

## Pre-service teacher Antigona's human mentor story

I didn't know my mentor personally. I just knew that she was a teacher at one of the high schools [in my town]. We got along very nicely. And during our initial meeting, I realized this was going to be an enjoyable process because it was so easy to discuss things with someone who understands them, with someone who has experience, with someone who's been through so much.

I remember sitting there being scared of a teenager who had a preference for Nazism, and she was sitting across from me and telling me that things like this happen, giving me suggestions about how to react. I liked that she saw me as an equal. In teaching, [especially] in our country, adults, i.e. people older than myself, don't see me or, students [in general], as equals. Teachers see students as someone they need to mould; someone they need to basically make something out of. But when we come to a certain age, teachers don't tend to realize that we already have our formed opinions. And this was a nice feeling, like talking with a colleague and not talking with the traditional teacher that knows everything and knows better, and basically has every right opinion ever.

It was very fun. It was very enjoyable, and it was a learning experience, because my mentor outright told me, and I'm quoting, I learn every day. I even learn from the students. Every day is a new perspective. And if a person tells you they know everything and that they have experience and they have all the answers, they're lying. Nobody knows absolutely everything.

She taught me [lots], but it was very subtle. It was very, very subtle. I was talking about [the student's Nazi salute], and she just sat there and asked me: In a perfect classroom where the classroom is yours and you have all the power to make decisions, not where you are observed by the teacher, [...] what would you have done? And I started thinking, what would I have done? And I just started telling her, well, I would stop the class and give the students homework to watch movies on the topic, and documentaries, and maybe write an essay and see how their opinions have changed. And through this all, she was just smiling. And she said to me, Well, maybe that's what you should do next time.

This type of mentoring also gives us privacy because the mentor isn't observing us, and we can discuss whatever we found interesting or disturbing or problematic in class. [...] It's like talking to a stranger about something.

I also got to hear [about] the experiences that the human mentor had. One of my problems was how to deal with parents and how to deal with demanding parents. Parents who come and say: Oh, every other grade that my child has is an A. Why can't they have an A in your class? Meanwhile, their child is not showing up in class. [...] So that was interesting, to hear about what she went through as a young teacher and how she handles herself now.

Most of my teachers in high school and primary school were traditional teachers in the sense of: I talk, you listen. And when I sat down with my mentor and had a conversation, she mentioned her students having a band and them doing rehearsals and talking about things, and it [seemed] a very relaxed kind of classroom environment. And I saw that even though she was the English teacher, she was supporting these students in their musical ventures and everything else. And we started talking about students having personal problems and how to deal with them. It made me realize: Oh, I'm gonna be an English teacher, but I can also help my students. I can motivate them to do music or to pursue art. [...] Or I could help them get out of an abusive relationship, or I could help them with problems at home. I could help them with things that they are scared to tell their parents. They could tell [such things] to me and we can find a solution. It kind of erased those borders that I had in my head that I'm an English teacher. I should stick to that.

LEGEND for mentor roles:

- Model, in the sense of modelling professionalism
- Support, non-judgemental attitude
- Acculturator (not applicable in this context as mentor and mentee didn't work in the same institution)
- Educator
- Sponsor (not visible in this story, but could be enacted through the mentor pointing the mentee to resources to consider, people/colleagues to observe/chat with, conferences to attend, etc.)