

Master or Mentor?

Every wise, old, experienced Feldenkrais practitioner, as well as every newly graduated practitioner knows that there are many ways in which learning contexts are created. Our teachers and our practice affirm for us, that a clear intention is essential to create an effective context for learning. Often our intention as teachers is to pass our skills and knowledge on to those with less expertise in our field. Sometimes our intention is to explore new ideas, or to build skills together. Whatever the intention, it is essential that it is clear and agreeable to all participants. Teachers, students and colleagues all need to know which roles and responsibilities will be appropriate, in order to participate effectively in the learning process. For example, is my role to teach, facilitate, coach, question or learn at the moment? When might this change and what would be the cue to do so? How does this match with the expectations of the other participants? Do we need to negotiate a plan?

Finding the right fit

Clarity about our intention and plans is also useful as we identify those who will be best suited to learn from, and/or with us. Do we simply want to share our own knowledge with anyone who happens upon it? Do we want to facilitate others in discovering a particular skill or idea for themselves? Do we want to find others who have a shared interest and explore together? Do I want to find someone with more skill or expertise than me, to learn from? Exactly what kind of skills and expertise do I need to learn? Do I want to be challenged as I learn? Do I simply need to be heard and supported? In the Feldenkrais Method we value the idea of individual responsibility for learning, however there will be times when each of the models described below can also be useful and appropriate.

The quality of the question determines the quality of the learning

Have you ever had a client arrive, immediately lie down on the table and say something like, “Just make me feel better”? As Feldenkrais teachers we quickly become skilled at helping our clients articulate a functional request for each lesson. In fact, when we come to participate in an activity, read some text or engage in a conversation, bringing a clear question, or holding an aspect of curiosity in mind, will mean we are much more likely to discover something of relevance to us. We will be better able to make useful meaning of our experience. Without a question or context, we might have a pleasant experience, or we might be bored and easily distracted. Occasionally there might be a delightfully unexpected, blinding flash of the obvious, but this is less likely.

Choosing the most appropriate model based on our questions and curiosity, will give a better chance of satisfaction. We know that when all parts of the system are moving in the same direction, with a shared intention, the movement will be easier, more efficient, and more pleasurable.

The Broadcast: one person tells many

Sometimes, when we have made an interesting discovery or succeeded at a task, we have a desire to tell other people about it. This can be useful at times and can simply be done by writing an article, giving a talk or making a video. Feedback and interaction are usually minimal – maybe we invite some questions for clarification. The teacher sets the agenda and often the curious appear.

The Master /apprentice model: one person teaches one or a few

It has been the practice in many cultures, over many generations, for a master to take apprentices or pupils to learn from him (her). In this model, there is a clear differential in knowledge and power. It

is the Master who determines the curriculum and the process for development. The relationship is often negotiated in term of duration.

The workshop or Advanced Training: one person facilitates learning in many

In the Feldenkrais community frequently someone with advanced skills or knowledge creates an environment where those with less experience in that subject can be given instruction or demonstration, and coaching. Typically, there is opportunity for participants to practice, generate questions, receive feedback, and interact with the presenter. This model can be used to both pass on 'recipe techniques' and/or support participants in making their own discoveries in relation to that topic. The agenda is chosen by the teacher but may be responsive the needs or interests of the participants.

The study group or specific interest group: many learn together

In this context, people with a range of experience agree to spend time together, to share the tasks of finding resources, exploring techniques, discovering skills, questioning and sharing ideas. Everyone learns, but they don't necessarily all learn the same thing. Each will take from the experience whatever makes sense in terms of their existing skills and knowledge, as it is relevant to their life and practice. Responsibility for choosing the direction and focus of the group is shared.

Mentoring: one directs his/her own learning with support from someone more experienced

Traditionally in this context, it is the mentees or learners who set the agenda. They negotiate a relationship with a more experienced person in their field of interest, in which they are able to ask questions, reflect on their experience and receive support in their own journey of discovery.

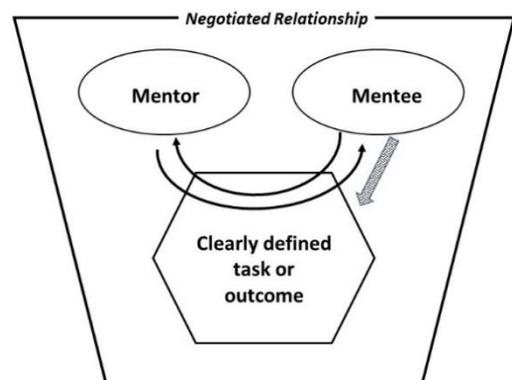
Often in our community, we hear people talking about their desire to mentor others. We also hear people saying that would like someone to mentor them. Sometime these comments come from an experience of a negotiated, facilitatory mentoring relationship, but sadly in many situations the desire tell someone *"What I think you should do"*, or the desire for someone else to *"Tell me what I should do"*, seems to be the driving motivation. When both parties are aware and agreeable to this particular kind of relationship, it works as a Master/Apprentice model and should not be confused with mentoring.

How does Mentoring work?

Ideally a mentoring program is developed with forethought, resources and supported by an effective organizational system. This means that the structure of the program can be defined, and potential Mentors and mentees can be supported in finding each other, negotiating a mentoring relationship, and learning the skills they need to make the process rewarding for both parties. Participants can be supported in maintaining the process, any difficulties can be mediated, and benefits showcased to others.

Typically, a mentoring program would be described as:

- A more experienced person,
- supporting, encouraging, and facilitating
- a less experienced person
- to manage their own learning, maximize potential, develop their skills, improve their performance,
- and meet their own goals



- within a specified period of time
- The more experienced person may not be a master of the Method but must be a master of mentoring. The mentor will need well developed skills of asking exploratory questions, active listening, taking multiple perspectives, action - reflection learning, and appreciating the implications of differences in thinking and learning styles.
- (S)he will understand that the role of the mentor is to support an exploratory process, in response to the experience and goals of the Mentee. The Mentor is able to shift mentoring styles in response to the needs of the mentee and/or the situation
- The context will clearly be constrained to professional development and will require confidentiality by both parties.
- The Mentor will use his/her process skills to ensure that the Mentee has clearly defined Improvement Goals which will guide their work together.
- (S)he may use organisation knowledge to assist in locating useful resources or introducing others with relevant knowledge or skills
- Whilst the Mentee may be less experienced in the specific mentoring context, it cannot be assumed that (s)he has inferior abilities in other areas. A Mentor is open to learning from the mentee and the mentoring process
- A healthy mentoring relationship is negotiated with specific constraints These include frequency and duration of meetings, and a process for either party to terminate early, should they desire it. It will recognise that the relationship will have an establishment phase, a working phase and an exit.

So, which model when?

Whether we are teachers, students, mentors or mentees, when we are clear about our own skills, style, intention, desires and needs in a particular moment, it is easier to determine which model will best support the desired outcome. Perhaps we can encourage each other to reflect, both as teachers and learners, so that the best options can be chosen. Developing the skills of exploratory questioning will help us all to know ourselves and each other better. Selecting a useful framework for learning, will help us move towards being informed, skilled and supportive members of our profession.

As in a *Feldenkrais*® lesson, learning to ask quality questions of ourselves or our pupils, enriches the possible outcomes of the experience.

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