

# Mentoring as a strategy for recognizing and attending to school violence

Mayra Guadalupe Niño Zuñiga  
Juan de Dios Escalante Rodríguez

Nowadays school violence is a complex matter calling for the attention of various disciplines and specialists from the academic and research community since it has over the past decades become an ever more evident global problem



## ABSTRACT

This article points out the importance of mentoring, be it individual or group, as a strategy for recognizing and addressing school violence and thus promoting academic performance at the National School of Social work or the UNAM, noting the need for intervention in the diagnosis and support for solving learning problems, recognizing the need for interdisciplinary work on a the complex issue such as violence. We are not interested in discussing the concept of mentoring but rather in working with concepts which make mentoring easier. The aim of this study is to share the attempt

to describe the participation of teachers and students in the field of mentoring in detecting situations of school violence. This proposal is the result of analysis and reflection on the relationship between Educational Guidance, understood in its broadest sense, and mentoring, as one of the functions of teachers in their day-to-day work.

**Key Words:** violence, tutoring, school environment.

### APPROACHING THE CONCEPT OF VIOLENCE

Violence is present in different social groups and is expressed in various ways: physical, psychological, sexual, economic and symbolic, among the most explicit, manifested both objectively and subjectively. (Zizek, 2009, pp. 19-26) Recent research on violence indicates that while certain biological factors and psychological elements explain a predisposition to aggression, family, community, historic and cultural factors and other agents external to the individual are what create an environment favorable to the emergence of violence. Historical analysis of this serious social problem reveals that it is a behavior learned through interpersonal relations within the family, social sphere, educational institutions and the influence of mass media which broadcast aggressive, violent behavior.

### FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH DELINQUENCY AND VIOLENCE

In a document drawn up by the World Bank entitled A resource guide for municipalities: community based crime and violence prevention in urban Latin America, the factors which detonate delinquency and violence<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There are some categories of violence which will now be explained. Self-inflicted violence covers physical harm caused to oneself and it is divided into suicidal and self-abusive behavior. Interpersonal violence is related to wounds or harm caused by one individual to another and collective violence is centered around harmful acts committed by a group and can, possibly,

can be classified in three groups: "individual factors, domestic/household factors and societal factors." (World Bank, 2008)

Individual factors are those inherent to a person (ontic), such as gender, age, biological and physiological characteristics and which are demonstrated on the social and political level. Some physio-psychological disorders of these factors are brain abnormalities, neurological dysfunctions, learning disabilities, prenatal and perinatal complications all of which may be responsible for violent conduct. "In terms of gender, in Latin America, as in the rest of the world, violent behavior is much more common in men (young) than in women." (World Bank, 2008)

Domestic/family risk factors include the following: household size and density, history of family violence, poor monitoring and supervision of children, ineffective parenting skills, school drop-out, and unemployment and poor socio-economic background. Following global trends, survey data from Mexico City indicate that children who are victims of domestic abuse have a greater disposition to acting violent in their adult lives; suggesting an inter-generational transfer of violence. (F.Knaul and M. Ramírez, 2002). Alcohol and drugs are identified as inciters or 'facilitators' to violence according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The

have political, economic and social motivations.



third factor indicated in the Guide is societal-community which refers to situations and events which take place at the social level and which may lead to delinquency and violence. For example, Income inequality may cause economic frustration, which may lead to economic violence.

## SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Nowadays school violence<sup>2</sup> is a complex matter calling for the attention of various disciplines and specialists from the academic and research community since it has over the past decades become an ever more evident global problem. Despite the fact that violence is sanctioned morally as well as legally, it is still present in many sectors of Mexican society even in universities where the level of education is better. The matter of violence in Mexico has historically been debated to the extent that it has been directly tied to human rights in sanctioning anyone who exercises it. For example, the Mexican Constitution in paragraphs four, five and six of Article 4:

Men and women are equal under the law. The law shall protect family organization and development.

Every person has the right to decide in a free, mature and informed way, the number and spacing of his or her children.

Every person has the right to receive medical treatment when deemed necessary. The law shall not only define the guiding criteria regulating the access to health services but also establish concurrent ac-

tivities to be carried out by the federation and the states in organizing public health services under Article 73, paragraph XVI of this Constitution.

Every person has the right to live in an adequate environment for his or her development and welfare.

Every family has the right to a dignified and decent household. The law shall establish all regulations and incentives deemed necessary to achieve such a goal. Children's need for nourishment, health, education, recreation and integral development shall be fulfilled.

Ascendants, mentors and guardians shall be obligated to enforce the aforementioned rights. The State shall provide whatever it deems necessary to uphold both children's dignity and the enforcement of children's rights.

The State shall help private individuals in enforcing children's rights.

Within the framework of human rights in which the latest modifications to Article 4 of the Constitution are consolidated the importance of the effective protection of the human rights of the Mexican people is deemed relevant in the prevention of behavior which is considered to be in violation of the rights and the creation of mechanisms which eradicate or eliminate violations.

In the school environment, the matter at hand, there are known to be violations to human rights within the student body, of teachers against students and of students against teachers and of families against teachers and students and vice versa. This is besides the problems of sexual harassment by students, known by all.

When the inter-relations of the family, school and those who make up the community, school authorities, and public safety authorities appear on the scene, the

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<sup>2</sup> School Violence may take place in any relationship, process or condition by which an individual or group violates the physical, social and/or psychological integrity of another person or group of people within the educational space, producing a type of interaction in which this kind of process is reproduce. Observatorio Ciudadano de la Educación: <http://www.observatorio.org/comunicados/debate011.html>

answer to a situation which has become a daily occurrence and which is very easy to detect becomes more complex.

In the classroom of the school and university community social and family violence affect and hamper the pedagogical process of teaching-learning and the building of knowledge. In consequence we find school dropouts and serious psychological problems for young people, adolescents and children in school in this country.

Today more than ever, one of truest of human values should be applied. Treat others as you would have others treat you, said by the philosopher Baruch Spinoza. (Spinoza, 2002) One of the main problems in school life today is mistreatment of people since childhood and the need of people to learn to relate to one another culturally as the philosopher said throughout the development of an individual.

It is absolutely necessary to refer to school violence considering it within the institutional context and taking into account the authoritarian exercise of power, the authority and vertical structure of the institution itself, as well as the scant practice of tolerance and respect for different social, cultural, economic, political, religious and gender differences by those who intervene in the school community.

Violent behavior normally refers to transgressive, punitive conduct which affects the positive interaction which should predominate in the school environment. (Martinez, 2007) This violent conduct within the school environment is related to demonstrations of social processes such as the constant search for identity approval, group acceptance, social acknowledgment of peers, a sense of belonging to a group, need for prominence, factual power (being stronger and more powerful than the others) and of being different (otherness), that

is to say, to create a personal identity within a group of peers. (Villareal-Gonzalez and Sánchez Sosa-Viega, 2011)

Academic spaces, at higher levels of education, have been converted into vulnerable landscapes for violence in its different manifestations. School is a space in which liberal values such as liberty, justice, equity and respect are reinforced, but which overrun by social elements (where values begin) without enough pedagogical elements for detecting and controlling these demonstrations of violence. Within this framework mentoring is proposed as a pedagogical instrument for detecting and controlling violence at college level.

#### MENTORING AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR CONTROLLING VIOLENCE

In 2000, ANUIES (National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Learning) implemented mentoring "understood as individual teacher accompanying and support, offered to students as one more activity in his or her formative curriculum. It is undoubtedly the support which gives the educational process a qualitative transformation." (ANUIES, 2000) The evolution of this concept has been incorporating pedagogical and psychological tools meant to enrich this task. One of the perspectives for understanding the working of mentoring is its beginnings. This word (tutorial in Spanish), in its etymological origins denotes orientation, protection, defense, conservation and safeguard. (Vargas, Cerna and García, 2011)

Mentoring constitutes one of the fundamental strategies corresponding to a new vision of higher education, in that it can promote the integral formation of the student in a humanistic and responsible vision of the needs and opportunities of the development



of Mexico. It also constitutes a resource for facilitating the adaptation of students to the school environment, improvement of his or her study and work habits, to fight the indexes of failure and falling behind in school, reduction in dropping out of school and improvement in end efficiency. Mentoring as a teaching method is not a substitute for teaching in front of a group, but is rather a complement which enriches it. Mentoring as an instrument for change can reinforce programs of integral support for students in the academic and cultural field and in human development. (ANUIES, 2000)

This quote presents a broad panorama of where mentoring may play an important role since the student is dealt with individually and guided in his or her academic practices and in which some cases of violence related to the academic environment may be detected: practices of sexual harassment between student and teacher and interpersonal violence with one's partner or among classmates, among others.

The mentor may become the empathetic bridge, systematically and or orderly, but always affectively, for detecting and channeling violent cases which are manifested in the school environment. Timely and opportune orientation may keep violence in the school environment in check. In this environment educational orientation and mentoring are tied to pedagogical processes, with the active involvement of the actors who participate in institutional management. At the present when reforms are being undertaken in education in México, it is indispensable for mentoring to intervene in order to manage, in the process of professional transformation, to lay the foundations for protocol for attention to this field.

Mentoring, be it group or individual, is considered a modality of teaching activity

which is made up of a systematized set of educational actions focused on the student. It is different and at the same time complementary to classroom teaching and is not meant to substitute it. It offers spaces and times different from study programs and it is where a real and profound human relationship should be built. The forms taken on by mentoring are what lead to proposing a diagnostic format for detecting cases of violence in students and for guiding them to corresponding institutions in time.

### PROPOSAL FOR A PROTOCOL OF ACTION FOR CASES OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE IN THE NATIONAL SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Below we will present a protocol of supportive action which in the face of the demand for intervention in situations of school violence among the student body will provide academic centers with orientation on the measures which may be taken in order to facilitate a quick, efficient and confidential procedure.

This protocol consists of a guide for acting, as orientation, which may facilitate intervention. Aside from this, each center may decide which procedure it will follow and the measures it will adopt in confronting situations of violence and harassment among students and even among teachers.

As methodology, it is suggested that before any action is taken in case of violence, it is necessary to compare all of the information coming in from various sources: direct observation and monitoring, professors, students and families, that is, the various sources as a whole will give us better information in order to proceed with proper orientation. Each specific situation has its particular characteristics which make it necessary to use different methods, always demanding and guaranteeing the utmost confidentiality.



Promoting the integral development of students,  
in order to detect and control violence

In the event that school violence is the diagnosis, quick, urgent, effective intervention is necessary. The procedure should be carried out with the upmost discretion so that more violence and tension are not generated.

### PROTOCOLS FOR ACTION IN THE CASE OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

#### General objective

Contribute to elevating the quality of the formative process in an atmosphere of the construction of positive values, attitudes and habits and promote the development of intellectual abilities in the student body through the use of strategies of personalized attention which complement regular teaching activities in the presence of school violence.

#### Specific objective for mentoring in social work as a strategy for recognizing and attending to school violence:

- Revitalize the teaching process through greater proximity to and dialogue between professors and students, based on recognizing the problems and expectations of the students in the matter of school violence in order to generate alternatives for attention and impact on their integral formation, both professional and human.
- Contribute to eliminating students' dropping out of school and avoid the social insertion of individuals with unfinished formation, with great limitations for incorporation into the work force and high levels of frustration and conflictive nature.





- Create a climate of confidence in order to provide knowledge of the various aspects which may directly or indirectly influence the performance of the student at school and thus promote obtaining the objectives of the educational process.
- Contribute to improving the learning circumstances or conditions of the student through the collegiate reflection on the information generated in the mentoring process.

which may be taken by the institution in order to offer alternatives for the solutions through personalized attention of the teaching-mentoring personnel and the generation or improvement of support services of the mentoring activity.

- Operative phase of recognition and attention to school violence:
- Create the conditions necessary to provide attention to students through mentoring and support services in order to achieve adequate academic performance and promote personal and professional development.
- Make up a guide for interviews for use in the case of suspected school violence:

### Strategies for recognizing and attending to school violence:

- Identify the risk factors which influence the academic performance of the student, as well as the actions

### GUIDE FOR THE INTERVIEW:

#### INITIAL INFORMATION FOR SUSPECTED CASES OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

National Autonomous University of México  
National School of Social Work

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone for attention to cases of school violence:

Information of the student who is suspected of suffering from violence:

First name and Last names: \_\_\_\_\_

Semester \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Origin of the application:

Family of the suspected victim \_\_\_\_\_ Victim \_\_\_\_\_

Professor of the Center \_\_\_\_\_ Classmates \_\_\_\_\_

Tutor \_\_\_\_\_ Non-teaching staff \_\_\_\_\_

Counselor, Other \_\_\_\_\_

Brief description of the incident (s):

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Actions taken by the mentor:

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The objective of this phase is "to discern the possible situation of school violence" in order to avoid alarmist reactions.

At the same time, as a mentor reports the event (indicating place, institution or space where the events took place) in order to establish preventive measures for protecting the suspected victim and watch over those places where the alleged cases of school violence may occur, always keeping in mind the essential confidentiality of the whole process.

As the mentor guarantee the absolute confidentiality of the interview. During the interview ask the student whether he or she is familiar with the school rules of university legislation and rights and obligations, if applicable.

Finally the student will be proportioned contention.

**Procedure for writing up the report:**

- A) Interview with the student who is the suspected victim of violence. The student must be guaranteed the confidentiality of his or her report.
- B) Interview with observers who did not participate. These are members of the school community who know the acts but who did not participate in the incident. (Annex II)
- C) Writing up of the report.

Without further ado, I attach Annex II of the interview in order for the report to be followed up. I await your instructions, sincerely,

Written up by:

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Date and time:

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Communication:

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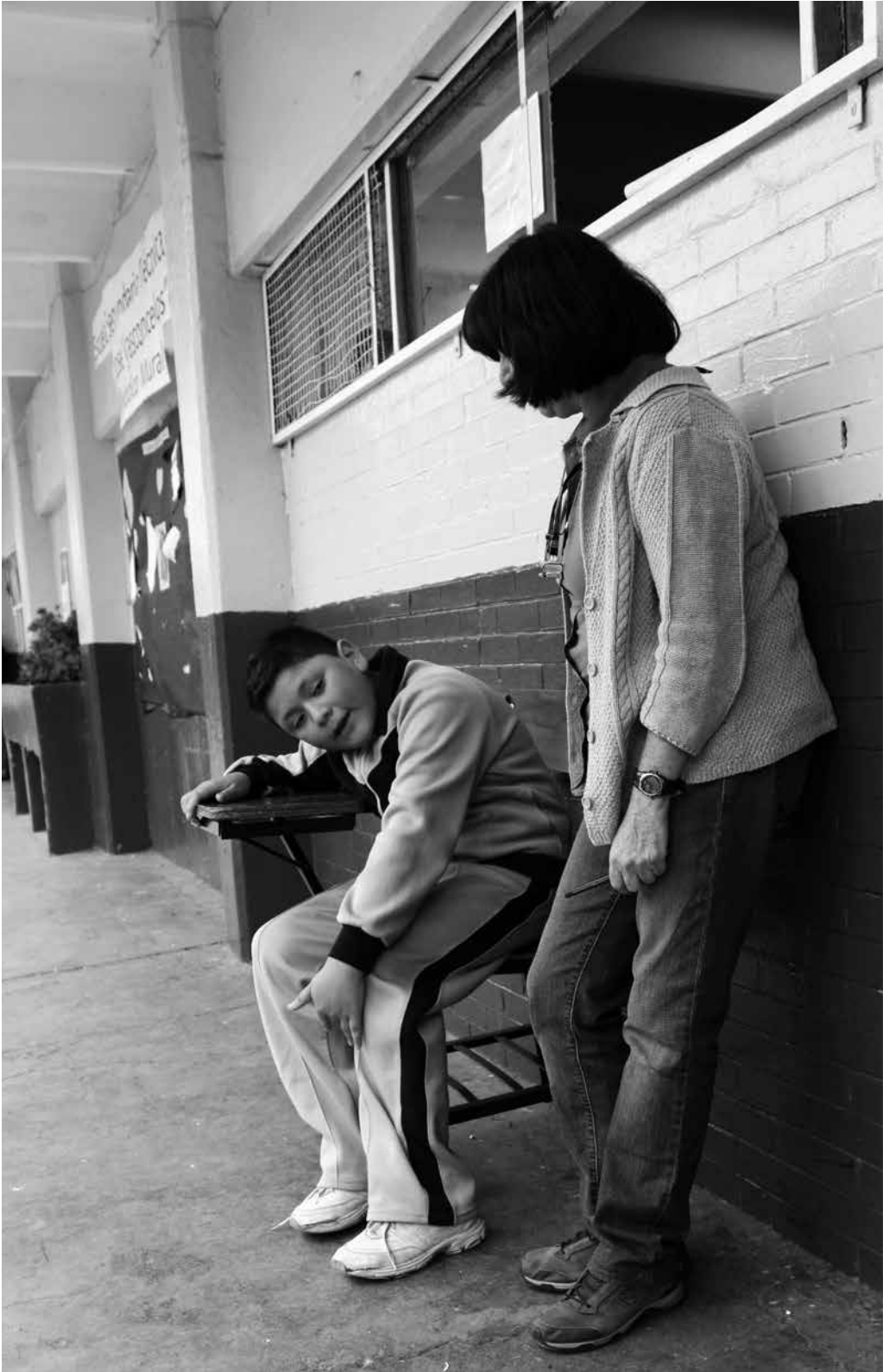
e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the person who received the report:

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Individual support, Qualitative transformation.

Along with this report send the guide for the interview with non-participant observer.

### Guide for interview with non-participant observers

It is important to take into account the following:

Observers of situations of school violence tend to keep silent due to pressure by the aggressors or fear of becoming victims themselves.

Passive spectators in situations of school violence suffer from the consequences to the same degree, they have to appreciate the need to "break the silence" in order to prevent other situations of violence.

It is advisable to use terms the student will understand in the interview.

The confidentiality of the interview will be insisted on and the observers guaranteed anonymity.

Value judgments should never be made.

Guide for questions for non-participative observers of the case of "name of the student who is the suspected victim of school violence." Informal Interview (it is suggested that 3 to 5 people close to the student be interviewed).

### Guide

1. Are you familiar with the case of (name of the student who is the suspected victim of school violence)?
2. How do people in your group get along with each other?
3. Do you think there are some kinds of behavior or aggression by some member of the group towards other classmates?
4. In your opinion what are the most frequent forms of violence you see during the time you are at school?
5. Have you witnessed any situations of school violence towards any classmate?
6. How often do you think these forms of violence take place?
7. What kinds of mistreatment have these been?  
Insults\_\_\_\_\_ Ridicule\_\_\_\_\_ Physical harm\_\_\_\_\_ Speaking ill of someone\_\_\_\_\_  
Threats\_\_\_\_\_ Blackmail\_\_\_\_\_ Making someone do something\_\_\_\_\_  
Isolation\_\_\_\_\_
8. How do you feel about these situations involving classmates?
9. How do you think those who carry out these kinds of mistreatment feel?
10. How do you think the person who receives this mistreatment feels?
11. What did you do when these things took place?



12. Who have you told about this?

No one\_\_\_ Classmates\_\_\_ My advisor\_\_\_ Professors\_\_\_ My parents\_\_\_

A Counselor \_\_\_ An administrator\_\_\_

13. Who could you tell about this?

14. What would need to be done to fix this problem?

15. What would you be willing to do for this problem to be solved?

Analysis of the group impact of the interview.

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Written up by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date and time: \_\_\_\_\_

Communication: \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the person who received the report: \_\_\_\_\_

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Individual or group mentoring in educational orientation, strategies for recognizing and attending to school violence.

Individual or group mentoring in educational orientation, strategies for recognizing and attending to school violence

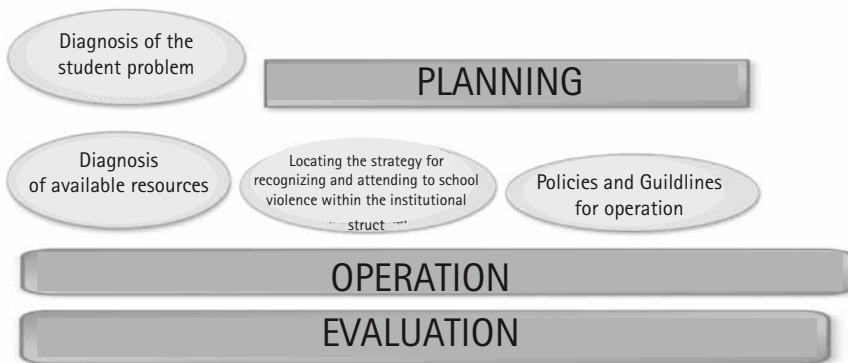


Chart 1. Planning, operation and evaluation for detecting school violence UNAM. (2012). Formación de coordinadores de programas institucionales de tutoría. Curso-taller "diseño, ejecución y evaluación colaborativa de planes de acción tutorial.

Chart 1. Planning, operation and evaluation for detecting school violence  
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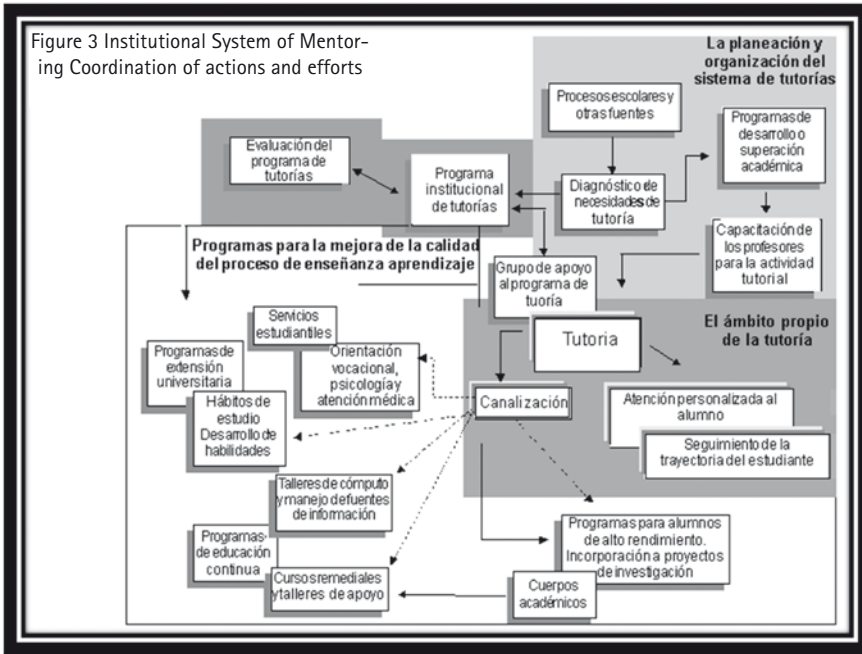


Chart 2. Planning and organization of the mentoring system  
 UNAM. (2012). Formación de coordinadores de programas institucionales de tutoría.  
 Curso-taller "diseño, ejecución y evaluación colaborativa de planes de acción tutorial.

Ambos cuadros fueron elaboración propia.

## CONCLUSIONS

Mentoring provides the right context for working with some school and extracurricular activities of the students. The importance of this kind of extra-class relations depends on certain conditions and should be accompanied by a definition of the role played by the professors oriented towards mentoring the student.

This proposal is an outline of intervention of the teaching practice of mentoring at the level of higher education in the School of Social Work of the UNAM from

up close to the nowadays teaching-learning processes and in keeping with the temporary demands of violence.

## ANNEX

institutional programs for mentoring. A proposal of ANUIES for the organization and functioning in institutions of higher learning.

..."the design of the mentoring program, its implementation, follow up and the evaluation of its results, must be con-



ceived as, and assumes, the active participation of the professorial body through the various collegiate mechanisms and authorities, keeping in mind the profile and conditions of each educational institution.

...It is important to point out that a mentoring program should have an adequate institutional context which permits the successful academic relationship between mentors and students."

### MENTORING ACTION

Body of activities carried out by the mentor as well as those fostered or organized by the mentoring program in the undergraduate school or institution to promote the integral development of its students.



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### MAYRA GUADALUPE NIÑO ZUÑIGA.

Acting full-time associate academic technician, level "C", at the Coordinación de Investigación de ENTS, UNAM, in the Centro de Estudios de la Mujer. Part-time professor at the graduate school and a judge of social projects from the perspective of gender, for Indesol.

### JUAN DE DIOS ESCALANTE RODRÍGUEZ.

Profesor at the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature of UNAM and at the graduate school of the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. His lines of research at present are the development of epistemological and ontological problems at the interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary levels.

