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An exploration of the transformational potential of supportive mentorship relationships within midwifery education and practice

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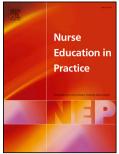
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I am delighted to welcome you as Midwifery Education Section Editor to this special issue that provides a global look at the impact and influence of mentorship within midwifery education and practice.

The term mentor has of course different meanings depending on profession, context, and geographical area but there is a commonality in the understanding of the role being that of supportive guide. The papers presented in this special edition provide the reader with a broad view of the mentorship role and use different examples and contexts of practice to demonstrate how the relationship between a mentor and mentee can enhance the learning and experience of midwifery students and midwives in practice.

There is increasing emphasis within higher education on the need to guide and support students through their degree program – enabling them not to simply attain the requirements of the degree-but to purposefully prepare students for transition into employability (Bennett, 2016; Griffith University, 2016; Smith et al., 2014). This transition process into higher education and onto employment depends on many things and factors known to support the transition and promote success include enabling the student to connect with their peers , form relationships and build resourcefulness and capability around the requirements of their degree program(Sidebotham et al., 2015).

Mckellar in her paper examining the impact of a peer mentoring scheme within a bachelor of midwifery program highlights the value of providing students with this supportive structure in order to guide their transition into university. Within the peer mentoring program described BMid students in their third year provide informal support to first year students. The First year students positively evaluated the program but It would be interesting to do further work in this space to look closely at the experience of those students who take on the role of mentor. Does this build leadership capacity, enhance confidence, affirm identity, or does it detract mentors from their studies? As always undertaking research leads us onto even more interesting questions.

The majority of entry to practice midwifery education programs – regardless of country of origin will have a substantial proportion of practicum within the curriculum. Indeed in most cases fifty percent or more of learning takes place within the clinical environment. While provision of supportive peer mentors is essential to guide socialisation and familiarisation with university processes as demonstrated by McKellar- it is imperative that the student receives adequate teaching and support in the clinical environment within a formal mentorship arrangement. The term used to describe the person who monitors, guides and assess the students' performance within the clinical environment varies across countries and institutions but regardless as to which term is used, be it facilitator, mentor, supervisor, the role is often very similar. McKellar's second paper explores best practice models for providing this supervision and support. A key responsibility of the mentor is the actual "sign off" or confirmation that the student has met the requirements to demonstrate competence within the clinical environment. Fisher et al in their paper describe a scoping exercise undertaken across the United Kingdom to explore the practice of monitoring and grading clinical practice in

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