on an aspect of Being that is only very obliquely referred to by others, and then only in the sense of career advancement. Their ‘Dream’ is a representation of ‘What I can become’ that is an intrinsic part of Being. In their work Levinson and his colleagues returned to it again and again and yet the importance they gave it seems to have been missed in the work of the researchers who followed in their footsteps.

**Going back in time**

At the end of my revisiting of the contemporary literature, I felt better able to ‘make sense’ of it, using the framework of Doing, Knowing and Being and my framing of Athenic mentoring. However I found that something was not quite right. There was something about much of the language that didn’t quite do justice to what I intuitively imagined or ‘had in mind’ when I used the term Being; and that did not begin to describe the dynamic of two people engaging at the level of Being in the context of mentoring.

I eventually ‘found my way back’ (yet again) to cues I had been given, but not responded to, earlier in my thesis journey – and to literature that also was from ‘way back when’. In engaging with that literature, I not only found
richer ways of understanding and describing the key constructs of Athenic mentoring, but I also started to get answers to some other critical questions – questions like, what are the conditions under which Athenic mentoring happens? Can I make it happen? Can I ‘learn’ to do it?

Early in the research journey I had had one of those ‘corridor conversations’ with someone at a management development workshop we were collaborating on. I had mentioned I was a PhD candidate and he had asked me what my topic was. On finding out my area of interest he said, ‘Martin Buber. I and Thou. That book had more impact on me than anything else. Are you familiar with it?’ When I answered that I wasn’t, he was adamant that I should read it. It took me some time to track it down as it was out of print, but eventually I found it.

Buber’s (1996) contention is that we see the world in two ways and that how we see the world powerfully shapes who we are. He outlines his thesis in a complicated and elaborate way that does not lend itself to trite summary so I will use his own words.

The world is twofold for man (sic) in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words he can speak. The basic words are not single words but word pairs. One basic word is the word pair I-You. The other basic word is the word pair I-It; but this basic word is not changed when He or She takes the place of It. Thus the I of man is also twofold. For the I of the basic word I-You is different from that in the basic word I-It. (Buber 1996, p.53).

He went on to make it clear that he is talking about relationship, emphasising that I-It does not involve the whole being, but I-You does – and
the simple logic of this is that one does not have relationships with things that are seen as ‘objects’ (I-It).

The implication is that if a person deals with others as if they were objects, they are objectifying themselves as well. Whereas by treating someone else as ‘You’ the person connects both with the other and themselves at the being level.

In the end, the singular ‘take out’ for me was that we cannot treat others as objects. If we do there is no hope of having a relationship with them. And having a relationship is the key to human development and individuation – because we cannot do this sort of work on our own.

The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one’s whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter (Buber 1996, p.62).

In the beginning is the relation (Buber 1996, p.69).

To have encounter with another, Buber says that I must bring my being into contact with another’s in the present. In that way the reciprocity that is relationship can help us to achieve ‘true personal life’. And so, ‘persons appear by entering into relation to other persons’ (Buber 1996, p.112). I discovered that Carl Rogers had drawn directly on Buber’s thinking in his own framing of therapeutic encounter.

In these moments there is, to borrow Buber’s phrase, a real “I-Thou” relationship, a timeless living in the experience which is between the client and me. It is at the opposite pole from seeing the client, or myself, as an object. It is the height of personal subjectivity (Rogers 1996, p.202).

20 Despite its title being I and Thou the modern translation I read uses You instead of Thou throughout the text.
This idea of relationship and ‘being there’ for oneself and for the client runs like a torrent through Rogers’ work as the key way to help the client learn and so to change transformationally. While *Athenic mentoring* is not a designed, deliberate therapeutic encounter, it shares with it this notion of deep, transformational learning and also the ways it comes about.

In describing the process Rogers touches on all the elements of *Athenic mentoring*: *Doing, Knowing* and *Being*.

I am often aware of the fact that I do not *know*, cognitively, where this immediate relationship is leading. It is as though both I and the client, often fearfully, let ourselves slip into the stream of becoming, a stream or process that carries us along.

...Involved in this process of becoming himself is a profound experience of personal choice. He (sic) realizes that he can choose to continue to hide behind a façade, or that he can take the risks involved in being himself.

But being himself doesn’t “solve problems”. It simply opens up a new way of living in which there is more depth and more height in the experience of his feelings; more breadth and more range (Rogers 1996, pp.202-203).

As I indicated earlier, I had been familiar with some of what I understood to be Rogers’ ideas of ‘client-centred’ therapy (meeting the client ‘where they are’, listening actively, paying attention with the whole of the body) and had tried to assimilate them into my work as a consultant. They seemed to work in practice and were helpful, but it was not until I began reading Rogers’ (1973;1980; 1996) work that I began to understand just how relevant what he was saying was to my research work, especially in the area of coaching and mentoring.

While Rogers originally articulated his ideas in the context of therapy, his articulation of therapy as a transformational learning experience led him to move into the field of education with a variation of his approach – ‘student-
centred’ education (Rogers 1969; 1983). At the heart of it, we see again the principles of his therapeutic encounter.

It is a type of learning which cannot be taught. The essence of it is the aspect of self-discovery. With “knowledge” as we are accustomed to think of it, one person can teach it to another, providing each has adequate motivation and ability. But in the significant learning which takes place in therapy, one person cannot teach another.

...The most that one person can do to further it in another, is to create certain conditions which make this type of learning possible. It cannot be compelled (Rogers 1996, pp.204-205).

It seems to me that while the context or trigger for deep transformational change differs, be it therapy, education or mentoring, in each case the scope and impact of that change is deeply personal. In fact Rogers (1996) referred to it as ‘becoming a person’. What is also striking about Rogers’ work is in his own direct acknowledgment, as in the passage above, that one can try to create the conditions for transformative change, but one cannot do things to others.

While there has been psychological research that has confirmed that the Rogerian approach can create the necessary, if not sufficient, conditions for transformative change (see, for example, Strupp 1996; and Luborsky, McLellan, Digner, Woody & Seligman 1997), the focus of recent psychological research has reinforced Rogers’ own view that what is important is the reciprocal dynamic between the two people involved. The research of Beutler et al. (1994), for example, suggests that it is the ‘therapeutic alliance’ that is most consistently and significantly associated with positive results. And Andrews (2001), in explaining why there is much less interest among psychologists in researching the influence of the therapist in achieving change in the client, maintains that:
...it seems to receive less interest now due to the recognition that therapeutic change is probably due to reciprocal influences rather than as a result of something the practitioner does (my emphasis) to a client (Andrews 2001, p.107).

In a similar way, in the field of mentoring Hay (1995) has described the ‘developmental alliance’ which she suggests as being fundamental to ‘transformational mentoring’.

Rogers’ thinking reconciled me to the dilemma I created for practitioners, myself included, by insisting that Athenic mentoring can play out, at least initially, for a long time at unconscious levels. It is so much easier to write about things that we can ‘do’ or ‘know’ as mentors. And we certainly do have comprehensive models of learning that capture what goes on at the levels of Doing and Knowing. For example, ‘action learning’ (Revans 1980; Pedler 1991; Marquardt 1999) is a powerful way of raising to awareness aspects of Doing and Knowing, the strategising of desired change and the taking of action. Being aware of something gives us the sense that we control it:

Transformational learning is learning at the deepest level. It is about learning to learn, and is the level a developmental alliance should target. With transformational learning mentees change their perspective, but this time they also have an awareness of the process by which they are doing so (Hay 1995, p.132).

This sounds quite a lot like what Argyris (1990) called ‘double loop learning’ and from my reading of his work assumes that transformative encounter involves the raising to conscious awareness of certain aspects of Doing and Knowing.

I am not at odds with the value of bringing material to conscious awareness, but I am prepared to stay with the challenging suggestion that Athenic mentoring cannot be planned; is not always recognised at the time and can
happen in a ‘flash’ or over a very long period of time. By definition, it is not something that can be ‘made to happen’.

What I do suggest about the ‘necessary but not sufficient conditions’ is that the transformational encounter of *Athenic mentoring* can only occur in the context of a robust ‘vessel’, to borrow an alchemical term, of relationship or encounter between two people. While this might not be a sufficient condition, I would certainly contend that it is in fact a necessary one. And a key element of that is to bring oneself authentically to the relationship – to connect at the *Being* level. This is not the only thing that one needs to do.

As well the work of Rogers contains much that is about *Doing* and *Knowing* as he tries to explain what happens in a relationship, but the *Being* element is the backbone of his work and gives us a guide to what needs to be in place if *Athenic mentoring* is to be given the opportunity to occur. It has been my experience that many people quote ‘the essentials’ of a ‘client-centred’ approach only in terms of the knowledge and skills a person needs to have and the way that they put that into action – the active listening, the congruence, the unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding. I will now let the ‘voice’ of Carl Rogers inform our understanding of engagement with another person at the level of *Being*.

...[I]t seems necessary that the therapist be, in the relationship, a unified, or integrated, or congruent person. What I mean is that within the relationship he (sic) is exactly what he *is*—not a façade, or a role, or a pretense.

...[H]e is freely, deeply, and acceptantly himself, with his actual experience of his feelings and reaction matched by an accurate awareness of these feelings and reactions as they occur and as they change.

...[T]he therapist experiences a warm caring for the client—a caring which is not possessive, which demands no personal gratification. It is an atmosphere which
simply demonstrates “I care”; not “I care for you if you behave thus and so.”

...To sense the client’s world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the “as if” quality—this is empathy, and it seems to be essential to therapy.

...[F]or significant learning in therapy ... the client should experience or perceive something of the therapist’s congruence, acceptance, and empathy. It is not enough that these conditions exist in the therapist. They must, to some degree, have been successfully communicated to the client (Rogers 1996, pp.282-284).

This much-abridged version of Rogers’ practice gives more than an inkling, I believe, of the importance that he places on the connection at the Being level. It also gives us a ‘template’ if there is one for behaving in ways that facilitate the occurrence of Athenic mentoring because at the core of the transformational change is the person becoming themselves.

It is a very paradoxical thing—that to the degree that each one of us is willing to be himself, then he finds not only himself changing; but he finds that other people to whom he relates are also changing (Rogers 1996, p.22).

A summary and reprise:

Before offering my thoughts about the further questions and issues that flow from this research, I would like to summarise and reprise the work as a whole.

This thesis has been an exploration of the construct of mentoring and its transformative power in the development of the self. The concept of Athenic mentoring has been offered and framed, in Jungian (Jung 1958;1996;2002) terms as an archetypical encounter between two people that can facilitate a significant transformative shift (metanoia) in the development of the personal and professional self. These shifts take place at the level of ‘being’ but influence the more visible dimensions of ‘doing’ and ‘knowing’. ‘Doing’ and ‘knowing’ have been articulated in terms of practice knowledge and skills (Schön 1987a). ‘Being’ has been framed in both Jungian (Jung
1958;1996;2002) and Rogerian (Rogers 1996) terms as engagement of the authentic, grounded and integrated self, in ways that may be largely and initially unconscious, but that can be taken up in conscious awareness and are ultimately reflected in overt, observable behaviours.

Cunningham’s (1988) framework of holistic interactive research has been the method that allowed me to draw on, as well as to reflect upon, my own experience in order to generate data. Within that framework of collaborative research, dialogic research, experiential research, and contextual locating, first person action research (Reason & Bradbury 2001a) has been used as a way of engaging in the research process itself, leading to a high level transparency in writing the thesis about the process of research and writing the thesis.

Written narrative and oral story-telling (Reason & Hawkins 1988) have been fundamental to the creation and analysis of the data presented. Indeed, the process of writing has been an important source of self-understanding, revelation and integration for the author. The power of archetypal story-telling – most obvious in the ancient stories of human challenge, development and triumph, such as that of Athena(Mentor), in the Greek tradition – has been particularly important and has been acknowledged and explored from this perspective. In this respect I’ve tried to follow Megginson’s (2000) advice that research into mentoring deserves and demands ‘vivid stories’.
As it turned out, I’ve also followed Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) suggestion to stay close to the data (‘ground’ theory in the data) before diving deeply into the literature, so that the researcher will be more open to the insights that the data might reveal. I must be honest, though, in declaring that this was because of my initial ‘fright’ after consulting the literature, rather than an intentional strategy.

The starting point for this research was my observation that, in the context of my work as a ‘hired mentor’ in an organisational setting, ‘turning points’ occurred that could be characterised as significant, transformational shifts in the energy and perspective of the person being mentored. While these shifts were reflected in important changes in work, choices and outward behaviour and practice, it was not obvious to me when or how the shifts had occurred. So my initial research questions were framed as: what does the mentor do that leads to this turning point? and, can this be identified so that mentors can improve their chance of achieving it in practice?

Later, the research journey itself led me to a much broader and richer framing of the research questions – specifically, as a deeper exploration of the level at which transformative development of the self plays out and the implications of that for mentoring itself. My major sources of data were the stories of ten people who have been in mentoring relationships (either as mentor, mentee, or both). My own experience was also a significant source of the data.
In its presentation, the thesis attempts to ‘track’ and make transparent the ways in which listening to and writing down the stories or others, the researcher’s own stories, engaging with the literature and writing reflective notes iterated with the construction of this particular conceptualisation of mentoring in ‘Athenic’ terms.

Both contemporary Western literature (the majority of it American) and translations of Homer’s (1980; 1998) accounts of Athena as mentor were used initially to explore the nature of mentoring. Later, the Jungian (Jung 1958; 1992; 1996; 2002) and post-Jungian (Hillman 1975; 1996) literature on the notion of the archetypes; Buber’s (1996) conception of relationship as ‘I-Thou’; and Rogers’ (1996) evocation of ‘becoming a person’ all helped to describe more richly the dynamics of Athenic mentoring – both in terms of the nature of transformative personal change and the dynamics of the relationship that facilitates it.

A major outcome of this research is the differentiation of Athenic mentoring (which facilitates the transformation of a person’s ‘being’) from mentoring that helps to develop what a person ‘knows’ or ‘does’. This differentiation will hopefully contribute to our understanding of the mentoring process, but at the most pragmatic level, will make it easier to navigate also the complex and poorly ‘mapped’ contemporary literature.

It is concluded that Athenic mentoring might not be, fully or even partly, recognised until well after it occurs and that because it involves the psychodynamic and largely unconscious interplay of one person’s dominant
archetypes with those of another, it is not something that can be easily orchestrated or arranged. This challenges contemporary notions (Burke & McKeen 1989; Murray & Owen 1991; Cunningham 1993; Hay 1995) that mentoring can be packaged, ‘commodified’ and paid for in a similar way to coaching and counselling.

In the last sections of this chapter, I would like to discuss some issues for further inquiry which flow from my framing of Athenic mentoring and to indicate where the work has left me personally and professionally.

**Food for further thought**

In reprising the work of Rogers (1969; 1973; 1996) at such length in this chapter, I became conscious that I am still struggling with the possibility of being able to define the ‘necessary but not sufficient conditions’ that need to be present in the mentoring relationship – while still acknowledging the fundamental importance to Athenic mentoring of the uncontrollable unconscious connection. This is just a remnant of the question I started with all those years ago: is there anything I can do to make it more likely to happen?

I would like to briefly explore the idea that the role of mentor can be understood as completing or starting aspects of the development of self that have not been initiated or concluded in the parenting relationship; and the possibility for being a mentor or a mentee continues throughout life, or for at least as long as there remains the possibility that a ‘Dream’ (Levinson et al.
Rogers has certainly had a strong impact on the way that I conceive Athenic mentoring and also on my practice as a consultant and mentor. Insofar as I can determine the way I want to be as a mentor, his words have been a major source of guidance and inspiration. And his words seem to have resonated for at least a number of those writing about mentoring. For example, Sinetar (1998) suggests that mentors:

...bear witness to transcendent realities. For instance, they are virtuous—good stewards of their own and the greater good. They are trusting and trustworthy—faithful to a constant set of superordinate values. They are people-lovers and unabashed lovers of life. They are empathetic and nonjudgmental—we feel that our mentors accept us unconditionally. They are also authentic. Relying on an internal compass, they figure out how to be themselves despite obstacles and shifting circumstances (Sinetar 1998, pp.4-5).

Productive mentors are congruent. They’re actually who they purport to be, and that trait encourages our congruency (Sinetar 1998, p.39).

I would dearly love to be able to say that I now always operate in a Rogerian way, but I don’t and that is part of the ‘long bag’ (Bly 1988) that I drag. Suffice to say that I now reflect more assiduously on my practice and that I attempt to ensure that I bring as much of ‘me’ as I can to my encounters. This has not been easy, but it has made a difference to the way I work and how I feel about what I am doing. My exploration of Rogers’ work served, in turn, to reconnect me with another element from my journey’s start – Schön’s (1987a) work Educating the Reflective Practitioner.

Given that I started my research very much focused on the Doing and Knowing aspects of mentoring, a work that explored ‘the elusive phenomena of practice competence and artistry and the equally elusive processes by
which these are sometimes acquired’ (Schön 1987a, p.xiv) naturally found its way onto my ‘must read’ list at the very beginning.

Schön’s notion that ‘outstanding practitioners’ are not said to have more professional knowledge than others but more ‘wisdom’, ‘talent’, ‘intuition’, or ‘artistry’ fitted well with my ideas that successful mentors knew something or did something that was not common, that mentoring had a ‘magic’ element to it, a ‘tacit dimension’ (Polanyi 1967) that only some talented and expert practitioners were able to surface and use consistently.

In his book he explores how elements of ‘artistry’ might be surfaced in professional education by using examples drawn from music, architecture, psychoanalytic practice, counselling and consulting. All of these areas have high skills and knowledge components, but it is how the practitioner puts those skills and knowledge into action that leads to the ‘master’ performance. Just as Rogers (1996) asserted that ‘becoming a person’ and developing high levels of skill cannot be ‘taught’ or transmitted in therapy or in the classroom, so it is Schön’s contention that being ‘masterful’ is not something that one person can teach another.

The student cannot be taught what he (sic) needs to know, but he can be coached (Schön 1987a, p.17).

Being ‘told’ is not enough, each person has to ‘see’ in their own terms – no-one else can ‘see’ for them. Even though Schön is talking about the fine arts here he is extrapolating to all forms of professional ‘artistry’. A performing arts professor had told me once that training arts students was about
‘helping them to go inside and find their voice’ (their *Being*) and it seemed to me that this is what Schön meant, as well.

Schön’s model of coaching is about the expert initiation of the student and has much in common with the master-apprentice model of mentoring, but his focus is squarely on developing mastery through what he calls ‘knowing-in-action’.

I shall use knowing-in-action to refer to the sorts of know-how we reveal in our intelligent action—publicly observable, physical performances like riding a bicycle and private operations like instant analysis of a balance sheet (Schön 1987a, p.25).

Paradoxically, however,

...most students do not begin with a tacit knowledge of competent designing. If anything, they are more likely at the outset to be able to give verbal descriptions of designing that they cannot produce. Only later, when they have learned some aspects of designing, can they advance by reflecting on the tacit knowledge implicit in their own performance (Schön 1987a, pp.88-89).

This exploration of Schön’s of the dynamic interplay of tacit and implicit knowledge and learning, raised for me exactly the dilemma that is implicit in my questions about ‘can you learn to do something that involves unconscious work?’

Ironically, Schön cites the practice of Rogers – whom he described as ‘a Socratic figure of our own times’ (Schön 1987a, p.89) – as being one way that the creative tension between *Doing*, *Knowing* and *Being* might play out, consciously or unconsciously, for a person who tries to create the conditions under which transformational personal change might happen.

He elicits self-discovery in others, first by modeling for others, as a learner, the open expression of his own deepest reflections (however absurd they may seem) and then, when others criticize him, by refusing to become defensive. As he expresses his own
uncertainties and convictions, emphasizes the “merely personal” nature of his views, and invites and listens to the reactions of others, he seeks to be literally thought-provoking. He believes that the very expression of thoughts and feelings usually withheld, manifestly divergent from one another, has the potential to promote self-discovery (Schön 1987a, p.92).

I am very conscious that, at the moment, these words are probably as close as I am going to get to an answer to my question, ‘How must I be?’ In the terms I first posed it, it is unanswerable. In the terms of Rainer Maria Rilke in her letters to the young poet (Hayward 1997) it is a question that can only be lived, that can only be engaged through being the question. That is an even bigger challenge for the practitioner who wants to be able to do and know what they are doing and why. It holds the same creative tension as Schön’s (1987a) framing of artistry – but a creative tension that engages the whole self, the whole person, not just the hands, the feet or the brain. It is, as Jung might probably agree, an archetypical question.

There are other questions, though, stimulated by the research that I can pose as unanswered, but not answerable. These are: is it ever possible for parents to be Athenic mentors? and is it possible for Athenic mentoring to trigger transformative change throughout a person’s whole life? The work of Erikson (1967) has outlined the beginnings of a way of connecting and thinking about these two questions.

In my own story and in my encounters with the literature, the dynamics of parenting and mentoring have been compared more than once. The perspective of the post-Jungian literature is that the notion of parent as mentor is problematic in psychodynamic terms. I found the work of Erikson (1967) very interesting in this respect. In his conceptualisation of the Eight
Ages of Man. Erikson (1967) outlined a list of ‘ego qualities’ that delineate the development of the person at each of eight key stages in life. These ‘ego qualities’ may be both conscious and unconscious. They resonate with my notion of Being in that they not only capture some of its intrinsic elements, but also they serve to highlight the struggle for growth and development that must ensue if each stage is not successfully ‘resolved’. These stages are: basic trust vs. basic mistrust; autonomy vs. shame and doubt; initiative vs. guilt; industry vs. inferiority; identity role vs. confusion; intimacy vs. isolation; generativity vs. stagnation; and, ego integrity vs. despair (Erikson 1967, pp.239-260). The implication is that vestiges of unfinished business can remain in our ‘shadow’ and that transformative change means serious engagement with that dynamic.

It is from the position of generativity that comes ‘the evolutionary development which has made man (sic) the teaching and instituting as well as the learning animal’ (Erikson 1967, p.258). And he added mentoring in the sense of ‘establishing and guiding the next generation’ (p.258).

In an ideal world, parents are able to use their own generativity to help their children in resolving the early developmental challenges they face. Erikson implied that this should be the norm rather than the ideal:

...there are some individuals who, through misfortune or because of special and genuine gifts in other directions do not apply this drive to their own offspring (Erikson 1967, p.258).

My understanding of post-Jungian psychology is that it is extremely unlikely that parents will in fact, assist all these developmental challenges. I am suggesting that the role of mentor in initiating or finishing that which
parents leave undone makes even greater sense in the context of Erikson’s (1967) theory of development. It also opens up the possibility that we may need mentors, as well as being capable of mentoring, right across our life span.

Certainly, Levinson et al. (1978) used Erikson’s propositions as a basis for framing their research. Their description of the reciprocal dynamics in action across a lifetime is worthy of note – it also acknowledges, albeit implicitly, something of the Jungian dynamic of the ‘shadow’.

Both generativity and stagnation and its opposite stagnation, are vital to a man’s (sic) development. To become generative, a man must know how it feels to stagnate— to have the sense of not growing, of being static, stuck, drying up, bogged down in a life full of obligation and devoid of self-fulfilment. He must know the experience of dying, of living in the shadow of death.

...The recognition of vulnerability in myself becomes a source of wisdom, empathy and compassion for others. I can truly understand the suffering of others only if I can identify with them through an awareness of my own weakness and destructiveness. Without this self-awareness, I am capable only of the kind of sympathy, pity and altruism that reduces the other’s hardship but leaves him still a victim (Levinson et al. 1978, p.30).

While my notion of Athenic mentoring allows for the 12 year old gang leader in the tough streets of Mexico City to be a mentor, Levinson and his colleagues maintain that a person has to be of a certain age or at a certain stage in life to be ‘generative’ and so be a mentor. That is a question that I think is very open and certainly one that I plan to return to in future research.

While in disagreement on the point of ‘age,’ I believe that Levinson and colleagues have given us a potent metaphor to associate with the notion of generativity wherever it occurs. It is the metaphor of the ‘Dream’ to which I
have referred on a number of occasions in this thesis and in ending this
section I would like to contemplate it at length.

In its primordial form, a Dream is a vague sense of self-in-world, an imagined
possibility of one’s adult life that generates excitement and vitality...

A life based upon a Dream has a special, vital quality; any other is at best a
compromise and at worst a defeat. A Dream that does not develop, or that has no
place in one’s life may simply die. In some cases the Dream is pursued through early
adulthood and then modified or given up in the forties. Pursuing a dream is risky,
since the outcome may be grievously disappointing but life without it is less intense
and exciting (Levinson & Levinson 1996, p.238).

A full, complex, mentorial relationship supports the evolution of the Dream...

Mentoring cannot be understood in purely individual terms, as the activity of a
single person. It is a relationship which the two participants conjointly initiate, form,
sustain, exploit, benefit and suffer from, and, ultimately, terminate (Levinson &
Levinson 1996, p.239).

A moment of truth: Athena appears again

Very late in the writing of this thesis, a colleague drew my attention to a
chapter of a book that had been sent to her. It seemed to be on the same
track as I was, she said. She was calling on her mobile phone and when she
left the message for me the reception was particularly poor and so I
misheard one of the authors’ names. When I got the message I thought I
should try and source the material. Searching book and library databases I
came across what I thought had to be the book in question and after a few
phone calls had ordered it to be delivered by overnight courier. The book
that arrived the next day turned out to be the wrong book, but by the right
authors.

It hit me ‘right between the eyes’: a conceptual framework that described
‘Doing’, ‘Knowing’, ‘Being’ and ‘Becoming’ in the context of professional
practice (Higgs & Titchen 2001). I could hardly believe my eyes as I scanned
the pages and I literally groaned when I turned a page and found that they had used an Aztec drawing to:

...reflect the integration of elements from everyday life and spiritual life, the mundane as well as the aesthetic, the people and things in the context of our lives and well-being, the symbols of learning, wisdom and philosophy which comprise our lives, cultures and histories (Higgs & Titchen 2001, p.6).

Had this encounter occurred much earlier in the process I would, most likely, have thrown up my arms in defeat because my first sense was that they were saying what I had wanted to say and that I would be accused of plagiarism. But on reflection, perhaps I have had protection from the goddess Athena who kept this work away from me in the ‘fog’ until I was ready and able to deal with it. I’d like to think so, anyway.

After the initial shock, my reaction was not of failure or despair, but quite the opposite. I knew that I had reached my own conclusions my way and that I had made that process as transparent as I could. If the work that Higgs and Titchen had drawn together covered the same area as I have then it was a way of ‘triangulating’ my independent work. Being able to look at the possibilities and put a ‘positive blush’ on an episode like this is a ‘perspective change’ (Mezirow 1981) indeed for me. Perhaps Athena has been around all along and somehow the process of research and writing has resulted in some deep, unconscious transformation for me.

When I examined the work more closely I found that it largely deals with Doing and Knowing in the context of practice improvement, and represents the work of a number of contributors (Higgs and Titchen are the editors, but include a significant contribution of their own). Like Schön (1987a) their work places a deal of weight on the importance of sustained reflection in the
process of ‘transforming practice’ (Titchen, Butler & Kay 2001, p.190). The contributions towards the end of the book begin to introduce the ideas that have the most resonance with what I have postulated as Being.

It should be noted that I include the idea of 'becoming' in Being whereas in Higgs and Titchen (2001) it appears to have a different meaning in that it is about the development of the person’s practice and skill base rather than the more intimate contact with the possibilities for self. As well the conceptualisation of mentoring (Ewing & Smith 2001, p.179) in the work is much more focused on skills acquisition than the development of the whole person.

When the book I thought I had originally ordered arrived I discovered that Titchen (2001b) has developed a model of what she calls ‘Skilled Companionship Relationship’. This model contains Doing, Knowing, Being and Feeling as key aspects of the container that holds the relationship. Allied with these (at the same containing level) are sensing, engaging, becoming, intuiting and perceiving. The model includes four process concepts:

- mutuality or ‘working with’ the patient;
- reciprocity or ‘reciprocal closeness and giving and receiving’;
- particularity or ‘knowing the patient’;
- graceful care or ‘using all aspects of self’ (Titchen 2001b, p.70).

The facilitative use of self is the ‘pathway’ or overarching domain of critical companionship. It is complex and dynamic, involving multiple configurations of the facilitation, rationality-intuitive and relationship domains and their interplay. It also involves interplay with the human aspects (i.e. knowing, being, doing and feeling) and with the situational aspects which are determined by the particular (Titchen 2001a, p.88).
Again, I felt very affirmed as I read about this model. While it does not deal with the unconscious dynamic that I believe distinguishes my framing of *Athenic mentoring*, I felt that my long, arduous journey had indeed brought me to ‘land’ in some sense. Rightly or wrongly, I felt confirmed as a scholar who had grounded the development of theory in the data of lived experience.

The research has had an impact on me that I am only now starting to begin to grapple with. But I know I have changed. I feel different even though I might not be able to express it right now. As I believe I have indicated in the Prologue and I would like to capture, in the moment, where I feel I am right now in relation to *Being* – much of what has changed for me that I can perceive most easily is in the *Doing* and *Knowing* domains, but it is more important, I feel, to capture the underlying *Being* changes.

As readers who have come this far will realise I have throughout my life closed up my *Being* by cloaking much of the uncertainty and ambiguity I experience. Not knowing has not been something I have welcomed or easily admitted, and this process has put me on the precipice of not knowing and held me there. As time passed I was able to admit to others where I was. I was able to open up more and more, and in more public ways.

While that may sound relatively easy and simple to others, I have found that ‘being myself’ has required hard, systematic reflection and work, and that the process of change has been slow and arduous.

Through observing others in action and listening to their wisdom, through reading, through reflecting on my practice, trying to make sense of it and
challenge it and the assumptions underpinning it I have slowly but surely evolved myself and my practice so that I am now much more able to easily bring much more of myself to conversations with others than I could previously. But it is the role of my Athenic mentors in all this that still strikes me as being the most powerful element of my developmental experience.

I have spent considerable effort and time protecting myself over the years and so consciously exposing myself to the risk of being vulnerable by sharing intimate knowledge or experience has often produced very high anxiety. My mentors assisted me with a level of unconscious work that I do not believe I could have ever done in conscious awareness.

*Being me*

For me, being authentic and genuine is not a state of being that I can create, turning it on and off as situations may require. In other words it is not limited to the context I am in at any particular time, but it is about how I live the whole of my life, about at all times accepting and acknowledging myself and my flaws as well as my good qualities.

I’m not sure how this might play out in coaching or mentoring relationships where the time together is the only experience people have of each other, but I suspect that over time it would be exceptionally difficult to maintain only a patina of authenticity in a relationship and that if that were the case, more energy would be going into maintaining the illusion than would be going into the relationship. While developed in the context of leading change in organisations it could be argued that Argyris’ (1974) observation that
humans are very adept at noting dissonance between ‘espoused theory’ and ‘theory in use’, between what is said and what is done, applies equally to any interaction between individuals in groups – even a group of two – whether in an organisational context or not and so authenticity which exists only in a particular context or is contrived to a large degree, given time, will most likely be seen for what it is – conditional and transitory.

How can I ask someone else to surface and be accepting of themselves and all their good and not so good aspects if I am not able to do that for myself? Growing to accept myself for what I am has proved to be a major transition for me. I would assert that because of the profound rejection of myself that I practiced for most of my life, the change that I have been able to bring about is a truly transformational one which has led to me engaging with life and with others in ways that would not have been possible in my previous state of being.

While I do not necessarily choose to disclose all my flaws and idiosyncrasies to the people I work with one-on-one, and while it may not be proper or useful for me to do this in any event, having a clear and visceral understanding of the struggle I have had to undergo and sustain before being able to accept myself for what I am is helpful when I am working with others. When I am exploring similar issues with others being able to be natural, to be me in the context of the saying, ‘What you see is what you get,’ has meant that I am not distracted by or putting energy into trying to maintain a contrived posture or attitude. I can simply just be me.
Recommendations and suggestions for further research

At this point I would like to offer some tentative suggestions for individuals and for organisations in terms of what they might be able to do to improve mentoring practice as well as some questions that I believe would benefit from being explored in future research.

For practitioners and would be practitioners

For those practicing or wishing to practice I would ask that you consider what I have said about the importance of Being and keep it in mind when reading the literature, especially the literature that tempts and seduces with notions that if you ‘know’ the right things to ‘do’ and put them into action everything will turn out for the best.

Doing and Knowing are important, that goes without saying, but without bringing your Being to a relationship you will not be able to connect with another at the deep level that is necessary for Athenic mentoring to even have a chance of happening. So search for and engage with yourself and your own archetypical resonance and make that available in your relationships. As well, reflect on, write down and most especially be your own story, and in that way you might be able to create the conditions that might lead to Athenic mentoring and through deep transformation help someone else be their story.

For organisations

For organisations my advice is simple: if you want to promote deep transformation and personal change in your leaders do what you are able to
do to help people bring all of themselves to work – their *Being* as well as their *Doing* and *Knowing*. And be mindful that this will not happen overnight as a result of a training intervention or ‘quick and dirty’ mentoring programs.

If having people bring who they are to what they do (to paraphrase Bellman (1990)) is *not* something you want to encourage, be mindful that it *may* happen as a result of even the most ‘commodified’ and ‘skills-only’ development-oriented mentoring program. In other words, if you don’t want Athena popping out in your organisation with unpredictable results, be very, very careful.

**For researchers**

I have indicated areas of interest for my own research in the future in this thesis and I will now make some suggestions for future study, based on what I have learned through this research.

Anecdotally, it would appear that not everyone is predisposed to either being a mentee or a mentor. What makes some people more favourably disposed to mentoring than others?

I have alluded a number of times to other cultures, especially in the archetypical context with regard to Jung’s (1958) notion of the ‘collective unconscious’. How is the archetypical nature of mentoring represented in other cultures/societies historically? Can we learn something about the nature of mentoring by studying its archetypical manifestation in other cultures/societies?
I have also drawn extensively on the ideas and work of Carl Rogers and would now ask: what can assist a person to bring more of their Being into their relationships with others so that Athenic mentoring might occur?

**Endnote**

And now it is time to stop, to put away the coloured markers, the notes, pieces of paper, random thoughts, books, articles and a thousand other things. I am done. Finished. Others have told me. I know it myself. But somewhere deep within me, I am reluctant to stop.

At the start of this thesis I offered the metaphor of weaving a carpet to underscore my concept of the process I was going through. I believe that I have managed to create a strong methodological backing and that on that backing I have woven the colours of my ideas and the patterns of my understanding. It is time to finish the weaving, resist the temptation to stall like Penelope in the *Odyssey* by going back and unpicking the parts that I feel are not good enough. I will have time enough and opportunity to weave again in the future, to add to my work if I so desire.

So now I must submit my work to the contemplation and use of others. In this process it might become a little worn, tattered and even a little muddied. Flaws that I have missed will be brought to light. This struggle to let go of my work is a struggle with my self at the deepest level and I have endured it throughout the research project, but most acutely during the past two to three weeks when my written work has come almost to a standstill. The weaving must come to an end, be removed from the loom.
which has framed it and allowed it to grow. The loose ends must be tied now lest it unravels. I know all this, but deep down something is making me fearful.

This is the chapter in which I elaborate the final elements of my best understanding of mentoring – it does not provide a neat and convenient ‘answer’ to the question I began with, ‘What is the nature of the mentoring relationship?’ Rather it provides an opportunity for me to add to the conceptualisation I have been building through the course of this thesis by outlining the metathemes in my data that I believe hold the concept and archetype of Athenic mentoring. That said, I am reminded of Jung’s (2002) caution that archetypes cannot be described and therefore any description is at best an approximation.

But I hope that what I have captured throughout this thesis, augmented by what is outlined in this final chapter, provides a description that can resonate for others. At the very least I hope that it makes it easier for others to connect with their own understandings or concepts of the mentoring archetype, whatever they are.

Learn your theories as well as you can, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of the living soul.  
Carl Gustav Jung
References

1940, Fantasia, Buena Vista, Los Angeles.


Argyris, C. 1990, Overcoming Organizational Defenses: Facilitating Organizational Learning, Allyn and Bacon, Sydney.


Bajnok, I. J. and Gitterman, G. 1988, 'Nurses as Colleagues and Mentors', Canadian Nurse, vol. 84, no. 2, pp. 16-17.


Bion, R. 1959, Experiences in Groups, Tavistock, London.


Brown, R. and Dexter, S. 2002, 'E-mentors: Connecting Caring Adults and Kids Through E-mail', TechTrends, vol. 46, no. 6, pp. 60-64.


Burke, R. J. and McKeen, C. A. 1996, 'Gender Effects in Mentoring Relationships', *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, vol. 11, no. 5, pp. 91-104.


Chao, G. T., Walz, P. M. and Gardner, P. D. 1992, 'Formal and Informal Mentorships: A Comparison on Mentoring Functions and Contrast with

Cherry, N. L. 1995, Developing Reflective Practice, PhD, RMIT University.


Clawson, J. G. 1979, Superior-Subordinate Relationships in Managerial Development, PhD, Harvard University.


Gray, W. A. 1986, 'Components for Developing a Successful Formalized Mentoring Program in Business, the Professions, Education and Other Settings', in Mentoring: Aid to Excellence in Education, the Family and the


Jones, J. 1992, 'Undergraduate Students and Research', in Starting Research - Supervision and Training, ed. O. Zuber-Skerritt, Tertiary Education Institute, University of Queensland, Brisbane.


Kuhn, T. 1962, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago, Chicago.

Kvale, S. 1996, *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research*

Interviewing, Sage, Thousand Oaks.


MacGregor, L. 2000, 'Mentoring: The Australian Experience', *Career Development International*, vol. 5, no. 4/5, pp. 244-249.


Matters, P. N. 1998, Mentoring in Australian Organisations and Its Relevance to Lifelong Learning, PhD, The University of Melbourne.


Montgomery, D. L. 1993, Critical Success Factors in Matching Formal Mentoring Pairs in Organizations, PhD., California School of Professional Psychology.


Rogers, C. R. 1969, Freedom to Learn, Charles E. Merrill, Columbus.


Willbur, J. 1986, 'Mentoring and Achievement Motivation as Predictors of Career Success', in *Mentoring: Aid to Excellence in Career Development*,
Business and the Professions, eds. W. Gray and M. M. Gray, International Center for Mentoring, Vancouver.


Appendix 1 – Reference Group trigger questions

I’d like you to think about the stories in terms of your own experience of mentoring/coaching. To help you do this it might be useful to focus on the following questions:

What fits with your experience of mentoring/coaching?

What doesn’t fit so well?

What do you find interesting in the stories?

What issues do the stories raise for you?

It’s my intention that we would talk about your responses to these questions and other issues and insights you have during the meeting.
Appendix 2 – Interview trigger questions

Interview Questions (Mentors)

Could you describe what you do when you work one-on-one?

Could you describe some examples of times when you are involved in a mentoring relationship?

Take me through one, what happens?

Have you been mentored/been in this sort of relationship? What was your experience?

What are the factors which you think make for effectiveness in mentoring?

What are the most challenging aspects?

Why do you do it?

How did you learn about it?

What are the principles/concepts/ideas/models or frameworks underpinning your practice?

How do you feel about it?

Have you done any reading/research on the subject? Who have you read?

What do you think you bring to the role?

Any comments, or things you want to add?

Interview Questions (Mentees)

Could you describe what you do when you work one-on-one?

Could you describe some examples of times when you are involved in a mentoring relationship?

Take me through one, what happens?

What are the factors that you think make for effectiveness in mentoring?
What are the most challenging aspects?

Why do you do it?

In your experience, what are the principles/ concepts/ ideas/ models or frameworks underpinning what happens?

How do you feel about it?

Have you done any reading/research on the subject? Who have you read?

What do you think you bring to the relationship?

Any comments, or things you want to add?
Appendix 3 – Informed Consent Form

RMIT
INVolING HUMAN SUBJECTS
RESEARCH PROjeCT

Please note: This is a prescribed form. It is a requirement of the RMIT Business Human Research Ethics Committee.

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT
FACULTY OF BUSINESS

Prescribed Consent Form For Persons Participating In Research Projects Involving Interviews, Questionnaires or Disclosure of Personal Information

Name of participant: ________________________________

Project Title: The nature of the mentoring relationship

Name of investigator(s): Mr Julian Lippi       Tel: (BH) 03 9885 XXXX
                                                      Tel: (Home) 03 9885 XXXX

1. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which - including details of interviews or questionnaires - have been explained to me and are appended hereto.

2. I authorise the investigator or his or her assistant to interview me or administer a questionnaire to me.

3. I acknowledge that:

   (a) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied;

   (b) The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching.
(c) I have read and retained a copy of the Plain Language Statement, and agree to the general purpose, methods and demands of the study.

(d) The project may not be of direct benefit to me.

(e) My involvement entails reading a series of no more than ten (10) papers and discussing them with a group of six other people, which will take a maximum of twenty hours.

(f) My anonymity is assured.

(g) Confidentiality is assured. However, should information of a confidential nature need to be disclosed for moral or legal reasons, I will be given an opportunity to negotiate the terms of this disclosure.

(h) The security of the data obtained is assured following completion of the study.

(i) The research data collected during the study may be published **Any data which may identify me will not be used.**

Signature: ________________________________ Date: __________

______________________________
(Participant)

Signature: ________________________________ Date: __________

______________________________
(Witness to signature)

Participants should be given a photocopy of this consent form after it has been signed.

Any queries or complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Secretary, RMIT Business Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee, RMIT, GPO Box 2476 V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is 9925 5594.
Appendix 4 – Plain Language Statement

Project Title: The nature of the mentoring relationship

Researcher: Julian Lippi, BA; Grad Dip Bus; MBus.

The project

You are being asked to take part in a research project exploring the nature and experience of the mentoring relationship. For the purposes of this project the initial definition of mentoring being used is: a “protected relationship in which experimentation, exchange and learning can occur, and skills, knowledge and insight can be developed” (Mumford, 1993). The research will be undertaken by Julian Lippi who is undertaking this study as part of a Doctor of Philosophy by research in the School of Management at RMIT.

The research will employ various qualitative research methods to explore the nature of the mentoring relationship and how that relationship can lead to change (learning) in the behaviour of either the person being mentored, or the person doing the mentoring.

You have been asked to participate in up to ten meetings with up to nine other people of no more than two hours each. Prior to each meeting, you will be given a paper written by the researcher, which will form the basis of the discussion at the meeting. You would also therefore be expected to spend some time prior to the meeting reading the paper and thinking about it.

The purpose of these meetings will be to critique and deepen the findings of the researcher and to share your experiences of mentoring. The discussions will be tape recorded and later transcribed by the researcher.

Your participation is voluntary and this will be respected at all times. You may at any time choose to withdraw from the project or to disallow the recording of particular information. Your anonymity will be ensured in the production of the thesis and in any other published material related to the study.

Further information

If you would like to discuss these research at any time, you can contact Julian Lippi on 9885 xxxx, Dr Carlene Boucher (senior supervisor) at RMIT on 9925 xxxx or Associate Professor Robert Brooks (Chair, RMIT Ethics Sub-Committee) on 9925 xxxx.

Julian Lippi