
The Making of a Researcher: A Self-Study of a Mentoring Relationship

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The doctoral mentoring relationship is an intense one. Advisors and advisees must learn to work together for long hours at a time refining the ideas that will eventually go into crafting the final dissertation. Simultaneously the two members in this relationship are engaged in a socialization process that is complex beyond words. All of this takes place in an atmosphere charged with the demands and pressure to meet external time lines and requirements imposed by the institutions in which they work.

The purpose of this paper is to consider how our mentoring relationship (professor-Donna and doctoral student-Josephine) reflected an interplay among three social contexts: a local or situational context, an institutional context, and the larger societal context. We focus on our interactions during a process that began with formulating Josephine's dissertation research question and extended to the proposal-writing stage. Specifically, our focus is on the power relations, all of which pertain to creating, valuing, and exchanging knowledge that were bound up in our professor/student dyad. We consider these power relations so that we can better understand our relationship and contribute to the literature on mentoring relationships in literacy.

Related Literature

A review of the literature on the nature of mentoring relationships between women in higher education suggests that this is largely "uncharted territory" (Heinrich, 1996, p. 447). Moreover, the literature that does exist represents data obtained largely from descriptive surveys and quasi-experimental designs (Daresh, 1995). Although the information derived from such designs is useful in understanding the more general aspects of mentoring, insufficient attention has been paid to the interpersonal mentoring relationships between women in the academy.

Heinrich (1995) examined the relationships between women doctoral students and their female advisors. A number of the women doctoral students in her study told her that they transferred certain characteristics of their earlier relationships with mothering figures to the relationship they had with women on their committees. And, as one might suspect, this transference of expectations from one type of mentoring relationship to another was not without its own set of problems. When relationships with their doctoral advisors reminded the women in the study of nonsupportive parental relationships with their mothers, they frequently maintained a silence about their disappointments—a practice that ultimately shortchanged their own personal and professional development.

On the brighter side, Johnsrud (1991) documented the necessity of striking a balance between autonomy and connectedness in mentoring relationships. Working from a developmental perspective that was compatible with feminist theorizing, Johnsrud concluded:

The orientation of women toward connectedness and their potential for interdependence suggests that academic women have the capacity to use the structure of the mentoring relationship to work through issues of dependency and autonomy and ultimately shape a relationship committed to the mutual growth and empowerment of both participants." (p. 11)

This view acknowledges that the power distribution in such relationships is not structurally equitable. Power relations regulate and guide all discourses and social interactions. The institution of schooling structures power relations between teacher and student (Brodkey, 1989). These power relations set unspoken boundaries and guidelines as to how we are "supposed" to interact as professor and student. However, as Johnsrud contends, the power relations need not be used to dominate and control. She posits that the advisor and advisee can work within the structured power relations to obtain an interdependent

professor-student relationship. This is an issue of power that we found relevant to our mentoring relationship.

Methodology

We used Fairclough's (1989) critical discourse analysis approach to help us think about the influences of these three different social contexts (situational, institutional, and societal) on the way we interacted with each other. Fairclough (1995) has argued that for critical discourse analysis to become a viable research methodology it must engage with these four themes:

- the relationship between language, ideology and power
- the relationship between discourse and sociocultural change
- the centrality of textual analysis to social research
- the principles and practices of critical language awareness (p. ix)

From his point of view, discourse analysis rests on the assumption that language is a form of social practice. Central to any understanding of critical discourse analysis is the asymmetrical nature of power relationships. Such relationships, Fairclough (1995) has maintained, must be viewed within a larger social system. For example, in our self-study of a mentoring relationship between professor and doctoral student, it was not enough that we consider only the power asymmetries typically associated with being positioned as either advisor or advisee. Instead, it was necessary to view our relationship in terms of how it intersected with family, university, and social life.

Sometimes referred to as the three-dimensional framework, critical discourse analysis has as its aim the mapping of three forms of analysis on to one another: "analysis of (spoken or written) language texts, analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 2). Each analysis shapes and is shaped by the other. That is to say, the power relationships inherent in each other are fluid and nonlinear.

Procedure and Data Sources

Over the 1996 summer and fall quarters at the University of Georgia, Josephine and Donna engaged in the process of formulating Josephine's dissertation research question and research proposal. We corresponded by e-mail and had face-to-face conversations. Josephine

also wrote her reflections about the process in a private journal. The e-mail messages and Josephine's journal entries were analyzed toward the end of fall quarter at the time Josephine was writing the final draft of her prospectus. The prospectus centered largely on Josephine's adaptation of Fairclough's (1989) critical discourse analysis.

We used the occasion for writing our American Reading Forum paper as a time to try out Fairclough's (1989) analysis. Our process included independently reading the data from our e-mail conversations and Josephine's journal. We coded these texts using the three social contexts identified by Fairclough (i.e., situational, institutional, and societal contexts). We discovered through this process that it was difficult to tease out how different social contexts explicitly influenced our interactions without considering the impact of what Fairclough calls member resources (Gilbert, 1992). Member resources are the personal knowledge, beliefs, values and assumptions we draw upon as we produce and interpret texts. Our member resources are shaped by and shape situational, institutional, and societal social practices.

In our case, the situational context pertained to writing a prospectus, and in a smaller way, to passing the preliminary exams. Donna and Josephine drew upon their different member resources during the process. For instance, Donna, having gone through the process of writing a prospectus and having guided others through the process had first-hand knowledge of the personal struggles Josephine was likely to experience. Donna also knew what the University of Georgia's Department of Reading Education expected in a doctoral prospectus. Josephine had only vague ideas about the institutional expectations; her interactions were informed by knowledge of herself as a student, researcher, and writer, and through her values and beliefs about being a wife and mother.

Participants' Backgrounds

Josephine: My decision to enroll in a doctoral program was a careful one. I had a teaching job that I loved and my family was content. I attended the National Reading Conference (NRC) in 1992 for the specific purpose of finding a doctoral program in reading education that suited me. I went to NRC in search of a professor who would encourage me to think in different ways and who was interested in listening to adolescents. I met Donna at an alternative session and immediately liked what she said and the questions that she asked the others at the session. We later had several conversations in person and by phone. I set my goal to study with Donna and to attend Georgia's doctoral program.

Donna: I recall being introduced to Josephine at NRC by a graduate student who was enrolled in the doctoral program at the University of Georgia. At this first meeting I remember thinking that Josephine had an enthusiasm and air about her that seemed in keeping with the Georgia program. She was a self-starter, had a goal in mind, and seemed at ease about working out the ambiguities associated with doctoral studies. I was especially attracted to her experiences as an alternative teacher at the secondary level. Whether consciously or subconsciously, I suspect I warmed to her teaching experiences because they were compatible with my own. Her thinking reflected an ideological slant not unlike what I had pursued in the sixties. In retrospect, Josephine seemed like the kind of student who would stretch my own thinking and be sufficiently self-assured to disagree with me on issues that she saw differently from me.

Our Mentoring Relationship

Below represents the data from our self-study as a conversation. The conversation consists of a sampling of our e-mail messages integrated with some of Josephine's journal entries. We use the conversation format to illustrate how our mentoring relationship was influenced by the three contexts identified by Fairclough's critical discourse analysis.

Journal Entry: Josephine's Journal 8/21/96

As I try to write a prelim on whole language and feminist pedagogy, my mind wanders off to worry about not having a dissertation topic. I want to have a job in 1998 in a place that Peyton can start high school. It would be ideal to move just before his 9th grade year—fall 1998. If I want to do a good dissertation study, I need to get started on it soon! I also wonder why I don't have a burning question and why I am so interested in whatever I am reading at the present. I came into the program with a desire to work with pregnant girls, but now my interests seem to be so broad I can't decide. No question or theory seems to capture my attention. I have noticed that most of my interests somehow relate to critical theory and pedagogy. I find myself looking for issues of power in everything I read.

E-mail: from Donna - 8/21/96

Keeping a diary/journal is a good idea; no matter what you do, it should be helpful in framing the reason you choose to pursue the question you finally decide upon. That's always the first

question you get asked at your prospectus and dissertation defenses. Saying you kept a journal and that it helped you decide would be novel and credible.

Journal Entry: Josephine - 8/21/96

I have got to write prelims. I think I did everything I could do yesterday in my ritual to get ready to write—except the garden, and I may spend a little time there today. I cleaned the boys' room with the boys, rearranged their room, got them new bunk beds, got my hair cut, went to grocery store, and then went to buy school supplies. I think today after I write Aunt Jean and Mama, I will read some stuff on Dewey and outline the changes I will make to prelim. I think I should relax about this prelim and just write it!

E-mail: from Donna - 8/31/96

Hope all is going well for you and that the prelim you are doing is still of interest to you. I'm checking e-mail about every other day, so if you need anything, let me know. Cheers, Donna.

E-mail: from Donna - 9/28/96

How do you plan to work this revision of your prelim question into your overall work plan? Make the changes first or plunge into Linda's prelim question? My sense would be that it isn't inconsequential—the order of things I mean. Here's my gut-level thinking, but obviously, feel free to adjust to your internal (and external) workings.

1. Do Linda's question next, so your timing isn't broken in terms of getting a prospectus written in time to defend it and collect data beginning mid-January.
2. While Linda is reading your prelim question, you could be making the revisions on Michelle and Jim's question. (While, at the same time making a stab at your first draft of a prospectus.) Just a thought.

Journal entry: Josephine - 10/2/96

I have taken Donna's advice and started Linda's prelim. She suggested that I wait to revise and get started on Linda's because (1) it may lead into prospectus. (2) I could revise Michelle and Jim's when Linda is reading hers and after prospectus is drafted—

She [Donna] has never suggested a plan of action to me—I thought since it was so rare for her to do so, I should follow her suggestion. I really need to organize my time well to get a prospectus and a prelim written and another one revised.

Journal entry: Josephine - 10/19/96

Donna brought up what worries me the most—no theoretical base. I have spent three years reading and writing about theory—I wonder why it's not visible in my thinking. Why hasn't all this reading and thinking transferred more to my life? I don't want it to be that I am not really interested in it and have spent my life here at Georgia reading it. I wish I didn't feel the need to get out of UGA within the next couple of years. I think with more thinking time, I could really make this idea come to life. I need to continue thinking about it, but I feel so pushed to write prelim, edit other prelim and finish chapter—then there is NRC paper and ARF paper. I feel so disjointed and afraid that I won't do a good job on anything. If I finish those papers I will be lucky, much less write a prospectus. I feel like I'm about to cheat myself on the most important part of my program. It seems like too much. I want the world to stop! I need to slow down—I waste time because I don't concentrate on what I'm reading or I start worrying about the amount of work I have to do and get in a panic.

E-mail: from Josephine - 10/30/96

Thanks for asking about my progress yesterday. I do appreciate your asking. It is slow, but the last couple of days have been profitable (I think). I have rewritten the beginning four pages of prelim four times. This time I will not change it—I will just write on. I may need a firm talking to if I don't. I'm worried about the ARF paper. Think we can write it between NRC and ARF and on the way down to ARF in your van? Probably not the best plan.

E-mail: from Donna - 10/30/96

Funny, I woke up this morning worrying about the ARF paper, too. I think we'd be wise not to wing it. The sessions are usually small but well attended in terms of commitment by the participants. They pride themselves, and rightly so, on being a small organization that gives quality time to presentations and presenters. So, I'm really hesitant about putting off the ARF paper. As you can see, I have my biases, but I'm open to alternative suggestions.

E-mail: from Donna - 11/8/96

Hope you write, write, write all weekend long. You are off to a good start (really good start, I think), and so don't let go of the momentum. Call in the troops (Randy, Peyton, and Marshall) if you begin to waver. They'll set you straight. When are we meeting again to go over the next draft?

E-mail: from Donna - 11/17/96

I'll have your prospectus read and responded to by Monday, as I promised. I read it all the way through yesterday and made comments, but today I still need to read a chapter in the new Fairclough book on critical discourse analysis before I can respond to your analysis section. I'll include a copy of the chapter I read, so you, too, can see what you think.

E-mail: from Donna - 11/20/96

Your explanation of how you think you might use critical discourse analysis is piquing my interest. Good! Stay with it...at least through the prospectus meeting. If people have problems with it or if you change your mind later, you can always track down another analytical scheme. In the meantime, finding something you like enables you to move forward! Go for it! Cheers, Donna.

E-mail: from Josephine 11/24/96

Thanks for your quick response to prospectus—you must have figured I'd be checking e-mail hoping for a preview of your thoughts. I've been catalogue shopping today for family and in-law Christmas presents—been pretty successful so far. Will begin prelim later. Glad your mother understands weather conditions, now you don't have to feel guilty!

E-mail: from Donna 11/24/96

After seeing the work that still needs doing on the sections that you rewrote for this time, I think you will be wise to forego the boys' soccer games this weekend. It's not major rewriting but it will take time. If you could do that next Saturday and Sunday and get me your revision by Monday before NRC, I could read it that night and feel secure that you are "on course" and on the time line you set for yourself. I know you wanted to spend the

better part of this week on the prelims. I want you to do a good job on them. At the same time, I want you to revise what you have so far, while it's fresh on your mind, but most importantly because the prospectus is so important and it will need to be prioritized. It does go against your tentative schedule a bit.

E-mail: from Josephine 11/25/96

Your plan is fine if I can do it. I will try to finish up prelims before the weekend and begin revising prospectus.

E-mail: from Donna - 11/25/96

Don't panic. I'm not pressuring you to take a short-cut on your prelim revision (actually, I don't think you are panicked). It's just that I see prelims as being secondary to your major goal right now, and that is to finish your prospectus with as much quality time put on it as possible. I bet if you sit down and assess what really has to be done, to make the prelim for Michelle and Jim coherent, you'll find it's not so big a job after all. In the meantime, do try to finish Linda's prelim.

E-mail: from Josephine - 11/25/96

I am not panicked yet—but at times I do feel close. I keep saying that I will do as much as I can. Today has gone well so far on Linda's prelim. I would love to have it finished by Wednesday—but not sure it's possible. I haven't even looked at MC's response in a long time. At the time I don't remember thinking it was going to be a terribly big job. But I could be wrong. I know the prospectus is the big thing to get written, but these prelims have to be done also. I really don't mind you pushing me along on this—but at times I wonder if you know more about what I can do that I do!

E-mail: from Josephine - 11/29/96

My father just called and confirmed that his wedding party is December 14th. Well, that's just about the worst weekend possible in my life. I am exploring options about what to do. He has planned a huge party and says he really wants me there. I have mixed feelings about even going, but I will feel very guilty not attending. I'm writing you to ask you how much writing do you think I can really do at ARF? I'm also wondering how horrible it would be to skip ARF. I hate thinking about that as an option,

but I am getting so stressed out! I don't want to move the prospectus deadline pass the 20th (that is not an option I am contemplating).

E-mail: from Donna - 11/29/96

You are experiencing a fair amount of stress, I know, and yes, it is natural (at least I've seen the same symptoms in other graduate students with whom I've worked.) Whether one has lots of time to write the prospectus or does it in a fairly concentrated space of time, the stress level is high. I think it is fairly common, too, for professors to go through this when they get behind in their commitments (or are over committed). It's an "illness" of higher ed that you learn to live with (and experience as little as possible hopefully). As for ARF...I really don't see skipping the meeting as a way out. It is not a session I can do by myself, and we don't do UGA or ourselves any service backing out of an ARF presentation. Hope I have helped. You will get everything done. Just keep thinking positively and don't panic. I have faith in you...Donna.

E-mail: from Josephine - 11/29/96

I'm over my stress attack that I wrote you about this morning.

E-mail: from Donna 11/30/96

I answered your first message before reading your second. Glad you are feeling better about the numerous things you have to do. Also, it sounds like you will be able to do both ARF and your father's wedding party. That's good! Cheers, Donna.

Interpretation of Conversation

Our locally situated interactions cannot be viewed as separate or apart from the larger institutional and societal contexts in which we worked and played. Nor can they be separated from our personal knowledge, beliefs, values, and assumptions. As Josephine struggled to formulate and write her preliminary exam papers and her prospectus, it became evident that our comments back and forth represented the complex interplay of Fairclough's (1989) three contexts. Within the situational context, Donna's comments were informed by her previous experiences as a doctoral student and as an advisor to other doctoral students caught up in the tedious process of writing a prospectus. The ongoing personal and professional relationship between us also influ-

enced how we produced and interpreted our texts. For instance, Josephine interpreted Donna's comments as well meaning, not meant to harass.

Within the institutional context, Donna guided Josephine through the proposal writing process—a process that has a rather rigid format. She explicitly and implicitly directed Josephine to participate in the appropriate social practices of a doctoral student. Donna also pointed out to Josephine a way to manipulate the predetermined procedure, which at the University of Georgia typically means finishing prelims before writing a prospectus. Josephine's interactions were also informed by the institutional contexts. She intuitively knew how to be a student, when to "follow directions," and when to proceed on her own. She chose to follow Donna's suggested time table.

Within the larger societal context, Josephine's concern for socially sanctioned practices that she both valued and found pleasurable (e.g., attending her son's soccer game, preparing for the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays) didn't allow her to speed up the prelim and prospectus writing process, as Donna had suggested. Josephine preferred to work at a slower rate, one that did not short change her family and her social life outside of the university. Donna empathized with Josephine's desire to take part in a socially active family life, and thus she didn't insist that institutional expectations for prospectus writing take priority over that life.

Postscript by Donna

In retrospect, I do not have a sense of Josephine's and my interactions being overly influenced by the parental mentoring relationship described by Heinrich (1995). If such a relationship did in fact govern our working together, I was unaware of it. More likely, what I do see as being uppermost on my mind was a concern that we both maintain a degree of autonomy and interdependence while staying connected. This relationship, as Johnsrud (1991) implies, is the more difficult one to achieve. And, whether we truly achieved a level of interdependence is open to debate.

On the one hand, I think we did. That is, I believe each of us in our own way fulfilled for the other what Johnsrud (1991) calls "the yearning for connectedness and the yearning for identity...[that is], is to be connected and not subsumed, and to be autonomous and not alone" (p. 15). For example, I worked hard to maintain my sense of what it means to be a "good mentor"—an identity issue for me that is strongly influenced by the positive relationship I continue to maintain with Hal Herber, my mentor from my days at Syracuse as a doctoral student in

reading and language arts. At the same time, I tried hard not to let my image of the "good mentor" get in the way of Josephine's needs as an individual. I valued our ability to work together on previous projects at the National Reading Research Center, and I wanted our unstated sense of connectedness to weather any storm that might present itself at the proposal-writing stage.

On the other hand, I am not sure that we did establish a fully interdependent working relationship. As Johnsrud (1991) notes, "the norms of the traditional academy are skewed in favor of individual achievement" (p. 15). It was difficult, therefore, to know sometimes when I was doing things that were in Josephine's best interests or mine. For example, when I suggested that she forego a weekend soccer tournament to revise sections of her proposal, was I putting my interests ahead of Josephine's? In the end, the question is moot given that Josephine decided to attend the soccer tournament for one day, but not the three she had originally planned. Ultimately, we avoided any collision in interests and managed to stay the course. In this sense, then, I suppose we did move in the direction of interdependency.

Postscript by Josephine

We did manage to avoid any collisions in interests and stayed on course. Like Donna, I believe that our relationship has moved in the direction of interdependency. Perhaps, our relationship took a step away from interdependency and then moved back toward it during the process of writing my prospectus. I felt more dependent on her to guide me through that process than I had been at any other time as a doctoral student. Like Johnsrud (1991), I came to know first hand that the nature of the preliminary exams and the writing of the prospectus required me to be immersed in intellectual work. This was not a time in which I could easily balance the situational, institutional, and societal contexts of my life. My proclivity to procrastinate when I feel overwhelmed or lacking in confidence became evident to Donna as she read my journal in preparation for writing the ARF paper. Her interactions with me changed significantly to accommodate a perceived need for me as a student-prescriptive guidance about how to manage my time in order to meet a deadline I had set.

Of course, the conversation represented above exposes only a small part of our mentoring relationship. There were other e-mail messages and face-to-face encounters during the process of writing my prospectus in which we talked about theory and methodological issues. During these exchanges, I felt our more interdependent relationship continue to grow. This relationship began at the National Reading Research

Center as we read and discussed research and theoretical literature, sorted data, and shared first drafts with one another.

Another aspect of our mentoring relationship that we alluded to in this paper is our friendship. Heinrich (1995) described some woman-to-woman mentoring relationships as something akin to professional friendships. Within these professional friendships, advisors and advisees in her study sought to develop relations in which personal power was shared and negotiated and structured power was dealt with effectively, not ignored or discredited. Our friendship, much like the professional friendships described by Heinrich, was built on shared and negotiated power. This sort of negotiated power allowed me to make a decision such as attending a soccer game and to know that Donna would respect it. It also allowed Donna to give me the personal advice that she so rarely had given to me in the past. As friends, Donna and I were able to speak the truth to each other and stay connected through a very intense period in our mentoring relationship.

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