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# Reflections on an Innovative Mentoring Partnership Facilitators and Inhibitors to Success in Faculty Development

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## Abstract

The need for more interactive, learner-centred pedagogies at Aga Khan University in East Africa led to the development of a partnership with Academics without Borders (AWB). AWB recruited three nursing faculty volunteers to provide mentorship to the nursing faculty at the three Aga Khan University Advanced Nursing Studies campuses in East Africa. As part of the evaluation and as a strategy to improve the quality of the mentoring and the project, the authors developed an action research study to identify facilitators and inhibitors to the success of this inter-cultural initiative. In this article, the authors share their observations and reflections as recorded in journal entries and postings to an online site as well as the results of a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis completed by mentees, mentors and project coordinators. Finally, the authors share their thoughts on the implications for future cross-cultural mentoring relationships at Aga Khan University and the potential for assisting others in similar relationships.

**Keywords:** inter-cultural mentorship, action research, learner-centred pedagogy, academic partnerships, teaching and learning

## Résumé

Le besoin de plus de pédagogies interactive, axées sur l'apprenant à l'Université Aga Khan en Afrique de l'Est a conduit au développement d'un partenariat avec Academics Without Borders (AWB). AWB a recruté trois volontaires de la faculté des sciences infirmières pour assurer un mentorat à ladite faculté

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au niveau des trois campus des Etudes supérieures en sciences infirmières de l'Université Aga Khan en Afrique de l'Est. Dans le cadre de ladite évaluation et comme stratégie visant à améliorer la qualité du mentorat et du projet, les auteurs ont développé une étude sur la recherche action pour identifier les facilitateurs et les inhibiteurs de succès de cette initiative interculturelle. Dans ce présent article, les auteurs partagent leurs observations et les réflexions telles qu'elles sont enregistrées dans les articles et les annonces à un site en ligne ainsi que les résultats d'une analyse des forces, faiblesses, opportunités et menaces (SWOT) menée par les poulains, les mentors et les coordinateurs de projet. En fin, les auteurs partagent leurs points de vue sur les implications des futures relations de mentorat interculturel à l'Université Aga Khan et offrent la possibilité d'assister les autres dans des relations similaires.

**Mots clés :** mentorat interculturel, recherche action, pédagogie centrée sur l'apprenant, partenariats académiques, enseignement et apprentissage.

## **Introduction**

The authors of this paper were involved in an innovative inter-cultural mentoring project. One of the authors was the project coordinator for Aga Khan University (AKU) in East Africa. The other two authors were mentors recruited by Academics Without Borders (AWB). The goal of the project was to provide mentorship to nursing faculty members in order to expand their pedagogical approaches to include more interactive strategies and to increase the level of scholarship within the Advanced Nursing School – East Africa (ANS–EA). The paper outlines an action research project developed by the authors to provide for ongoing improvement of the mentoring while the project was in progress and recommendations for future mentoring opportunities.

## **Background**

Aga Khan University (AKU) is truly international, spread across eight countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the UK. It began with a school of nursing in Pakistan over thirty years ago. Excellence in teaching and learning is one of its strategic priorities within its core principles of quality, access, relevance and impact, as it aims to develop leaders and critical thinkers to serve the developing world.

The Advanced Nursing School (ANS–EA) operates in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda where there is a lack of nurses to meet the health needs of the region. ANS–EA has been upgrading working nurses (n=2000) to the Diploma and the Bachelor of Science in Nursing level for the last ten years.

AKU's quality assurance framework focuses on the student journey. Recent internal quality assurance reviews of ANS-EA identified faculty development as a priority for improving the student experience through enhanced pedagogy, feedback, assessment of learning, and closer student-to-faculty contact.

Since 2006, the mission of Academics Without Borders (AWB) has been to build capacity in developing countries by strengthening higher education based on needs identified by the local higher education institutions. The project described in this article was a joint venture between AKU ANS-EA and AWB. The initiative focused on a mentoring programme to strengthen the capacity of AKU ANS-EA's nursing faculty for both the EN-RN and RN-BScN programs at its sites in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

AWB has a network of contacts in universities across North America and it recruited interested academics with the skills required by ANS-EA. AWB completed a vetting process of applicants, but the final decision on which mentors were chosen was made by ANS-EA. Three volunteers were selected: one to work in Uganda, one in Tanzania and one in Kenya. The needs addressed by each volunteer varied slightly on each campus, so each was selected for their slightly different skill set.

The formal objectives of the partnership between AKU ANS-EA and AWB were:

- to implement a faculty development continuing education plan that met identified needs from the quality assurance reviews of the three campuses of ANS-EA;
- to build the capacity of the nursing faculty on student-centred pedagogies, clinical teaching, effective feedback and assessment of student engagement and learning;
- to share lessons learnt and mentoring strategies for faculty development across Aga Khan University and with other higher education institutions in East Africa.

### **The Action Research Study**

Right from the onset of the project between ANS-EA and AWB it was realised that there was a need to adopt an 'elastic practice' approach to the mentoring innovation (Carew, Lefoe, Bell and Armour 2008) in order to remain open to changes in the academic development process as required and that there would be lessons to be learnt from this partnership. The initiative was therefore designed as an action research project, so that through the cycles of implementation of the mentoring, key lessons could be acted upon to improve provision through incorporation of these in subsequent cycles.

The key questions for the research were:

1. What are the challenges to implementing a cross-cultural mentoring process and how did mentors address these during the life of the project?
2. What are the facilitating factors that contribute to the success of a partnership between an East African University and the non-profit organisation. Academics without Borders?
3. What can be learnt from this experience of partnering for mentoring that would inform future endeavours both at AKU but also for other academic and education developers?

## **Literature Review**

### ***Action Research***

Action research is a qualitative research method through which individuals or groups engage in systematic inquiry into an area of their practice (such as teaching) with the intent of transforming practice for the better (Mezirow *et al.* 2000; Waterman, Weber, Pracht, Conway, Kunz, Evans, Hoffman, Smentkowski and Starrett 2010).

In action research there are a series of phases, which can be completed once or be repeated through a number of cycles. Heron and Reason (2001) describe the steps or phases of the process as follows:

- Phase 1: People/practitioners come together to explore a common area of interest and agree upon a focus and a method for inquiry.
- Phase 2: The group members become co-researchers and carry out the inquiry, observing and recording their actions and experiences.
- Phase 3: The group members become fully immersed in the inquiry process, becoming more open with each other, which tends to allow for more honest discussion of pre-conceptions or assumptions.
- Phase 4: The group shares their experiences and considers their initial framing of issues, reframing them as necessary.

The authors used the phases described to inform the design of this study. They recorded their observations and reflections in personal journals and accessed postings from an online discussion forum, which was used to facilitate communication between the mentors and ANS–EA leaders during the project. The evaluation data on the project also informed open discussion between the researchers.

### ***Cross-cultural Partnerships for Mentoring***

Mentoring has been described as ‘a reciprocal and collaborative learning relationship that develops between two individuals with mutual goals and shared accountability for the success of the relationship’ (Hnatiuk 2012:9.). Wroten and Waite (2009) note that mentorship involves purposeful activities that assist in career development and personal growth. A mentoring relationship can develop at any point in a professional’s career and often is needed when moving from one role to another or when new skills or knowledge are required (Hnatiuk 2012; Metcalfe 2010; Wroten and Waite 2009).

Keiter Humbert, Burket, Deveney and Kennedy (2011) researched the experiences of occupational therapists engaged in international, cross-cultural work experiences. Their findings highlight the complexity inherent in such experiences, which are ‘dynamic, multi-faceted and intricate’ (Keiter Humbert *et al.* 2011:306). Participants in the study emphasised the need for cultural awareness by distinguishing the difference between one’s own culture and that in the work context. Purnell (2005) also identifies that working cross-culturally requires a degree of cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. The process of developing such awareness tended to be accompanied by internal conflict, particularly surrounding a sense of how little the practitioner knew about the culture, both in the workplace and social environment.

These and numerous other factors make cross-cultural mentoring challenging, as time is a strong factor in developing the cultural awareness required (Purnell 2005). In this project, we could say that nursing mentors faced similar kinds of challenges and the time available to mentors to develop such cultural awareness was limited.

Academic work is subject to cultural differences. Allan (2010) states that different teaching approaches and learning styles can be challenging in situations of cross-cultural teaching and mentoring. Often in mentoring situations the mode of learning is based on adult learning principles, and reflection on practice is expected. Individuals educated outside the Western education system may be more comfortable with other approaches. Differing expectations can interfere with effective mentoring. Mentoring programmes should consider learning style diversity as well as development of cultural awareness and cultural competence (Allan 2010).

The nursing faculty mentors involved in this project tried to be sensitive to the varied cultural differences and learning styles while, at the same time, they strived to create nurturing environments for their faculty mentees. At times this was challenging and led to reflections on how mentors might work effectively with the ANS–EA faculty and share responsibility for the success of the project.

## Methodology and Analysis

Action research was employed to reflect on practice and address issues that arose over a four-month period. This qualitative approach was the most appropriate methodology to use, allowing for the research to be interpretive and action orientated in nature (Ellis and Bochner 1996). Early in the project the three mentors and project coordinator decided it would be worthwhile meeting regularly and sharing their perceptions of the mentoring process, evaluating the effectiveness of the approaches that were being used and making adjustments as needed. In other words, the steps of the action research process, as outlined by Heron and Reason (2001) were utilised. In order to access data from a variety of sources, the mentors and director of quality assurance kept reflective journals, contributed to an online discussion forum and discussed their experiences at regular review meetings. To augment the data collected through these actions a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis was completed at the mid-point in the project.

The mentors were three nursing faculty members from two universities in Canada and one from the United States of America. Each came with experience of action research and extensive teaching experience as well as being well grounded in community development theory and action. One of the mentors had previous experience of working in East Africa. The article is authored by two of the mentors and the director of quality assurance at AKU who also had experience with action research and teaching experience.

1. Reflective journals: Each mentor and the project coordinators (academic heads from each ANS–EA campus and the director of quality assurance, who was the primary coordinator of the project) kept a reflective journal in which they wrote, on average, once a week to reflect on how the implementation was progressing and identifying challenges to and successes of faculty development. Each mentor was working with five to eight faculty members. The reflections were brought to the review meetings (see below) for discussion. Later, the journals were analysed for themes in order to address the research questions
2. Online discussion forums: The three mentors and four project coordinators participated in online discussions, reflecting on barriers or facilitators to the mentoring programme. These were documented on MOODLE (an e-learning platform) and provided a useful source of data to review when identifying themes in the journals, as they provided ongoing documentation during the implementation processes.
3. Review meetings: These were held every two weeks to review progress, share lessons learned across the three countries and identify next steps. The three mentors and project coordinators participated. The meeting

notes were documented, uploaded to the MOODLE site and aided in the reflective process as well as providing a record of decisions and suggestions that were made. Throughout these discussions mentors were supported to make adjustments to their mentoring approach by faculty members. Any adjustments to the approaches used could then be discussed at later review meetings and became part of an ongoing cycle of action, reflection and adjustment.

4. SWOT analysis: A midterm participatory review, which included strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis, was conducted with mentors (three), mentees (20) and the project coordinators (four). This process identified the strengths, challenges, facilitating factors and inhibiting factors as perceived by each group of participants in the project and, when used to complement the journal reflections allowed for further adaptations to the mentoring process in the final two months of the project.

As noted a process of reflection upon actions taken was used to make adjustments to the mentoring process as the project progressed. However a final analysis of data was accomplished towards the end of the project in order to make recommendations on the lessons learned throughout the project. A mixed method approach was used to triangulate data. Triangulation is used to investigate a phenomenon from different perspectives adding to the robustness of conclusions drawn through qualitative means. This may be done by triangulation of data, investigator triangulation, triangulation of theories and methodological triangulation (Rogers, Sharp and Preece 2011) as employed in this study.

Each mentor/manager identified themes from their own journal. The online discussions and meeting notes, as well as the SWOT analysis were analysed for themes by the authors of this article. Themes were identified and compared with those arising from the journals. From this analysis the facilitating and inhibiting factors to the success of the mentoring programme were derived. In order to reduce repetition, the themes found in the online forum postings and the review team meeting notes have not been described separately in this paper as they mirror the ideas and tensions noted elsewhere. The language style of the authors is preserved in the reporting of their journal themes below.

### **AKU representative – My Journal: Reflecting on Reflections**

It appears, in terms of managing the AWB mentoring initiative, that there were facilitating and inhibiting factors to the process. The themes identified were:

1. Management support
2. Ownership
3. Creating and enabling environment, including team work
4. Hand holding and role modelling.

Where an academic head did not take charge of the initiative, uptake was slower or less successful. The role of the academic leader both to support the mentor and also to encourage the mentee relationship was crucial. This juxtaposed to the perception by the mentee of the mentoring being a management-driven top-down initiative. However, once a mutual common understanding was established of the goals and purpose, mentees were keen for the mentoring to continue. The lesson learned was: do not assume that by informing management or the academic head of the goals and objectives; faculty members are well versed with these intents. The need for orientation to create buy-in and, hence, ownership is critical for success.

An enabling environment is crucial. On campuses where team work was not the working culture, there appeared to be more resistance and cynicism concerning faculty development and less openness to a peer visiting class, creating/sharing teaching plans and co-teaching. In such instances, the mentor's role modelling is crucial to break down barriers and promote best practice through example setting, including reflecting by the mentor on how teaching can be improved. The need to operate in a safe academic environment enables relationship building, critique and reflection.

Who drives the outcomes? There was a tension felt between the set goals for the initiative (faculty development on pedagogy as identified in a quality assurance review) and the outcomes mentees wanted (i.e., publication). Thus, it is important to insure faculty members are involved from the start of the project so open communication about outcomes can occur. ANS-EA leaders thought this had occurred but faculty members did not perceive this to have happened. Re-explaining the initiation and purpose of the project was required. Also matching the expertise of the mentor to the need of the mentee is important as is ensuring flexibility is built in to take advantage of both.

Before the mentoring initiative, several faculty development workshops had been conducted at ANS. Despite using micro teaching (organised practice teaching) during these sessions, follow-up observations showed little change in pedagogical practices. However, through the mentoring initiative, it was evident that the most powerful levers of change were when mentors actually role modelled a good teaching session and, even more, when they worked directly with the faculty to plan and co-teach a lesson,



i.e., handholding (see SWOT results). In so doing, faculty members were empowered as they developed their confidence in trying a new teaching method in the safety of a peer – their expert mentor. In the SWOT analysis mentees also confirmed that changes in their pedagogical practice were due to ‘learning by doing’ in a ‘non-threatening’ environment.

### **AWB Mentor #1 – Reflections: Themes from Journal Entries**

In analysing the reflective journal this mentor kept throughout the project the following themes were identified:

1. Relationship building
2. Competing responsibilities
3. Transformation takes time
4. Challenging the status quo is... challenging.

#### ***Relationship Building***

It took much longer than anticipated to develop an effective working relationship with faculty members. In the early writings the mentor reflects on how her gender, ‘whiteness’ and Canadian ‘way of knowing and being’ might influence how faculty members at ANS–EA would view her and how it might impact relationship development. She feared presenting herself as superior or all-knowing.

In a variety of journal entries, this mentor noted the difficulty in trying to arrange times to attend classes or meet with faculty members. Initially, she wrote that she did not fully understand the tensions/dynamics within the faculty group. It was revealed during the mid-point evaluation of the project that faculty members believed the project with AWB to be a ‘top-down’ initiative and hence, initially, there was a resistance to working with the mentors. It was difficult to know how hard to push the faculty members to meet and work with her. She had a sense that if she demanded too much of them they would demonstrate more hesitancy and even total resistance.

After reflecting upon the hesitancy of faculty members to meet and after discussing the matter at review meetings the mentor tried a different approach with faculty members. She spent more time in informal conversations and dialogue with faculty members over coffee or lunch. The conversations helped her develop a better understanding of some of the social structures in Kenya as well as the general education system, nursing education and government oversight of education. Such evolving understandings helped her to take a new look at some of the dynamics on the team and ways in which

nursing education and nursing in Kenya were governed by certain agencies and processes. Her perception was that even pedagogical approaches were seen by faculty members to be influenced and even dictated by the rules set out by external agencies. There was so much content outlined for inclusion in nursing education programmes that the faculty thought that only by lecturing could they insure that all of it was covered. The mentor was able to begin some philosophical discussions with some faculty members regarding pedagogical approaches and adult education principles.

Journal entries reveal that, after about two-and-a-half months, faculty members appeared more comfortable with the mentor and worked on alternate teaching strategies and the action research project developed momentum. Gradually, as the mentor attended classes and clinical placements with faculty members, she felt that they came to know her better and spoke more openly about their practice. Several faculty members came to her, asking for assistance with their teaching and writing. As trust developed, team teaching was a strategy that seemed more acceptable and contributed to relationship building. The faculty members and the mentor engaged in more dialogue, providing feedback to each other and planning for the next class.

Some faculty members were very hungry for this academic dialogue with the mentor and others were not so anxious for this opportunity. Focusing their joint efforts on an action research project concerning which classroom strategies engaged students the most, moved the focus from individual teachers to the faculty as a whole and the mentor wrote that she believed that this also contributed to the development of better individual relationships and allowed for academic dialogue based on a model of shared power. The mentor noted that reflection on practice, which is essential for transformative learning, did not seem to be a process that came easily to faculty members. As a mentor it took her a long time to realise that this was not a learning style/practice that was familiar or at least reflections on practice were not shared easily with others.

### ***Competing Responsibilities***

Throughout the four months that the mentor was in Nairobi, there was rarely a full complement of faculty members present. Faculty members were away at conferences, committee meetings, courses on another campus, on vacation or sick leave and teaching on other campuses. Although these are/were bona fide activities for faculty members it did make it challenging to meet regularly with individuals or the team as a whole. In addition, faculty members reported having a heavy load of responsibilities, including teaching theory and clinical practice, organising clinical experiences and

evaluations, preparing examinations, auditing each other's examinations, marking, etc. Several times a meeting with the mentor was cancelled by faculty members, as either a more pressing meeting was arranged or not enough people attended.

The mentor, also, had a sense of competing responsibilities. The project had designated outcomes and she wrote about her responsibility to meet those outcomes. However, her philosophical orientation was noted as one of community development, transformative learning and shared responsibility. She wrote often that there was a tension between this personal philosophy and wanting to honour the aims and objectives of the project. Philosophically there was a belief that the project could only go as fast as the participants would allow.

### *Transformation Takes Time*

Inherent in the design of this project was a belief that changes needed to happen in how teaching and learning occurred at AKU. There was an identified need for more student- and/or learner-focused pedagogies as opposed to teacher-focused strategies that tended to emphasise content rather than the development of critical thinking and application of theory to practice. Such a change in focus required a philosophical shift. The mentor wrote that she often became discouraged, and on several occasions, had to remind herself that transformative learning does not happen on a set schedule; in fact, it takes time and often happens much later, once a project is apparently finished.

### *Challenging the Status Quo is... Challenging*

Several entries in the journal point to the difficulty of trying to refocus teaching and learning strategies in a curriculum that is set by an organisation outside of the university. The curriculum is very content heavy, as set by the Kenyan Nursing Council, which leads to some of the tensions experienced by faculty members: do they try innovative strategies aimed at developing critical thinkers and developing lifelong learners or do they simply cover as much content as they can in every class and pray students remember some of it? The mentor gradually became more understanding of the tensions faculty members experienced.

The mentor perceived tensions within the faculty group around competing and divergent beliefs about pedagogy and political action. Late in the project, it became apparent to this mentor that faculty members might need support in order to take leadership action and begin to influence

change. She noted in the journal that the need to develop leadership and more effective teamwork among the faculty members was pivotal in order to move forward. Teamwork began to evolve while faculty members worked on the project about engaging classroom strategies and entered into more philosophical conversations regarding pedagogical approaches.

### ***AWB mentor #2 – Reflections***

As the mentor in Uganda had to leave after two months, her journal has been reviewed and a thematic analysis completed by the other researchers. She reviewed and agreed with the analysis that follows. The themes identified were:

1. Conflicting agendas
2. Various degrees of engagement
3. Need for teamwork

### ***Conflicting Agendas***

It was evident from the beginning that faculty members often had different priorities for their work with the mentor than was intended in the original project design. The academic head, who was actively involved in developing the project design, identified a need for the mentor to work on pedagogical approaches with the faculty. However, when meeting with the mentor, faculty members often asserted that they would like assistance in writing articles and grant proposals and in getting ideas for student-centred learning. Faculty members certainly seemed more engaged when working on activities they saw as important. Some faculty members met regularly with the mentor and others did not.

Progress was made in some areas, for example, in student-centred learning. In order to engage students in psychiatric-mental health nursing (who were much more interested in doing physical assessments), the mentor suggested that students focus on how to listen to persons with mental illness (stigmatising conditions in this culture). Patients were identified who would tell the students their stories: effects of their illness on families and themselves; their comments on the health professional caring for them. Students were also able to articulate their concerns in caring for people with mental illnesses. This strategy was a great success and the faculty member vowed to continue it.

This contribution was derived in memoriam from Dr. Judith Baigis.

### *Various Degrees of Engagement*

In the journal it was evident that faculty members engaged with the mentor to varying degrees. Some were very enthusiastic and approached the mentor; others needed to be invited by the mentor in order to engage. Some faculty members invited the mentor to class and clinical experiences, but others seemed hesitant to do so. Some eagerly discussed feedback on their teaching and writing, while others were not as enthusiastic. The mentor notes that arranged meetings sometimes did not occur. Faculty members' workload and faculty members' leaving for courses and other activities off campus complicated the work and relationship building. Thus, the mentor spent most of her time with those faculty members who wanted her support and expertise, while continuing to encourage the others to become engaged.

### *Need for Teamwork*

Faculty members were often observed using innovative teaching strategies. However, they were often conflicted on how much content they needed to cover and were hesitant to move responsibility to students for covering materials. The mentor obliquely mentions that faculty members needed to work as a team so that certain approaches, such as having students read and prepare ahead for classes, could be enforced. She suggested that this approach would allow for more innovative classroom strategies focused on application of material. Some faculty members were doing this, but others needed support and encouragement to accomplish such actions. The mentor suggests that a stronger team approach and leadership development might assist each faculty member to seek collegial assistance and benefit from the innovative approaches being utilised.

### **Overall SWOT Analysis of AWB Mentoring Programme Across East Africa**

The SWOT analysis was conducted at a workshop held in Nairobi two months into the project. Representatives from the three campuses were present. Faculty members, administrators and academic heads as well as the mentors completed the SWOT analysis separately, and then the results were combined to create an overall analysis.

**Table 1:** Overall SWOT analysis

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role modelling by mentor (attitude and behaviour of mentor)</li> <li>• Action research</li> <li>• Handholding (attending class; planning lessons; immediate feedback)</li> <li>• Sharing of experiences</li> <li>• Research expertise</li> <li>• Innovative teaching methods learnt</li> <li>• Learning by doing</li> <li>• Mentors' expertise and commitment</li> </ul>	<p><b>Facilitating Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The thorough vetting process to identify mentors</li> <li>• Well-defined need to match the mentors expertise with faculty needs</li> <li>• Non-threatening</li> <li>• Confidential</li> <li>• Presence on campus</li> <li>• Institutional facilitation of initiative</li> <li>• Faculty involvement and ownership</li> <li>• Academic head involvement</li> </ul>
<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of availability of faculty members</li> <li>• Lack of time (2 months' mentoring too short)</li> <li>• Initially seen as top down</li> <li>• Slow pace of change; not meeting all outcomes</li> <li>• Mentor and management driven rather than faculty driven</li> <li>• Time required by mentors to understand culture and context</li> </ul>	<p><b>Inhibiting Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competing priorities</li> <li>• Based on institutionally identified needs rather than individual faculty needs (lack of ownership)</li> <li>• Lack of understanding/communication of the initiative</li> <li>• Lack of a team culture in some campuses</li> </ul>

As shown in Table 1, most of the facilitating and inhibiting factors, as well as strengths and challenges, identified mirror issues and tensions raised by the authors and the other mentor in their reflections and journals themes.

## Discussion

In many ways the challenges to implementing a cross-cultural mentoring process created learning opportunities and eventually illuminated the facilitating factors or key issues to consider for success. For this reason, the challenges and facilitating factors will be discussed together and will lead to an exploration of how these insights might inform further projects. The challenges were often revealed during the action research process and attempts were made to address them as the project progressed.

### ***What are the Challenges and Facilitating Factors to Implementing a Cross-cultural Mentoring Process?***

Mutually agreed-upon goals are important to the success of a mentoring project (Hnatuik 2009). The perception of faculty members at ANS–EA that the mentoring project was mandated by the administration clearly influenced relationship development between faculty members and mentors. Despite actions on the part of ANS–EA administrators to engage the faculty in the design of the project, there seemed to be a resistance, initially, to working with the mentors. Partly, this seemed related to differing agendas with faculty members often wanting to have assistance in writing and scholarship, while the project outcomes identified enhancing student-focused pedagogies. The mentors struggled with the resulting philosophical tension this created, as each came with a community-development orientation (Freire 1992; Naidoo and Wills 2009). As a result of reflection on action, in one instance the two agendas were combined when a faculty team investigated learning strategies that engaged students.

Mentoring is a complex process and both an art and a science (Metcalf 2010). It is even more complex when occurring cross-culturally. Expectations surrounding the role of the mentor/teacher vary between cultures (Wroten and Waite 2009). The AWB mentors experienced challenges in trying to understand the dynamics of the faculty teams and developing an understanding of how best to mentor in this context. Their writings suggest that it took time to develop relationships and try different approaches. Wroten and Waite (2009) suggest that gender, race/ethnicity and culture are factors that influence the nature of the mentoring relationship and are noted in some of the reflections and journal entries in this study. The mentors' non-threatening approach and their presence on campus over time were identified in the SWOT analysis as facilitating the mentoring process. The art of mentoring is illustrated in this delicate dance between pushing faculty members while not pushing so hard that relationships are destroyed.

The three mentors were committed to the project and the development of their relationships with faculty members. Each of the mentors came with a different skill set, had a different personality and was self-reflective about her practice. Their journals showed that they were willing to try different approaches based upon their reflection on how the project was progressing. Role modelling effective teaching approaches through team teaching and other teaching demonstrations, developing class plans with faculty and, providing constructive feedback were all effective mentoring strategies. These strategies are consistent with the roles for mentors identified by Tobin (2004), which include advisor, role model, coach, and confidante. Darling (1984) identifies

numerous traits demonstrated by mentors including inspirer, supporter, envisioner, teacher-coach, feedback-giver, eye-opener, door-opener, idea-bouncer, problem-solver, career-counsellor and challenger. The AWB mentors assumed many of these roles with faculty members. However, these roles are dependent upon the development of effective relationships, as noted by Allan (2010). Relationship development and mentoring effectiveness were related to the need to better understand the culture of the organisation as well as the societal culture (Allan 2010). One mentor commented on how meeting more informally with faculty members assisted her to better understand organisational culture so that she could better assume the various roles of a mentor.

At the end of the second month of the project, a workshop was organised for faculty members from each of the three ANS–EA campuses. It was important to both the AWB mentors and ANS–EA administrators that the focus of the workshop be on faculty members sharing their experiences. The commitment to this orientation for the workshop also contributed to relationship development as faculty members realised they were introducing more learner-focused strategies in their teaching; change was happening. The workshop also provided an opportunity for academic dialogue between the mentors and faculty members on a variety of pedagogical issues. Wroten and Waite (2009) note that mentoring can have a great impact on a person particularly when mutual interest, respect and trust are present. Creating a positive learning environment to address anxiety issues, and also understanding different learning styles was important to the process (Pritchard and Gidman 2010) and was a key contributing factor to the success of the workshop.

Allan (2010) notes that nurses educated in different countries may have differing expectations about how nurses learn, including expected learning styles and the degree of adult learning philosophy employed. Such differences can greatly influence the mentoring process. Reflection on practice is a mode of learning emphasised in the Western education system but may not be so in other areas of the world. Interactions with faculty members and the responses to some of the exercises at the workshop demonstrated the differences in learning styles that may be culturally influenced.

As noted above and identified by Metcalfe (2010), organisational culture also had an impact upon the mentoring process. Faculty members demonstrated varying degrees of engagement in the project. Where academic heads were able to provide leadership on the project there was more faculty involvement. It became evident to the mentors that faculty members needed to assume more leadership and ownership for their learning as well as demonstrate more teamwork in order to support each other more effectively. Such actions would



contribute to the development of more efficient ways of preparing classes and developing alternate teaching approaches, as well as accomplishing other academic responsibilities such as research and ongoing curriculum evaluation and revision. Metcalfe (2010) says that nursing, as a profession, needs its current leaders to role model and cultivate new leaders for tomorrow, underscoring the roles for mentors, administrators and faculty members.

### ***What can be Learnt from this Experience of Partnering for Mentoring that Would Inform Future Endeavours?***

The need to provide adequate time for relationship building between the mentors and faculty members is very important. It took time for the mentors to become more attuned to the nuances of the faculty teams in order to work effectively. The project design originally called for mentors to be in place for six months. However, due to the challenges in finding mentors who could commit for six months, a shorter period was selected (two to four months). Each of the mentors found that, after two to two-and-a-half months, they were developing more effective relationships with faculty members.

Careful attention needs to be given to the length of time mentors are engaged in a project. The time needs to be aligned with the outcomes envisioned for a project. Wroten and Waite (2009) assert that certain mentees may need several mentors depending upon their needs at any one time. In this project, mentors were assigned to a specific campus but, instead, the three mentors might have moved between sites in order to share their specific expertise.

Towards the end of the time that mentors were in East Africa, it became apparent that there were underlying issues or needs that had not been identified previously through the action research cycles. These might benefit from further mentoring attention. Both authors of this article (and the second AWB mentor whose experiences are recorded here) noted a need for the faculty to develop its leadership capacity and ability to engage in effective teamwork. It was challenging to get faculty members to work together on projects, partly because of competing responsibilities but also because of hesitancy to assume shared leadership roles and work as a team. There was also a hesitancy to address the political issues that held faculty members back from moving towards more learner-centred pedagogies. Such growth is important if faculty members are to work effectively with student-centred pedagogies and may require further mentoring and support. Faculty members need care and nurturing from their administration and mentors in order to develop in their practice and leadership (Wroten and Waite 2009). The activities described in this article were just the beginning of such a transformative project.

The outcomes envisioned for the project and the issues identified in the previous paragraph require transformative learning on the part of ANS–EA faculty members, mentees, mentors and administrators. Transformative learning takes time and is difficult to schedule (Mezirow 2000). According to Mezirow (2000:5), learning is understood as ‘the process of using prior interpretations to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience as a guide for future action’. He also notes that language and social practices are cultural and influence learning and knowing; historical power structures and processes can limit the ability of people to reflect and challenge assumptions concerning such practices. Power is a component of all relationships and so is a key consideration in teacher/learner relationships and, one would assume by extension, mentoring relationships. When learning to be more effective practitioners, teachers (in this case nursing faculty members) need to reflect on the assumptions that drive their practice, an often challenging and confusing task (Brookfield 1995). As suggested by Lee *et al.* (2013), there is a need for such international collaborations to proceed with humility and with understanding of post-colonial tensions in order to better appreciate the strengths of the cultural exchange.

## **Conclusion**

Although the partnership between Aga Khan University and Academics Without Borders was mutually negotiated and the information disseminated and discussed with all stakeholders, the complexity of a cross-cultural mentoring project between mentors from North America and faculty members at AKU ANS–EA was not fully appreciated. There were several facilitators and inhibitors to the success of this project. The themes identified from the journals of three people in this study indicate that sufficient time, patience, cultural sensitivity and effective communication are keys to success.

The development of project outcomes by the faculty members at ANS–EA might have contributed to a greater sense of ownership of the project. Such an approach would have assisted the mentors to work from a community development approach. In order for faculty members to move towards student-focused pedagogies, they need to develop a greater sense of their learning needs around pedagogy, taking more time for reflection on practice and assuming more individual leadership roles, contributing to more effective teamwork. Supporting faculty members in the development of their leadership potential and ability to influence change, as well as fostering effective team functioning, is important for the development of a consistent approach to learner-centred pedagogy.

Understanding the dynamics within an institution, the tensions experienced by faculty members, and the constraints of AWB mentors has assisted the University to expand to a much larger virtual mentorship project with AWB. This involves twenty-two faculty mentees from the disciplines of Nursing, Medicine and Teacher Education across Tanzania, Kenya and Pakistan working with eight educational development mentor academics in North America, including the continuation of mentoring by the AWB author. Through this virtual mentoring project AKU faculty members from a variety of disciplines are being assisted to develop their teaching and also engage in educational research.

The role of peer mentoring is documented as one of the more effective strategies in the support of teaching excellence of faculty members (Fexias *et al.* 2013; Randall *et al.* 2013). Lessons learnt from the facilitating and inhibiting factors identified in this study on international mentoring partnerships provide some ideas for consideration by others embarking on cross-cultural mentoring for education development of higher education faculties.

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