

Scholarship Spotlight: Child Care Challenges

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Abstract

Effective mentoring, involving mutual respect and collaboration, requires availability, capability, activity, and proximity. Mentorship fosters trust, goal-setting, and understanding between mentor and mentee. The author, an experienced mentor, describes mentoring Eboni Bango, whose work focuses on early education access. She addressed the U.S. childcare crisis, exacerbated by high costs, insufficient subsidies, and post-COVID daycare shortages. The article advocates for enhanced funding and policies to ensure quality, affordable child care, which is crucial for closing the opportunity gap and fostering equity.

Key Words

mentoring, collaboration, child care

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After completing a search for the word ‘mentor’ on the university’s library system, 748,442 search results appeared. After refining results and limiting them to full text, peer reviewed, and available in the library collection, the number dropped to 214,251. Finally, after inputting dates for 2014 to 2024, the number dropped to 103,827. After limiting the search to English only, the number dropped dramatically to 1,374. Simply asking *Google* about ‘being a mentor’ brought over 508 billion results! It seems that many people all around the world have much to say about either being a mentor, a mentee, and the act of mentoring. Overall, mentoring and being mentored can be explicit, implicit, personal, professional, paid, and unpaid. Mentors can be assigned based on the individuals’ roles, responsibilities, or work-related goals, personal compatibilities, and opportunities. What successful

mentoring should be is mutual respect between mentor and mentee.

Serving as a mentor is a collaborative process with a mentee. Oxford Learner’s Dictionary defines a mentor as “an experienced person who advises and helps someone with less experience over time.” I believe the phrase, “over time,” is important because being a mentor requires time spent with the mentee. Time is an important aspect and brings opportunities to build trust, to discuss individual experiences, to determine educational endeavors, to set goals, and to discover the commonalities and differences between mentor and mentee. Serving as a mentor and being a mentee requires “availability, capability, activity, and proximity” (Li, 2019, pg. 799). In a blog on mentorship, James Cole (n.d.) suggested mentorship requires three A’s: availability, active listening, and analysis. Mentors should quickly analyze the needs of the mentee,

answer questions as honestly and factually as possible, and assist in clarifying and supporting the mentees' goals and aspirations.

Having served as both a mentor and mentee before, I said yes to serving as a mentor to my mentee, Eboni Bango. I initially and unofficially met Eboni prior to her being named as an Emerging Scholar. We both attended the Texas - National Association of Multicultural Education (TXNAME) Conference at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. As often happens, we simply sat at a random table and began conversing regarding the conference and various topics. Our conversation was easy, unforced, and unrehearsed. We were two women simply sharing our thoughts. After the conference, the Emerging Scholars mentees were named and Eboni was listed as one of the individuals, so I immediately jumped at the chance to serve as a mentor. This has been an excellent choice. Eboni and I have had the opportunity to travel and present the work; we chose to focus on the National Association of Multicultural Education Conference in Montgomery, Alabama.

In the summer of 2023, we began discussion of her interests and her work. Eboni's work centers on access to early education, which is critical in helping to close the opportunity gap and foster a more equitable society. Current federal and local funding, also known as subsidies, are simply not enough to support families with limited financial resources in assessing childcare programs. Moreover, many middle-class parents, as well as employers, are faced with the exorbitant expenses of the childcare conundrum. For many parents, the high cost of childcare is akin to the cost of a college education (Child Care Aware, 2022; Weinraub, 2015). For employers, the costs are related to issues such as parents missing work or being unable to obtain or maintain a job due to the childcare morass. Eboni's article is entitled *Constructing Educational Possibilities via Childhood Subsidies: A Call to Action for Educational Access* (Bango, 2024). There is a childcare crisis in America wherein there are a plethora of issues related to the critical shortage of daycare centers, the quality of open daycares, and the struggle for parents to find both high quality and affordable

daycares. Many of the issues regarding childcare include the closing of a multitude of childcare centers, particularly during and after COVID, which led to childcare deserts, as well as the ponderous pace of federal and local policies to alleviate shortages of clientele. Additional issues include the changing rules, requirements, and procedures for opening and maintaining childcare centers, the lagging and lack of funding to support childcare initiatives, and the paucity of increased employment funding and staff for childcare workers. Given that there were 12 million children in 2019 under the age of five in childcare in the U.S. (Child Care Aware, 2019), it behooves us all to consider the costs associated with access to available and quality childcare and daycare centers.

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