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ISNN 2433-5444

To cite this article
Üstündağ-Algın, P. (2022). "If I don't get lost, I will never find a new route": Engaging with my mentee in my first mentoring session. *Relay Journal, 5*(2), 107-116.

To link this article
https://kuis.kandagaigo.ac.jp/relayjournal/issues/5_2/ustundag-algin/

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“If I don’t get lost, I will never find a new route”: Sharing with my mentee in my first mentoring session

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Abstract

This article elaborates on an online mentoring session conducted with a colleague with 17 years of experience as an EFL instructor at a university in Türkiye. Specifically, the purpose of this session was twofold: (1) to practice what is referred to as intentional reflective dialogue (IRD) (Kato & Mynard, 2016), using advising strategies and a tool called picture of life (POL) (Kato, 2017) and (2) to delve into the occurrences of positive emotions that emerged while utilizing advising strategies, which are joy, interest, and serenity Fredrickson (1998). The analysis of the excerpts from the session revealed that the utilization of advising strategies at the right time unearthed three positive emotions which serve particular functions in the mentee’s life.

Keywords*: mentoring session, advising strategies, picture of life, positive emotions*

This paper focuses on a mentoring session that I held for “Advisor Educator’s Transformation: Mentoring Others,” the fourth course offered by the Research Institute for Learner Autonomy Education (RILAE) at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS). The course aims to help novice advisors with their professional development to become mentors to other advisors and teachers. In this process, becoming a mentor is a significant aspect of supporting advisors’ professional development (Kato, 2012).

The course introduces different advising/mentoring strategies and tools and requires a conducting mentoring session at the end. As an EFL instructor, I participated in these courses to support the learners in reaching higher levels of autonomy. Additionally, I desired to attend Course 4 to observe and evaluate more about what qualities a mentor should have as a student mentorship program supervisor at my institution.

Advising and Mentoring

I assume that the most rewarding aspect of mentoring and advising is the opportunity to learn from others and gain new perspectives. Both are similar and aim to equip advisor/mentor candidates with the knowledge and skills to help learners or novices with their learning process through a one-to-one dialogue and boost their performances and potential. The difference is that, in mentoring, mentors are usually experts offering support to novices.

Therefore, mentors may share their experiences, knowledge, and suggestions to transfer their skills to the mentees (Kato & Mynard, 2016). Additionally, as an advisor and a novice mentor, I observed that while it is true that advisors can learn from their advisees and gain new insights through the advising process, the primary focus of advising is to help the advisees improve their performance to achieve their goals. Thus, I believe a mentoring session may be more prominent compared to an advising session in terms of mutual learning.

Purpose

The purpose of the mentoring session I conducted had twofold. The first was utilizing the advising strategies I learned in the advisor training courses. The advising strategies I employed, in general, cover repeating, mirroring, restating, summarizing, empathizing, metaphor, asking powerful questions, challenging, silence, and giving positive feedback. These strategies are a part of intentional reflective dialogue (IRD), which aims to help advisees/mentees have a deeper self-awareness, reflection, and autonomy (Kato & Mynard, 2016). Conducting the mentoring session online was a challenge because I had never experienced an online advising experience before. Therefore, I decided to employ a tool that would enable me to manage it more smoothly. With this idea in mind, I opted to ask my mentee to draw her Picture of Life (POL), which underpins advisees/mentees to map onto their life story and promotes self-reflection on the advisee's/mentee's professional and personal lives (Kato,2017). As an advisor, I have anchored to POL many times. I can assert that POL is a dynamic, advisor-friendly, and flexible tool based on my experiences.

The emergence of the second aim was a natural outgrowth of the session excerpts. While working on the transcription, I observed the mentee expressing strong, positively charged emotional responses. The intensity of these emotions was so remarkable that they left a deep impression on me. Based on my interest in the correlation between mentoring and positive emotions and my review of related literature (eg., Karaaslan, 2019), I opted to delve into the occurrences of positive emotions that emerged while utilizing advising strategies. The emotions I observed in this paper are joy, interest, and serenity, as Fredrickson (1998) contended that they are more concrete than other emotions (gratitude, hope, amusement, inspiration, awe, love, and pride).

Dez and I

I conducted a one-to-one online mentoring session via Zoom with a colleague whom I will call Dez (pseudonym). Dez and I are close friends, relatives, and colleagues. Thus, we already

have rapport and a mutual learning relationship. Dez has 17 years of experience as an ELT instructor and holds a PhD in sociology. Having lived in various cultural contexts across Australia, England, and Turkey, she offers a unique socio-cultural perspective that enriches her outlook on life.

Our engagement in advising started in 2019 when I first shared my experiences, feelings, reflections, and comments on advising and mentoring. Since then, we have enriched our professional development by sharing and discussing insights regarding theories and concepts related to advising and mentoring. Upon proposing Dez to be my mentee, she accepted it without hesitation. She values mentoring and believes in a close alignment between sociology and mentoring. Given our close friendship and her more experienced background, conducting a mentoring session with Dez posed a real challenge for me. I thought that these two factors would impede the mentor-mentee equilibrium negatively. However, I was able to overcome it by focusing on the advising strategies and the tool I intended to utilize, and I realized that this view was only a prejudice as a novice mentor.

Dez's Picture of life

The mentoring session was in English and lasted for a total of 40 minutes. First, I explained POL to Dez as she was unfamiliar with the tool, and asked her if she would like to use it. She agreed and asked me if she could listen to music while drawing. Then, she focused on her drawing by listening to her favourite song, Farid Farjad, a renowned violin virtuoso. During the 15-minute drawing period, I refrained from speaking and carefully observed Dez's all nonverbal clues, including her facial expressions and bright smiles, which indicated a sense of contentment and positive emotions.

Upon completing her drawing, I proposed to her to give a name to her POL (see Figure 1). Thus, she decided to call it *The Way of Freedom*. Besides, I encouraged her to reflect on POL by using advising strategies such as empathizing, metaphor, asking powerful questions, challenging, confronting, and silence (Kato & Mynard, 2016). Looking at her POL from a broader perspective, I interpreted that she was standing on the board, determined and in tranquillity, her fingers touching the waves as if they were a reflection of her free spirit.



Figure 1. Dez's POL

The Emergent Positive Emotions

Joy

Frijda (2012) associates joy with the unrestricted activation of the mind, while Lazarus (1991) uses joy and happiness interchangeably. Further, Fredrickson (1998) supports the idea that it enhances momentary thought-action repertoire, and thus expands physical, intellectual, and social skills through repetitive play. In this vein, joy may address human well-being and support exuberant discovery. The following excerpt shows how the theme of joy emerged through our dialogue, in which I utilized restating, repeating, summarizing, complimenting, and asking "what if" questions as advising strategies. The strategies used are in bolded characters and put in brackets.

Extract 1: Joy

Pınar: *I asked you why you were smiling while drawing. You said that you were dreaming of. Where exactly do you dream of yourself?*

Dez: *Right here!* (Shows the POL) *While fighting the waves, I love to fight, I have always loved to fight.*

Pınar: *Mmm, what if I want you to describe fighting using another word?* (**"What if" question to go deeper)**

Dez: (Pauses a long while) *Good question! It would be happiness.*

Pınar: *You are saying that it would be happiness.* **(Repeating to make sure the mentee feels being listened to)**

Dez: *Definitely, Don't people fight for happiness? If we look back in time, we see that all wars are fought for happiness.*

Pınar: *You think that people fight for happiness. So, do they smile like you while they are fighting?* **(Restating to change the mentee's perspective)**

Dez: *Of course not… The definition of happiness differs from person to person. I DO fight for* ***enJOYment,*** *I mean feeling the wet surfboard with my bare feet, fresh drops on my face… These are the things that make me "me" for my well-being.*

Pınar: *You are right. Do you remember posting a video of your surfing before the pandemic? You were surfing wonderfully. And yes, you had the same smile on your face as the one you had while looking at your POL. Do you think it is a coincidence or is there a connection between your thoughts and your smile?* **(Complimenting/ Linking to encourage the mentee's sense of self-awareness)**

Dez: *A-ha! Another good question. If the waves are not strong enough, generally I do plans about my future career. Let me share one of them with you, would you believe me if I said I decided to do a Ph.D. in sociology while surfing 6 years ago? And I've never regretted any of the decisions I made on the surfboard.*

The timely use of advising strategies such as restating, complimenting, and linking has surfaced how one of the positive emotions, joy, affects the mentee's well-being. Regarding the joy and well-being relationship, Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) state that joy and broadened thinking influence one another and increase well-being. In the excerpt, one of the positive emotions, joy, broadens Dez's thinking, leading her to make decisions, and envision her future, ultimately contributing to her professional and personal growth. Therefore, I can safely state that joy broadens not only the scope of her thinking but also the scope of her action.

Interest

Interest can be used interchangeably with curiosity, intrigue, or excitement. Deci and Ryan (2008) suggest that interest is directly related to exploration and stimulates a feeling of investigating, becoming involved, and creating an intrinsic motivation to have new experiences with the person or object. In this regard, augmentation in knowledge can bring further interest, exploration, satisfaction, and competence. As such, interest is critically important for personal and academic growth. The following excerpt shows how the theme of interest and intrinsic motivation came up in our dialogue. As both of us know about intrinsic

motivation due to our background and previous discussions on theories related to learning, advising, and mentoring, it was natural for us to address such topics.

Extract 2: Interest

Pınar: *Yes, I remember, the last time we spoke, you said you were thinking of doing a Ph.D. in English Language Teaching. If I remember correctly, you had a right to enroll in a university with a 50% scholarship. So what changed? I mean, you made a sharp move toward a different field; what has changed your point of view?* **(Asking questions to encourage the mentee's sense of self-awareness)**

Dez: *Surfboard.* (laughing together) *You know; I have been teaching for around 17 years. Of course, I love teaching and learning but at the time, when I looked back, I felt that different disciplines started to affect me more. I mean, it's actually about* ***INTEREST****. You know me, I'm the curious type.*

Pınar: *It seems as if you have been intrinsically motivated, have you? By the way, the situation is the same with me these days. Unlike last year, I am in a constant exploration mode and I am quite happy with this situation.* **(Giving positive feedback/ Sharing experience)**

Dez: *We are in the same boat!* ***INTEREST*** *and intrinsic motivation are the key factors, I guess. I mean, first of all, I started to take an active role in social solidarity and assistance associations. And this situation pushed me to read in the fields of sociology and anthropology.*

Pınar: *I can tell from my own experiences that there is a breaking point in such situations, do you remember when yours was?* **(Challenging/ Asking questions to encourage the mentee's sense of self-awareness)**

Dez: (Smiling) *One day, I found myself talking to the father of sociology, Augusto Comte, about positivism. The man died years ago, so at that moment I was happily surfing and speaking with a dead man.* (Laughing) *If that's not genuine* ***INTEREST****, what is?*

Challenging, experience-sharing, and asking questions helped me unearth how powerful the interest and intrinsic motivation are on Dez because the effect of personal values and interest created a new path to explore in her career. That was a sharp and brave move toward a different field to flow freely, sociology. Related to interest, Frederickson (1998) underlines that it is a motivator throughout childhood and continues into adulthood. Although Dez explored sociology for intrinsic reasons, such as becoming involved and satisfying her curiosity, this exploration had reliable outcomes on her career and professional development.

Serenity

Serenity is often associated with terms such as contentment, relief, inactivity, and tranquillity (Ellsworth & Smith, 1988; Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991). Although it may appear as if serenity is equivalent to doing nothing, Fredrickson (1998) points out that it is less physical than cognitive. In other words, as it is more strongly correlated with cognition and focusing rather than physical activity, I can assume that it is not inaction but a mindful expansion of an individual's self-notions. Additionally, serenity may contribute to self-care to restore cognitive energy for individuals. Thus, it can promote personal and professional growth by providing an opportunity for self-exploration and self-understanding. The last extract from the dialogue shows how advising strategies helped uncover serenity, another positive emotion.

Extract 3: Serenity

Pınar: *You said that you were pretty busy these days. On the one hand, you work at two different universities, on the other hand, you continue your academic studies and self-improvement. Do you sometimes say enough is enough?* **(Asking powerful questions to encourage the mentee to open up further as well as complimenting indirectly)**

Dez: *Yes, of course, You know, I am not a machine.* (laughing together) *If I turn off the tap from time to time, I don't have any problems.*

Pınar: *You are saying that you turn off the tap from time to time to avoid problems.* **(Repeating/restating to express empathy and make sure the mentee feels being listened to)**

Dez: *Definitely.*

Pınar: *So how and in what situations do you feel when you need to turn off the tap?* **(Asking a powerful question to allow emotions to surface)**

Dez: *Somewhere inside me, those little things are starting to pile up until the glass is full…*(Silence) *After the glass is full, it starts to overflow and I feel tired mentally and physically. In such a situation, I say to myself I can't do anymore…I turn off the taps quickly and start to take care of myself… A little self-care...You know, it is a kind of contentment or* ***SERENITY****, you name it.*

Pınar: *Wow! Knowing how to act when is a very valuable trait; I appreciate you a lot. You turn off the taps quickly when you need* ***SERENITY****. So, what do you do in the moment of*

serenity? I prefer to take care of my children and watch movies, what about you? **(Complimenting, repeating, asking questions, sharing experience)**

Dez: *Walking in the forest and surfing, of course. You know, sometimes I get lost, but I know that if I don't get lost, I will never find a new route. And all I know is that each time with the help of* ***SERENITY****, I can determine my new route and the steps I need to take.*

Pınar: *Your words touch my heart… What a powerful reflection? So is* ***SERENITY*** *like a compass to you?* **(Complimenting, Linking)**

Dez: *Navigation not compass* (laughing together). *Anyway, modern times are imposing on us that we have to succeed all the time. As if failure is something that should not be in our life. There is NO such thing…Sometimes we succeed, sometimes we fail. We can't be successful in every field. Failure is also about life. This is where* ***SERENITY*** *comes into play, allowing me to take a step back and see things and people more clearly. To cut a long story short, it is a healer for me.*

Pınar: *Can I deduce from all these reflections that you find YOURSELF in moments of* ***SERENITY*** *and it allows you to see the whole picture?* **(Asking a powerful question to encourage the mentee to look at the big picture)**

Dez: *This is exactly the summary.*

The use of asking powerful questions, complimenting, experience-sharing, linking, repeating, and restating led me to identify and surface another positive emotion, serenity. To begin with, I noticed that Dez was highly self-aware and resilient because she pointed out the importance of self-care in regulating well-being. Additionally, her emphasis on the healing role of serenity in her life made me reflect on my own well-being. Lastly, Dez's quote in the paper's title is evidence of mutual learning in mentoring sessions, as she changed my perspective on how serenity can be a compass to explore new paths. Thus, I can assume that serenity is like a jewel of wisdom because the more serene a person becomes, the greater their success, influence, and power for positive emotions.

Reflections on the Mentoring Session

Prior to the mentoring session, my primary concern was that the mentee and I had a close relationship, and she had more experience than me. However, by implementing IRD and utilizing various advising strategies, my self-confidence grew, and I was able to establish a more balanced power dynamic with the mentee during the session. Additionally, during the

session, I became aware that my weaknesses include knowing how to say no and when to prioritize self-care, which are the mentee's strengths. Therefore, focusing on these areas would benefit my personal growth and well-being. Further, Dez asserted that POL paved the way to jump into her past experiences and memories and increased her self-confidence as she mirrored her salient decisions.

As a dedicated advisor, my primary focus was previously on helping learners gain awareness of their learning needs and become more autonomous. However, I realized that I need to be more self-reflective and evaluate my practices to become more effective. The mentoring session allowed me to see the importance of self-reflection and evaluation in my role as an advisor. Were not self-reflection and self-evaluation the way to become a better advisor? I feel privileged to participate in this mentoring training, and I have realized that it is leading me on an exciting journey of professional development, shared learning, broadening my perspective, and promoting a holistic approach.

Conclusion

This paper centered on a 40-minute mentoring session that aimed to promote using advising strategies. I used a tool called picture of life (POL), which I found particularly useful in facilitating a deeper level of reflection for the mentee during online sessions. The analysis of the excerpts from the session revealed that using advising techniques and POL was beneficial in enabling me to discover and unearth three positive emotions. Upon closer examination, these positive emotions seem to have specific roles in the mentee's life. Joy provides a positive influence when making important decisions, interest arises when the mentee contemplates her career path, and serenity serves as a source of healing during times of confusion or uncertainty.

Acknowledgment

I want to dedicate this full paper to the person who gave me this scholarship to attend Course 4 at Kanda University and support her joy, interest, and serenity. I am also grateful to Prof. Tim Murphey for his invaluable friend *"ship"* throughout Courses 4 and 5.

Notes on the contributor

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