



Mentoring of Hispanic Persons in Theological Education: Reflections on Distinctive Elements

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Abstract

Hispanic scholars are increasingly gaining seats at the table of theological education in the United States, yet many remain marginalised under it, seeking food and opportunities for advancement in academic institutions. This study examines the distinctive elements of mentoring Hispanics in theological education, exploring how cultural features and biblical foundations inform effective mentoring relationships within these communities. This research was conducted in the context of North American theological educational institutions, with particular attention to the emergence of Hispanic theological scholars and organisations such as AETH (Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana) and La Comunidad of Hispanic American Scholars of Religion. This research synthesises insights from educational theory, theological studies, and cultural analysis to develop a framework for understanding mentoring in Hispanic theological education. The investigation revealed eight distinctive cultural traits among Hispanics that inform mentoring relationships: passion, personalism, soul paradoxes, community, spiritual journey, *musical elan*, *fiesta*, and family. The study identifies parallels between traditional mentoring and the Hispanic concept of padrino/a (baptist parenting), showing how cultural understanding improves the effectiveness of mentoring. This study establishes that effective mentoring develops through four stages: idealisation, disappointment, differentiation, and partnership.

Keywords: distinctive elements, hispanic persons, mentoring, reflections, theological education

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Introduction

Mentoring is widely advocated as a means to support the formation of persons in widely diverse fields of professional training (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). What, if anything, is distinctive about the mentoring of Hispanic persons in the ministries of theological education? The life and ministry of Dr. Eldin Villafañe warrant consideration of this question in the light of the fruits of his ministry over many years. This ministry has included the mentoring of other Hispanic persons. In addition, the rise of the Hispanic presence in the public consciousness of the United States calls for reflection regarding this presence in both the thought and practice of theological education. Over the past forty years, I have witnessed the emergence of Hispanic theological scholars in ways similar to those of other ethnic minorities in the history of higher education. This coming of age has included the emergence of various organisations such as AETH (*Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana*) and La Comunidad of Hispanic American Scholars of Religion, in which Villafañe has provided formative leadership. One distinctive thought of the Hispanic presence has been the insistence on being equitable partners at the metaphorical table of theological offerings (Titizano, 2023). The strategy of tokenism is appropriately questioned as the means to address the potential contributions of a widely diverse Latino cohort (Camargo, 2023). The challenge of the Hispanic presence at the table of theological education is captured in a parable shared by Guillermo Cook that is applicable to North America as well as Latin America:

It is as though a large number of people were huddled under a large, food-laden table. They can smell the food, but all they see is the underside, the base of the table. Only a privileged few are seated around that table, enjoying the fullness of nature's bounty. Some are unconscious of what is happening underneath the table. Others are dimly aware of it and occasionally pass down some crumbs to those below. But several banqueters know well enough who is under the table but are doing their best – and worst – to keep things as they are. They don't want anyone to spoil their meal. Then a person enters the room. He walks across to the table. But instead of taking his place in the seat of honour, he stoops down and gets under the table. He sits with the hopeless people down below and shows them his love and concern. With him as their Head, they begin to have hope. God loves them! God has something good in store for them! They join in small groups to sing, pray, and study His Word. In time, they will be ready to come out from under the table to join the privileged few in the common meal around the table.

There is sufficient food to go around. Perhaps not enough for everyone to gorge on, but certainly to satisfy the basic needs of everyone, if those who are abundantly blessed are only willing to share what they have. But if the banqueters resist, if they resort to force to keep the others down, it might become necessary, as a last resort, for those under the table to turn it upside down – as Jesus upset the tables of the moneychangers in the temple. Of his followers, it is written, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also (Acts 17:6) – actually, in the end, to turn things right side up.” (Cook, 1988, pp. xiv-xv).

Cook’s (1988) parable has progressed in time within the United States because Hispanic scholars have begun to sit more widely at the table of theological education, though many within our community remain underneath, hoping to gain some nourishment as presented to the guests. The assumption here is that the food served is in fact, nourishing, which is a question to pose in relation to educational offerings that do not allow for and honour cultural diversity. Those now sitting at the table are called to support those not as privileged through their mentoring.

This article will consider the meaning of mentoring within the Hispanic community by exploring its roots in classical and biblical sources along with its cultural distinctives among North American Hispanics. One noteworthy comparison is between mentoring and the *padrino/a* or godparenting relationship. The ends or purposes of mentoring will be discussed in relation to partnership as modeled in the life of the Trinity. Finally, the character of mentoring by way of summary is outlined in terms of the context, persons and content of education. Mentoring can be viewed as a form of nonformal and informal education that centers upon relationships of mutual empowerment and affirmation. As such, mentoring provides a hopeful vehicle for the living of faith across the generations.

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is currently promoted as a means to develop the leadership of persons in various areas of human endeavor. These areas include business, medicine, law, social services, education and religious ministries of diverse forms. One theological school, Seminary of the East, promoted mentoring as its institutional distinctive. In some ways, mentoring is supported as a panacea for institutional approaches that have failed to develop persons with the skills

required for effective service. A suspicion of leadership persists in wider society because of immoral behavior and the trust in institutions has eroded a public sense of accountability and integrity. With such a cultural climate, the hope is that mentoring will enable persons to make a connection between intentions and realities through personal relationships that model wholeness and integrity. Mentoring assumes the ability of persons to develop trust and vulnerability along with a willingness to change. With so much invested in mentoring as an educational and formative strategy, the matter of definition is important. What is mentoring?

In her work *Mentoring in Religious Education*, Leona English (1998, p. 213) draws upon a comprehensive definition of mentoring; mentoring is a “a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development. Mentoring functions are carried out within the context of an ongoing, caring relationship between the mentor and protégé.” Where English draws upon Eugene M. Anderson (1987), quoted in Eugene M. Anderson and Anne L. Shannon (1988, p. 40). For additional works on mentoring, see Shelly Cunningham (1998, pp. 31–49); and Edward C. Sellner (1990). My preference is to use the term “mentee” instead of “protégé” to suggest a mutuality of caring in the relationship between the mentor and mentee where the mentor is a mentor-mentee and the mentee is a mentee-mentor.

Robert Kelley in his work *The Power of Followership* makes a clear distinction between mentoring and discipling. He suggests that unlike mentoring “which is an intensive one-on-one experience aimed at personal maturation, discipleship involves a body of knowledge being passed from a teacher to a group of students.” For Kelley (1992), discipleship involves embracing a paradigm, a world and life view, being one of the family, and being at home in a tradition. My own thinking can incorporate both mentoring and discipling in actual practice different from Kelley’s clear demarcations. For a discussion of discipleship, see Fernando F. Segovia (1985). For example, Jesus as a Jew in his ministry certainly passed on a new tradition that later emerged as the Christian faith and he related to his followers as disciples who could continue in his ways. However, Jesus also deeply related to his followers as persons who had distinct personalities, needs, and life trajectories for their development. My both/and

position in relation to mentoring and discipleship tends to be characteristic of Hispanic culture with the blending of what on one level can be viewed as disparate elements. On another level, those elements bring into complementary relationship elements that parallel the two foci of an ellipse that are within the same orbit and form a unity in relationship to each other.

Mentoring can be viewed as an elliptical relationship between two persons that brings new shape into both of their lives through their interconnection. The ellipse also suggests that one potential goal of any mentoring relationship is that the two persons can form a partnership where equal influence and support are experienced. Mentoring relationships can continue throughout life, but their shape and focus may change to reflect natural processes of maturing as inexperienced persons gain experience and become contributing members of the wider community. This maturation is to be celebrated as generations interface and contribute to each other's journeys. The notion of a journey is also helpful in exploring the classical roots of mentoring.

Classical Roots of Mentoring

Homer's *The Odyssey* provides the source for the name "Mentor." The themes of this classic poem serve to elaborate upon the various dimensions of mentoring. Mentor is the aged protector of Odysseus' property. In Odysseus' absence from his home while on an epic journey, Mentor provides protection and stewardship within Odysseus' household. Odysseus entrusted his house and only son, Telemachus, to an older, more experienced and wiser man. The mentor was responsible for the education and guidance of Telemachus. On one occasion, Mentor's advice saved Telemachus from death. When Telemachus sought to find his missing father, Mentor served as an advocate for him in securing a ship and crew in the effort to rid his father's house of suitors who sought the attention of his mother, Penelope. The father-like relationship between Telemachus and the wise, loving Mentor sets a standard for a supportive and nurturing relationship in mentoring. Nevertheless, the plot thickens and serves to expand upon the gender considerations beyond male categories from my consideration of Mentor.

The goddess Athena appears. Athena in Greek mythology is the daughter of Metis and Zeus, who is a warrior goddess who fought on the side of the Achaeans against the Trojans (Sutton, 2024). Athena uses her wisdom to guide Odysseus and Telemachus, disguised as Odysseus' boyhood friend Mentor

(Cassling et al., 2022). Athena advocates for Odysseus by speaking with Zeus on his behalf; she is a guide for Odysseus's projects and a resource for his needs. The mentor Athena has been described as a "soul giver" and "soul maker" because she guides Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus to find their true selves and to live with integrity. Descriptions for Athena include "self-confident and courageous, clear-eyed and strong, intelligent and accomplished, judicious and fair." She is a friend and counsellor to Odysseus and his family. Athena gives courage and confirmation, the sudden bright idea or the seasoned reflection appearing at that right moment as a true counsellor and helper to her mentees. Athena represents the ideal mentor as might be expected of a goddess, but the themes of her mentoring and that of Mentor applicable to earthly mentors include protection, stewardship, education, wisdom, guidance, friendship, advocacy, resourcing, integrity, counsel, encouragement, confirmation and seasoned reflection. These themes are also sounded in the biblical sources for understanding mentoring.

Biblical Sources for Mentoring

From the Old Testament, a number of relationships can be cited as examples of mentoring. They include Moses and Joshua, Naomi and Ruth, Elijah and Elisha, Eli and Samuel, Baruch and Jeremiah, and Samuel and Saul (Toth, 2015). In addition, the school of the prophets served to support mentoring relationships in passing on faithful spiritual and ministry traditions in Israel (Purcell, 1990, pp. 407–408). Timothy Jones (1991, p. 22) suggests that "priests, prophets and holy men and women kept the followers of God from wondering too far from the truth on their journeys." Mentors accompany mentees on their journey and provide perspective on what is encountered and what can be anticipated at the next turn along the way. From a faith perspective, the journey of Old Testament believers includes one's walk with God and the company of God's followers who travel together. It makes all the difference that one is not travelling alone in addressing the challenges of one's journey.

In the New Testament, one can cite the examples of mentoring with Mary and Elizabeth, Jesus and his disciples, with particular consideration of Mary, Martha and Mary Magdalene, as well, Barnabas and Paul, and Paul with Timothy, Titus and Philemon (González, 1992). In relation to Jesus, it may be possible to substitute the instances he is referred to as "Master" with the term

“Mentor.” This substitution serves to illustrate the depth of Jesus’ commitment to the personal development of others who sought what God intended in relation to their vocation. One’s highest calling is to be a child of God, yet becoming all God intends involves a discernment of one’s abilities and gifts in relation to the common good described in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the workings of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

The additional mentor apparent in this New Testament text is the Holy Spirit whose person and ministry serve as a model for coming alongside others in their journey (Pazmiño & Esqueda, 2019). Coming alongside others in mentoring helps them to identify and develop their gifts, services, and activities for the common good. The Spirit, the blessed Holy Spirit, is also referred to as the Spirit of Christ, whose ministry of mentoring extends the earthly ministry of Jesus (Pazmiño & Esqueda, 2019). Jesus himself, in his encounter with his disciples, who included women and men, is worthy of careful consideration in the New Testament.

Jesus’ sensitivity to mentoring is evident in the account from John 21, where Peter encounters Jesus after his three-fold denial and is restored to a relationship. In verses 20 through 23, Peter compares his future with that of the beloved disciple. Jesus delineates the paths of his followers from each other and maintains their individuality. Jesus respected the person of Peter and that of the beloved disciple, whom some have identified as John. Some forms of comparison and competition may be inevitable in a mentoring situation, but Jesus modelled a deeper concern for individuals. Jesus made explicit what God expected of each person, which may in fact differ from the expectations for others. The masterful way in which Jesus attended to each of his disciples is described in the classic work of A. B. Bruce (1971) *The Training of the Twelve*. Jesus had a unique ability to discern the particular needs and struggles of each person he encountered, and he tailored his approach accordingly. For example, his encounter with Nicodemus in John 3 differs

significantly from his interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well reported in John 4. His treatment of his enemies differs widely from his inner circle of mentees with whom he shared the mysteries of the kingdom.

One way to evaluate the impact of a mentor, Jesus in this case, is to examine the lives and ministries of mentees, of persons mentored. Matt Friedman (1990, p. 202) in his work *The Master Plan of Teaching*, he provides an account of what historical records and church tradition reveal in the case of Jesus' mentees, known as the apostles, which included Matthias after Judas Iscariot's demise: "the overwhelming opinion of scholars is that the reproduction of the Christ through their lives was no easy matter. They were forced to give their lives for their faith. Jesus was right. 'Wisdom is vindicated by all her children' (Luke 7:35). Justification for the enormous amount of time Jesus invested in these men is found in the spread of the Gospel to 'Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth' (Acts 1:8)." The account Friedman describes cites the sacrifices and deaths that Jesus' followers willingly confronted following the example of their mentor who willingly gave their life for them.

One way of summarising the biblical accounts and Jesus' model is to use the categories suggested by Laurent A. Daloz (1986) in describing effective mentoring. He proposes that mentors hold up a mirror for mentees by supporting, challenging and providing vision. First, mentors support through their care and love, which in part is captured in Proverbs 25:11: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver." The word that mentors share with mentees can be transformative by affirming the validity of mentees' experience and fostering a sense of trust and courage for the tasks that mentees must face. Daloz provides specific suggestions regarding how mentors can support mentees. They can listen carefully to what life feels like from the mentee's perspective. They provide structure for stability in times of stress or anxiety for mentees. Mentors express positive expectations regarding the mentee's ability to succeed. They share themselves as honestly as possible to mirror realities for mentees and seek to make the relationship special. In these ways, as Daloz suggests and Jesus modelled, mentors support mentees.

Second, Daloz points out that mentors challenge mentees by speaking the truth and confronting issues directly. Proverbs 27:17 captures the essence of this ministry: "Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another." Mentors do this by setting tasks before mentees. They engage in discussion that

expands awareness and perspective. Mentors also hold high standards for the mentees' performance and may pose dichotomies by opening up points of dissonance in their lives. This challenge in the lives of mentees involves caring enough to confront them and speaking the truth. In relation to Daloz's first insight, the task before mentors is to "speak the truth in love," a standard proposed in Ephesians 4:15 and exemplified in Jesus' ministry.

The third responsibility of mentors is to provide vision identified in Proverbs 29:18a: "Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint." This insight is expanded upon in Joel 2:28: "Then afterwards I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." Joel's prophecy finds initial fulfilment on the day of Pentecost as described in Acts 2, but is extended in the discipling or mentoring embraced by Jesus' followers (Elisha, 2025; Harrison, 2024). Mentors offer light in addressing the question: toward what? Mentors serve as witnesses that the journey can be made. They help mentees to look ahead, to form a dream, to sketch their own maps, and offer "a fair chance of winning through" as Mentor said to Telemachus in *The Odyssey*. Mentors do this by modelling the person whom the mentee wants to become. They keep tradition and serve as guarantors of continuity within a particular community. They offer a map through listening to mentees' stories, travels, and dreams. Mentors also suggest new language and possibilities. They provide a mirror that can extend the mentee's self-awareness through suggesting the best learning strategies and using a repertoire of methods.

In summarising these three mentoring tasks, the words of Amos Bronson Alcott are appropriate. Metaphorically, "mentoring is the shoulder to cry on (support), the kick in the pants (challenge), and the brain to pick (vision)." In the case of biblical tradition, the brain loves God with all of one's mind (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; and Luke 10:27). With the classical and biblical roots of mentoring explored, how do the cultural realities of the Hispanic community interface with these traditional understandings with their contemporary implications?

Distinctives of Hispanic Culture

The seminal work of Eldin Villafañe (1993, p. 15) in *The Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic* serves to identify cultural

distinctives among Hispanic American persons. These distinctives, named by Villafaña as “Homo Hispanicus,” provide essential insights for the quality of relationships that potentially can be fostered through mentoring. The cultural traits Villafaña names are passion, personalism, paradox of the soul, community, romerías, musical élan, fiesta, and family. Each of these traits is explored in relation to mentoring as particularised in the ministries of theological education.

Passion identifies the Hispanic commitment to express openly one’s deepest feelings and concerns. For a study of passion or pathos from a North American Hispanic perspective, see Samuel Solivan (1998). The squelching of emotion, both positive and negative, is not viewed among Hispanics as appropriate restraint when issues of life are at stake. These issues emerge each day and impinge upon all of life, so expression and deep personal investment are valued. In fact, the lack of expression may evidence a lack of honesty and integrity in dealing with matters of ultimate concern. For mentoring relationships, this suggests the need to tap into one’s passion as reflective of the very heart of God. The commandment to love God with all of one’s heart is taken seriously and finds expression in the passionate embrace of all of life. Mentoring can be viewed as the education of the heart of each person. Matters of the heart require the consideration of passion so valued in Hispanic culture.

In personalism, Villafaña (1993) suggests that “personal relations are paramount, above abstract principles and institutions.” This is an essential value as persons live in and navigate through an institutionalized world that may be devoid of consideration of individual persons and their intrinsic worth. This trait is related to the matter of respect and dignity that is afforded to each person. Ismael García in his study of human dignity notes that,

Hispanics give priority to care, responsibilities and connectedness over separation, individual achievement, and individual rights. Interpersonal social relationships cement our sense of respect for others and adherence to moral standards. We define who we are, and unveil our dignity and worth through the relationships of mutual aid we have with others. Hispanic moral conscience entails awareness of the interdependent nature of social reality and the corresponding responsibility for considering how our actions impinge upon on the lives of others. God is conceived in terms of personal relationships. We view God as a companion, a friend, a source of care, support and hope. (García, 1997, p. 17)

This cultural trait of personalism supports the establishment of mentoring relationships where respect and dignity are valued.

The paradox of the soul identifies the embrace of both realism and idealism among Hispanics as complementary perspectives. Villafañe (1993) suggests that “one can be both without confusion or confinement.” This paradox reflects the changing passions and perspectives of human life. Realities must be seen and carefully considered, yet our ideals serve as milestones for human striving as persons reach for new realities that the future can hold. Concerning mentoring, this cultural trait of paradox parallels the history of education. Mentoring itself can be understood as one form of nonformal or informal education for life. Du Bois (1989, p. 65), in commenting on education, noted that it is a “necessary combination of the permanent and the contingent – of the ideal and the practical in workable equilibrium,” that “must be in every age and place, a matter of infinite experiment and frequent mistakes.” Mentoring can enable persons to identify and embrace the paradoxes of life that include realism and idealism, but other paradoxes as well.

The cultural trait of the community of Villafañe (1993) associates with a communal consciousness that permeates all of life. Both mentor and mentee are members of religious, academic and cultural communities engaged in theological education. They are also representatives of those communities. As the more experienced person, the mentor may serve as one who initiates the mentee into respective communities, and the mentee can also serve as a bridge person for the mentor with new constituencies.

Concerning the academic communities that relate to theological education, it can help to identify, from the work of Dwayne Huebner, ten characteristics of theological disciplines that represent an academic community. Each discipline, first, is a community of persons who periodically gather and interact. Second, each is an expression of the human imagination that can encourage the playful handling of questions. The third characteristic is that each discipline is a domain of thought and expression with particular boundaries and limitations. Fourth, each discipline represents a tradition with its history and commitments over time. Fifth, a syntactical structure or mode of inquiry is embraced in the discipline that suggests the way in which the elements or pieces of life are viewed. Sixth, a substantive or conceptual structure is proposed with its theoretical framework. Related to this structure is the seventh characteristic of specialised language. The eighth

characteristic is a body of artefacts, tools, literature, equipment and journals that members of the discipline use. Ninth, an affective stance with an attitude or approach to life is embraced. Tenth, a theological discipline is an instructive community where scholars serve as mentors to neophytes who eventually become conversation partners with their own distinctive perspectives and voices.¹ Understanding the contours and dynamics of the academic or theological community enables mentors to orient and support mentees within their shared community. An issue among Hispanics is how each theological community welcomes and sustains their presence and contributions.

The *romerías* Villafañe (1993, pp. 9, 15) notes refer to the pilgrimage or journey to a sacred place that is shared with others, which can provide a place for spiritual reflection. Similar to the trip of the twelve-year-old Jesus with his family to Jerusalem as recorded in Luke 2:41-52, these journeys can be transformative on a number of levels. This was the case for my family and me when we first travelled to Latin America during an academic sabbatical from September 1988 to May 1989. To review the account of my learnings from this journey, see Robert W. Pazmiño (1994). In a mentoring relationship, the mentee and mentor can share the journey through theological education and gain perspective concerning the presence and work of God's Spirit in that very journey. Mentors can pose questions for mentees about how their spirits are experiencing the journey. Questions can also include how their spirits are related to God's Spirit. In this area, mentors explore the possibilities of spiritual direction for their mentees.

For Villafañe (1993, pp. 10-11, 15), musical *élan* relates to a sense of unity, liberation, transcendence and joy that is expressed and impressed in all of life. This *élan* derives from the African roots of Hispanic heritage and sustains a sense of affirmation even in the face of oppression and injustice. This *élan* sustains the spirit along the journey and can imbibe the mentoring relationship through the connections with the wider community and the place of theological study itself. Theological study can provide a renewable source to sustain the life of the community and provide perspective in terms of the past, present, and future. Theological study can issue in celebration regarding how God has sustained the community and promises to do so in relation to current and anticipated challenges. This is a warrant for music, song and dance that issues in *fiesta*.

¹ Dwayne Huebner, lecture at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, November 11, 1978

Villafaña (1993, p. 15) relates fiesta to a “celebration affirming that life is a gift and worth living.” Fiesta preserves the central place of celebration in life because life itself is a gift that is worth celebrating. This trait restores the place of joy that too readily is forgotten in the life of the Christian community and is limited to rigidly prescribed occasions. The spirit of fiesta embodies a willingness to celebrate on all occasions, even in the midst of suffering and loss. Mentoring can foster sensitivity to the place of fiesta and itself can celebrate the life and ministry of the mentee and what that means for the entire community. Speaking of community, Hispanic culture values its expression most directly in relation to the family.

The final trait identified in Villafaña's account is that of family. He suggests that the intimate group relations within the family provide a “sense of security, identity and recognition of accomplishments.” He associates this family sense with the ambiguous cultural trait of machismo, but also mentions the extended family trait of “compadrazgo” where persons serve as a padrino or padrina with others (Villafaña, 1993, pp. 14–15). Compadrazgo or godparentage refers to the ties of mutual commitment by which a friend becomes like an adopted family member. The compadre or commadre serves as a sponsor or mentor for the younger person in relation to a faith heritage and more generally, in relation to life. Mentoring itself can then be seen through Hispanic eyes as a form of godparenting that supports the emergence of inexperienced persons. In theological education, mentors godparent mentees into various faith families (Freeks, 2021). I hope that godparenting avoids the dysfunctional patterns that can emerge from one’s family of origin, with alternatives that model integrity and enable the emergence of younger generations.

In addition to the cultural distinctives identified by Villafaña, acknowledging the pedagogical expectations they bring may assist those mentoring Hispanic persons. Hispanic persons in comparative studies, as cited by Norman Wilson (1997), tend to be identified as “field dependent”, which means they “rely to a great degree on their peers and the surrounding environment to help make sense of experiences.” Field-dependent Hispanic persons also “tend to be more emotionally responsive and empathetic to others, as opposed to detached, aloof and reflective.” Wilson (1997) said, “Field dependency also is generally accompanied by a more holistic and visual approach to reality as opposed to solely an analytical and verbal orientation.” In mentoring, this calls for a greater

sensitivity to contextual realities and emotional factors in interpersonal relationships. Questions regarding the process and ends of mentoring relationships also need to be raised.

The Process and Ends of Mentoring

The analysis of mentoring relationships has identified various stages through which mentors and mentees pass over time. Pamela Holliman in a work entitled “Mentoring as an Art of Intentional Thriving Together,” identifies a process of mentoring as experienced by the person mentored, the mentee. She names the four stages of this process to be idealisation, disillusionment, differentiation, and peership, which might also be named partnership. In the first stage of idealisation, individuals choose a mentor during a time of transition, seeking out someone who has “done it.” A mentor is viewed very positively and the mentee identifies the mentor as one who provides safety, protection, and sponsorship to navigate the transition and to be oneself. The second stage is disillusionment when the limitations of the mentor become evident. This stage can be painful, leading to confusion and disappointment. This stage is inevitable as the mentee launches into new territory and begins to make choices perhaps distinct from the mentor’s understanding. The third stage is differentiation, when integration, growth and mourning result from a greater distance between the mentee and mentor. The mentee emerges with their own voice and perspective in becoming a valued person with their particular gifts. The fourth and final stage for Holliman (1996, pp. 173–175) is peership, or what I prefer to name partnership. A new level of mutuality is experienced, and the mentee becomes a resource for the mentor and both persons’ gifts are celebrated as colleagues (Edward, 2022). Efrain Agosto (1998, pp. 9–12, 15), who was mentored by Villafañe at the Centre for Urban Theological Education (CUME), in his study of the Apostle Paul and his mentees, describes this fourth stage when mentor and mentee become partners, friends, co-workers, or siblings in the Lord and in the Spirit. This is modelled in Paul’s relationship with Philemon. Paul modelled the ultimate end of mentoring in terms of a partnership that Parker Palmer insightfully describes:

Mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance, and one of teaching’s greatest rewards is the daily chance it gives us to get back on the dance floor. It is the dance of the spiraling generations, in which the old empower the young with their experience and the young empower the old

with new life, reweaving the fabric of the human community as they touch and turn (Palmer, 1998, p. 25).

One dance most fitting for Hispanic culture might be the *pasa doble* or literally double step. This dance is patterned after the interaction between a matador and the cape as each flows in their encounter with the bull. In the encounter that the mentee and mentor have in life with all of its dangerous twists and turns, the opportunity to work together assures survival.

Beyond the *pasa doble*, the ultimate model for mentoring can be found in the very nature of God as Trinity. The mutuality and care modelled in the life of the three persons of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, sets the terms by which to assess human interactions in mentoring (Pazmiño & Esqueda, 2019). The Trinity models a community of love and interrelationships that includes the place of individuality and personhood for both mentors and mentees. A mentee can launch into new areas of inquiry and responsibility with the presence of an advocate and the knowledge of resources accessible in the person of the mentor. Human mentors are significantly limited as compared with divine persons; nevertheless, they are a source of encouragement and can remind mentees of God's resources to meet their needs (Williams & Thompson, 2022). The life of the Trinity also suggests that mentoring relationships should be the norm with persons created as communal in the image of God (James, 2023). The ministry of "lone rangers" is not fitting for those who claim the name of Christ and seek to follow him in their vocational journeys. We need the ministry of mentors and mentees in honouring the call to become members of the Body of Christ, known as the Christian church in its local and global expressions. The end of mentoring is to reflect the life of God in our personal and corporate life together and thereby to glorify and enjoy God.

Theoretical Implications of Hispanic Mentoring Research in Theological Education

Research on Hispanic mentoring in theological education contributes to the expansion of mentoring theory through the lens of cultural capital theory and critical race theory. The study's emphasis on distinctive cultural elements challenges the universalist assumptions often found in traditional mentoring frameworks, suggesting that effective mentoring must take into account culturally responsive pedagogical approaches. This is in line with the theoretical framework

of Molina Zamora et al. (2024), which shows that peer mentoring develops cultural capital that is specifically relevant to the professional field while supporting the development of social and cultural capital for mentees.

The research contributes to theological education theory by demonstrating that mentoring serves as more than academic support – it functions as a supportive pedagogy that contributes to spiritual growth, character development, and ministry formation. This expands traditional theological education models by incorporating holistic competency development that integrates cultural heritage with professional development (Chiroma & Cloete, 2015).

These findings support the application of social identity theory in academic settings, particularly regarding how mentoring relationships facilitate identity transformation for Hispanic scholars. Kujawa-Holbrook's (2023) shows that effective mentoring helps Hispanic theology students develop a legitimate academic identity while maintaining their cultural authenticity, contributing to transformative learning theories in theological contexts.

Recommendations for Further Research

Current research will benefit from ongoing research to capture the long-term effects of mentoring relationships on the career trajectories of Hispanic theology students. Future studies should track participants through their theological education and into ministry or academic careers to assess ongoing impact (Smith, 2025). Research should also be expanded beyond its current scope to include diverse theological traditions and geographic regions to enhance generalisation. Comparative studies in different denominational contexts will provide valuable insights into how theological traditions affect the effectiveness of mentoring (Boshart, 2009).

Future research should include comparative studies with Hispanic theological education in Latin American contexts to understand how cultural and institutional differences influence mentoring effectiveness. International collaboration could provide insights into best practices across different educational systems (Ferrer, 2023).

Conclusion: The Character of Mentoring among Hispanic Persons

As noted, mentoring itself is a form of education; a form that is most often associated with informal and nonformal education. Nevertheless, mentoring is

increasingly attended to in formal educational efforts like theological education. As a form of education, mentoring can be evaluated in terms of three dimensions of education. I define education as a process of sharing content with persons in the context of their community and society. By way of summary, I will suggest what my reflections here imply for the content, persons, and context of mentoring of Hispanics in theological education. To begin with context, mentoring among Hispanics should attend to the cultural traits identified above, with particular attention to the place of passion and godparenting or the relationships of padrino/a. In relation to persons, the importance of relationships, along with respect and dignity, needs attention in the theological education of Hispanic persons. Finally, in relation to the content, the challenge is to honour the contributions of Hispanic scholars like Dr. Eldin Villafañe for the ongoing tasks of theological education among all persons and not just Hispanics. This commitment will signal the genuine desire to have all persons seated as equals at the table of theological education and sharing for the common good of extending the gospel of Jesus Christ in a multicultural world.

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