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The following excerpt was written for the book No Teacher Left Behind by Brian Fiese, and describes a teacher's role as a mentor, using as an analogy mentors from popular culture. Copyright © 2008 Motivated Proformance. All rights reserved.

Merlin, Morpheus & Obi-Wan Kenobe

Merlin was a great magician, who served as mentor to King Arthur in the Arthurian legend. Morpheus, in *The Matrix*, is Captain of the Nebuchadnezzar, and the person who finds Neo and introduces him to the real world. And Obi-Wan, of course, is the great Jedi knight who teaches Luke Skywalker the ways of the Force in *Star Wars*.

These three provide excellent examples of what it is to be a mentor to a young student, and outlined below is their function within each story.

Rescue from Without

The mentor's first job is always to rescue the hero from some external threat. In Arthurian legend, Arthur finds Merlin's house while he's lost in the woods. In *The Matrix*, Morpheus attempts to help Neo escape from the agents, and then he successfully removes the tracking device the agents have implanted in Neo's belly. And Obi-Wan first appears to frighten away the Sand People.

The threats to your students may not be as imminent as Agent Smith or the Sand People, but they are no less real: a culture of negativity; drugs; violence; teen pregnancies; parents who don't take an interest in their children's education; parents who spoil their children; over-reliance on technological communication, which hampers face-to-face interaction ... all of these pose a threat to a student's ability to grow and develop into a mature, successful adult.

The degree of imminence will dictate how much of a rescue is required. A 12-year-old using drugs requires a different course of action than a parent spoiling his child. In fact, the latter doesn't necessarily require any direct course of action on your part at all. But as a Theory C teacher you should start by recognizing what it is each individual student is struggling with or running from, and take it upon yourself to provide an opportunity for your student to escape from that struggle.

Providing the Key to the Hero's Identity

The next role of the mentor is to provide the hero with key information he needs in order to know who he is: Arthur's real father was King of England, Neo is "The One," and Luke's father was a great Jedi knight who was killed by Darth Vader.

The latter is particularly interesting: Luke has known of the strange hermit "Old Ben Kenobe" his entire life, but only now found out that Ben knew his father. Prior to the revelation of this information, Luke was not a hero, he was simply a farm-boy (and a whiny one at that). It is only in the discovery of his true identity that he will have the motivation to leap into the scary world of the unknown.

Your job in mentoring your students is to provide them with the key information they need **about themselves** in order to complete their journey as successful adults. What are their strengths that will guide them toward success? What are their weaknesses, which must be developed along the way? What can you say that will inspire them to learn; that is, to make the choice to take on **their** journey?

Obviously, in most cases you won't know your students as well as Merlin, who sees the future, Morpheus, who has consummate surveillance capabilities, or Obi-Wan, who has been watching

over Luke his entire life. So for you, providing your students with the keys to their identity will take a concentrated effort once you meet them.

Successful teachers are the ones who take the time to get to know their students. So take the time, early on in class, to have one-on-one meetings, to have your students complete surveys, or to otherwise do what it takes to learn the dreams and goals of the people you're teaching. Students want to know that you care, and if you show this up front, You'll have a much easier time convincing them that you're interested in **them** later on when they start to struggle or run into conflict.

A Former Hero

The mentor is always someone who is battle-tested – he has gone on his own journey, he has been his own hero in the past, and he is simply at the endpoint of his own character arc, where his job is to inspire the hero to take on a great journey of his own. Merlin can only be Arthur's mentor because he himself has been on a great many adventures, and Obi-Wan was a great Jedi knight himself.

Though the mentor is older than the hero, it is not his age that stops him from being the hero of this particular tale – rather, it is a matter of destiny. Morpheus is a great officer, but it is not his role to end the war against the machines; it is Neo's. Obi-Wan is a great Jedi, but it is not his role to bring balance to the Force.

You are a great adult. You have followed your own path to greatness, and it has led you exactly where you need to be, to your destiny of coaching and mentoring these young minds. Your role, then, is to inspire these students – through tales and anecdotes of your own life experience – to pursue *their* destiny, whatever that may be.

The point is to **be open to sharing your own life with your students**, so that they can see that you're not just some schmuck who has authority over them this year. Show them that you're a real human being with successes and failures. This display of truth is a demonstration of respect to them, and it will inspire them to respect you and follow in your footsteps.

Premature Death

Obi-Wan dies right before Luke needs him the most. Morpheus is captured and is rendered unable to help Neo in his development. Merlin is seduced by the Lady of the Lake, who casts him into the land of fairy keeping.

Don't worry, though. Remarkably, in each of these deaths the mentor doesn't actually die. Even in stories where the mentor physically dies, he is in some way re-born or immortalized in a way that makes him even more powerful. Obi-Wan, for example, lets himself be killed by Darth Vader so that he can be embedded in Luke's psyche, no longer confined to the physical realm. In *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, Gandalf the Grey plummets to his death, only to come back in the next installment as Gandalf the White. In *The Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe*, Aslan sacrifices himself and is reborn because "when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward."

The reason these mentors never actually die is because, as an allegory for life, the death simply represents the final step of his character arc: the journey from mentor to legend. By taking this step, he immortalizes himself and simultaneously forces the hero to win the final battle on his own, which is the most critical step of the hero's journey.

So you don't have to die in order to successfully mentor your students. (Whew!) But you **do** have to **metaphorically** kill yourself off. **At times, you need to walk away and let them do it on their own.** Only then will they develop the skills and the confidence they require to successfully complete their journey. And feel free to come back later and let them know that it was all just part of their training – great mentors always do.

And when you do come back, you achieve the status of legend.