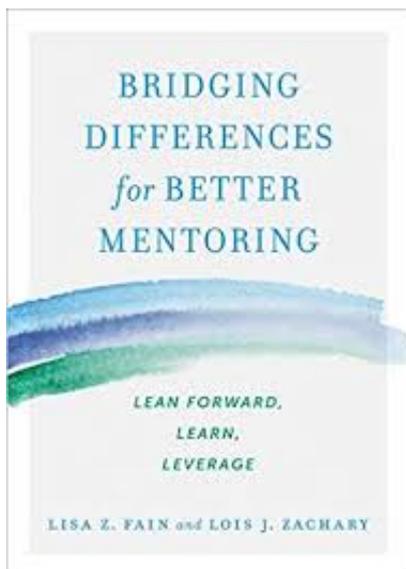# The Journal of Asia TEFL

Book Review

Bridging Differences for Better Mentoring: Lean Forward, Learn, Leverage, by Lisa Z. Fain and Lois J. Zachary, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2020, 224 pp., $25.44 (US) (Paperback), First Edition, ISBN: 978-1-5230-8589-7

This book is about how mentoring can be utilized as a powerful tool for people to go through transformational processes by creating understanding, strengthening relationships, and sharing knowledge in workplace within and across cultures. It falls into three parts and ten chapters of mentor-mentee scenarios gearing to build connections and bridge differences.

Part 1 "Lean Forward into Difference" prepares mentors and mentees' self-awareness for a mentoring relationship. By highlighting that "our differences rest between us, not within us" (Fain & Zachary, 2020, p. 1), the authors guide us to understand and appreciate the differences so that we can leverage the differences to improve our conversations and deepen our learning. In ***Chapter One: Building the Framework for Mentoring across Differences***, a four-phase mentoring cycle model is contextualized, namely, *preparing, negotiating, enabling growth*, and *coming to closure* are illustrated successively. The model prompts us to perceive mentoring as a collaborative endeavor and win-win learning relationship for both partners. However, the authors point out that there is no formulaic or one-size-fits-all mentoring relationship. Rather, mentoring relationship is dynamically shaped and pragmatically customized based on each mentoring pair's needs and preferences along the mentoring processes. Therefore, the authors challenge us to not passively "accept" differences but to actively identify them, appreciate them, and find out how these differences influence mentoring relationships and affect ways of building knowledge around culture and identity. In ***Chapter Two: Seeing the Differences between Us,*** the authors guide us to understand the meanings of Diversity (means differences), Inclusion (means the feeling of being valued, heard, and respected in the mentoring relationship), and Cultural Competence (means skills for achieving effective understanding and communications across differences). Milton Bennett's (1998) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity is introduced to underpin three steps of bridging cultural differences: taking ownership, creating awareness, and shifting perspective. It is worthy of emphasizing that the authors encourage us to adopt a growth mindset to allow difference to show up and to appreciate different viewpoints. The authors claim that developing a growth mindset is an essential step to deepen and accelerate learning. Believing that differences are bridged through adaptation rather than assimilation, the authors advise us to negotiate our differences to communicate effectively by unlocking knowledge about commonalities, diversity, worldviews, and future envisions. In ***Chapter Three: Culture and Identity in Mentoring,*** the authors advocate exploring our identity through looking at how our culture has impacted us in terms of interpersonal relationships. The authors relate their mentoring framework to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (2012) five ways of addressing interpersonal relationships across different

cultures, such as 1) Applying Rules: Universalism (i.e., the same culture apply to everyone) and Particularism (i.e. different rules apply in different contexts); 2) Role of the Group: Individualism (i.e., focusing first on individual contributions) and Communitarianism (i.e., focusing first on the community); 3) Role of Emotions: Neutral (i.e., placing more value on being detached, objective and unemotional) and Affective (i.e. placing more value on being expressive and passionate); 4) Scope of Relationship: Specific (i.e., focusing only on work-related goals) and Diffuse (i.e. requiring a broader and whole-life perspective, e.g., how to balance work and life priorities); 5) How Accomplishment is Measured: Achievement (i.e., judging people based on their accomplishments) and Ascription (i.e., judging people based on their social and education connections). Towards the end of this chapter, the authors discuss the concepts of identity iceberg and motivations as well as how identity influences motivation for mentoring. Interestingly, the authors categorize motivations of work across generations such as 1) baby boomers (born 1943–60) and Gen Xers (born 1961–80), who were motivated by building a career for perks and public recognition; 2) millennials (born 1981–2000), who were motivated by finding a chance to make an impact, having a career path, and achieving a sense of purpose in the greater social context; 3) postmillennial generation (sometimes referred to as Gen Z or iGen) (born after 2000), who enter the workplace with an entrepreneurial and global mindset and are motivated by garnering diverse and multicultural life experiences. Subsequently, the authors discuss how identity affects motivation for mentoring due to individual learning styles. In *Chapter Four: Bias and Privilege in Mentoring*, the authors guide us to explore our bias, understand how bias evolve, how to manage our bias and how to detect our unconscious bias, learn to confirm bias and acknowledge affinity bias. Since privilege means unearned advantage, the authors suggest mentors understanding the privilege of mentors and the lack of privilege of mentees in order to neutralize power in mentoring relationship. I particularly appreciate the authors' powerful messages and thought-provoking questions at this awareness-raising stage of appreciating differences and getting prepared for the mentoring relationship.

Part 2 **"Learn from Differences"** addresses issues in establishing ground rules. The authors showcase how to explore ways to negotiate differences and to communicate effectively. In *Chapter Five: Preparing the Relationship*, the authors advise us to deepen our awareness of our own culture, identity, and biases in order to explore our differences and understand the uniqueness of a particular person. Asserting that a good conversation is essential in building trust and promoting learning, the authors spell out a five-level conversation model proposed by Zachary and Fischler, (2014), such as 1) Monologue: where one person does all the talk acting like a sage on the stage; 2) Transaction: where talk remains on the surface with exchange of questions and answers like a checklist of a set of to-dos; 3) Interaction: where talk gets closer to a good conversation focusing on "how to" and "where to" rather than "why". It promotes knowledge transfer but limit opportunities for insights, reflection, or discovery; 4) Collaborative engagement: where deeper insight and reflection happens; 5) Dialogue: where transformational thinking and shared learning takes place. In the following sections, the authors analyze common assumptions about mentoring to clarify roles of the mentor and the mentee as well as the true nature of mentorship, and to encourage us to use constructive curiosity to "seek new experiences, knowledge, and feedback and an openness to change" (Fernandez-Araoz, Roscoe, & Aramaki, 2018, p. 61). Thereafter, the authors exemplify how to ask expansive questions and how to be good listeners through both verbal and body language which are particularly germane to express curiosity, generate quality conversation, create developmental relationships, build networks, and develop trust. In *Chapter Six: Getting to Know Each Other*, the authors demonstrate how making connection is essential and how building trust is critical in getting to know each other for a mentoring partnership. This chapter is practically useful for me as a supervisor and language teacher to reflect on my supervisory style and teaching practice. I agree with the authors that mentoring as well as supervisory/teaching conversations should strive for collaborative engagement or dialogue in order to promote learning and deepen trust.

Part 3 **"Leverage Differences"** investigates establishing agreements, goal setting, and goal achievement. This part offers practical guidance and tools that can be applicable in any cultural contexts to acknowledge our differences, customize our learning for growth, and to build our own unique

mentoring relationships. In **Chapter Seven: Establishing Agreements,** three steps of agreement-establishing negotiating process are exemplified: 1) clarifying mentoring expectations; 2) establishing accountability assurances; and 3) setting well-defined goals. The authors emphasize that setting the parameters of a relationship within the zone of appropriateness is the premise for successful negotiations. In **Chapter Eight: Enabling Growth**, the authors claim that enabling growth is at the heart of mentoring since it creates the momentum to successfully accomplish mentoring goals. To provide guidance on how to address differences, the authors focus on Bennett's (1998) five-stage cultural competency developmental continuum from denial, polarization, minimization, acceptance, and adaptation. The continuum spans from a monocultural mindset with an ethnocentric viewpoint in the first three stages to an intercultural mindset with an ethnorelative viewpoint in the last two stages. This model helps mentors and mentees to see and bridge their differences, and guides mentoring partners to make staged progress and development by avoiding leapfrogging over a stage. The model can also function as a diagnostic tool when uncertainty occurs. In **Chapter Nine: Enabling Growth though Feedback**, the authors accentuate the importance of constructive feedback in the mentoring relationship and suggest delivering culturally-appropriate feedback honestly to ensure that a mentoring relationship receives sufficient investment of time, knowledge, and emotions. In **Chapter Ten: Coming to Closure**, the authors guide us to maximize and leverage our learning by preparing beforehand for the final mentoring meeting in a personalized and culturally appropriate way. When a closure stage comes, mentors and mentees review what have learned and envision the future growth and development. I like this part of the book the most as it provides established tools that can be accessed across many different relationships and help navigate, learn, and leverage mentoring over time.

This book creates a space for reflecting on our practice and moving forward to leverage our learning with expansive insights into mentoring, supervising, teaching, and communicating. It offers informative guidance, especially in how to detect, determine, and regulate differences between mentors and mentees of diverse cultures. It is a strategic manual that can be used to guide individual professional development as well as organizational transformation. The book can be taken as a mentoring handbook since it is systematically and practically organized with insightful reflections, tactics, and anecdotic stories to walk the reader through the mentor and mentee relationship and process. An added bonus is that each chapter wraps up with "Your Turn" exercises with reflective questions that can be conveniently put into practice in helping develop and maintain meaningful mentoring relationships across differences and a chapter recap that facilitate understanding and retention of the key concepts presented in each chapter.

However, since the potential beneficiaries of this books are adult professionals in workplace, its usefulness and applications to supervising and teaching need to be tailored to the needs of the learners in formal educational settings. Undeniably, the book is appropriate for teaching and supervising undergraduate and postgraduate students at universities. However, the supervisors must be aware of the local socio-cultural norms for supervision as well as expected educational outcomes in a particular educational context. If the mentoring practice and reflective questions are to be implemented with underage learners in schools, they must be well adapted to be more age appropriate.

Finally, invaluable takeaways from this book include the well-defined concepts, instrumental models, unique cultural and intercultural understandings, pertinent interpretations of fixed mindset, growth mindset, intercultural mindset, and global mindset. Significantly, as a teacher and supervisor of students from different cultures, I found my understanding of mentoring and its implications for teaching and supervising has been refined after reading this goldmine book. In brief, this book helps us to see ourselves, our learning/mentoring partners, and the many people who contribute to our professional development, personal growth in diverse ways across time, experiences, and cultures.

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