**Subversive Spaces, Embodied Places and Mentoring as Onto-Epistemology**

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**An introduction**

In the pursuit of new knowledge, the Ph.D. can be intellectually, physically, and mentally isolating. It is also fraught with tensions and trepidations such as navigating the unknown, imposter syndrome and understanding how to inhabit the academe as a researcher. As a result, the doctoral student experience has started to be explored in recent years. In particular, there has been an increasing focus on the mental health of Ph.D. students (Levecque et al, 2017) in what is acknowledged as a crisis in Ph.D. well-being (Times Higher Education, 2017) along with the benefits of establishing doctoral communities (Parker, 2009; Pilbeam & Denyer, 2009). Although doctoral education has previously been under-theorized and conceptualized (Boud & Lee, 2005) it is increasingly being considered in terms of pedagogy. However, this tends to be limited to Ph.D. supervision (Stracke, 2010) and teaching cohorts of learners through a Researcher Development model, focusing on training research methods and skills as separate to the doctoral experience.

Whilst discussion of mentoring is limited in the context of doctoral education and predominantly focuses on the Ph.D. supervisor as mentor, this chapter reconceptualizes mentoring as an expanded and multidimensional mode of support that has the potential to both enhance the doctoral experience and meet students' doctoral training needs. Specifically, I explore the pedagogical potential of mentoring for Arts, Design and Media Ph.D. students and their associated challenges of attaining 'doctoralness,' including negotiating the nuances, complexities and slipperiness of 'art practice research' that, by its very nature, challenges the boundaries of the Ph.D. and knowledge itself (Taylor, 2018). Conceptualized as both pedagogical

action and research, I draw on action research undertaken at my own U.K. institution, as part of an Arts, Design and Media Ph.D. mentoring scheme in which I elaborate on the embodied nature of mentoring in relation to 'place' and its subversive potential. Aligned with the broader framework of critical pedagogy that underpins this book, I contend that mentoring is a complex ecology and site of intra-actions able to facilitate learning-teaching spaces to transform both mentor and mentee on an onto-epistemological level where the emotional, intellectual and professional are intertwined.

### The Terrain of Mentoring and Doctoral Education

A plethora of mentoring literature exists that encompasses a variety of definitions, including a focus on the role of the mentor and the benefits of mentoring. Whilst mentoring has been explored in some depth and there has been a considerable increase in research about mentoring in the work place, there remains a lack of mentoring models specific to academia (Linden et al, 2013). Nevertheless, mentoring is steadily gaining traction in Higher Education and emerging as a rich discourse. However, as Linden et al note, "systematic knowledge is practically non-existent with respect to mentoring in PhD studies, or … other developmental relationships that doctoral students may engage in" (p. 639). In the context of doctoral research, mentoring thus occupies a highly complex territory which at present is only underpinned by a small body of research and literature.

Notably, the literature available predominantly focuses on mentoring as a staff-student relationship in which the mentor is usually the student's own Ph.D. supervisor[i] (Kalin et al 2009; Carpenter et al, 2009; Delacruz, 2009). In a broader educational context, whilst 'teachers' normally deliver a predefined curriculum, mentoring has the potential to address other dimensions such as providing pastoral support, enhancing interpersonal relationships,

and nurturing autonomy to respond to individual needs (Cullingford, 2016). The multidimensional potential afforded by mentoring could be said to resonate with the Ph.D. supervisor as mentor. Indeed, the growing body of literature on doctoral supervision points to the role of the supervisor as shaping the student's intellectual research project as well as extending to their pastoral, coaching, and professional development needs. As Lee (2008) points out, the role of the supervisor might very well change throughout the doctoral journey but fulfils multiple functions including manager, gatekeeper, coach and mentor to facilitate different knowledges, skills and behaviors such as project management, critical thinking, emancipation and emotional intelligence (p. 2).

Mentoring is therefore a crucial component of a doctoral student's intellectual, personal and professional growth. This is particularly so in facilitating the epistemological shifts required to attain 'doctoralness' whereby students must make a new 'contribution to knowledge' as well as supporting Ph.D. students' transition to becoming researchers and navigating the complexities of academia. Yet, there is also a tension at play whereby the mentor-mentee relationship in this context is simultaneously underpinned by certain power structures, hierarchies, and institutional requirements. To follow Cullingford (2016), the distinction between supervisor and mentor is highly blurred, embodied in a delicate relationship between research student and supervisor; although the mentor should be on the side of the individual rather than the institution "there is no question of where the ultimate power lies" (p. 5). This complexity is echoed by Sullivan (2009), in conversation with Carpenter and Zimmerman, who argues that the melding of the roles of supervision and mentoring "can, at times, be confusing for [doctoral] students, as everything from practicalities and politics can get into the mix" (p. 130). Whilst Ph.D. students' scholarly needs (as related to research productivity) and psychosocial needs (as related to personal and

professional development) can be met in Ph.D. supervision (Linden et al, 2013), any sort of mentoring relationship is thus ultimately imbued with a Ph.D. supervisor's own need to ensure timely completion of the doctoral thesis, make academic judgements on progress and various politics.

Other studies have also explored doctoral mentoring through an academic-student relationship but where the academic mentor is independent of the supervisory team (Noonan et al, 2007). Again, such studies are sparse and mirror the tensions of the senior-junior hierarchy and blurred boundaries that underpin the staff-student dyadic relationship. As Johnson (2012) notes, the boundaries between research student and junior colleague often blur as they become colleagues themselves "usually at an indefinable moment before the dissertation is completed and the doctoral hood bestowed" (p. 974). Such mentoring pursuits also risk mentoring being employed as a formal intervention to support Ph.D. students prompted by a need to address the quality of the doctoral thesis (Linden et al, 2013) and progression in the Ph.D.

Peer mentoring has instead been argued to challenge the traditional hierarchical mentoring relationship (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Whilst a Ph.D. supervisor can also have the qualities of a mentor, a more fluid space at the edges of and complementary to this formalized and institutional relationship might also be productive and have the potential to shift the power dynamic of the supervisor-student model. Indeed, peer mentoring relationships have been argued to provide a safe environment for research students to give and receive feedback (Bonilla et al. 1994). This is echoed by Noonan, Ballinger & Black (2007), who assert that peer mentoring relationships elicit a safe and supportive space where students feel less judged and are more inclined to authentically articulate their feelings, resulting in receiving additional guidance in meeting program requirements. The isolation experienced by doctoral researchers might also be countered by peer mentoring as a form of socialization and feeling more integrated into the student body. However,

there is still a tendency to approach such relationships hierarchically based on assumptions such as age. For example, Allen et al (1997) contend that younger students are more likely than their older counterparts to experience greater "uncertainty about expectations and requirements" (p. 500). Terrion and Leonard (2007) too assert that the psychosocial support provided by a mentor can "reduce the stress experienced by a younger and less experienced student" (p. 155). The general trepidations experienced as part of the doctoral process, including intellectual, physical and mental isolation, imposter syndrome, transitioning to becoming a researcher and navigating the unknown are well-acknowledged. As such, undertaking doctoral study has been recognized as impacting well-being and mental health (Levecque et al, 2017; Times Higher Education, 2017). However, this is not limited to age or lack of experience but rather something universal, experienced in different ways and to different degrees by the majority of researchers as part of their doctoral journey. Indeed, older Ph.D. students may experience anxiety precisely because of their age and experience. For example, in the context of the Arts, Design and Media, many mature students often begin the Ph.D. after a significant gap from education; whilst they might have considerable experience as a practitioner in their respective field – vital to their Ph.D. – this can simultaneously create a disconnect from the academe and elicit feelings of imposter syndrome.

## The Arts, Design and Media Ph.D. Mentoring Scheme

Whilst the mentor and mentee have traditionally been perceived to occupy a hierarchical relationship, akin to master and protégé (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007), it has instead been argued that "a good mentoring relationship is built on mutual respect, not power" (Carpenter et al, 2009, p. 128). Amidst the complexities and nuances of mentoring discourse as I have discussed, this chapter adopts a multidimensional and fluid understanding of mentoring in the context of

doctoral education. Here, the mentor and mentee have a reciprocal partnership where both parties are open to and transformed by learning and the mentoring journey; thus, on an ontological and epistemological level. The mentor is indeed considered a wise and trusted guide as noted in traditional mentoring rhetoric but is also a critical friend and ally that promotes trust, risk-taking and caring. The personal and professional are purposefully intertwined to inform one another, combining what Terrion and Leonard (2007) identify as the psycho-social and career-related functions of mentoring. The mentor and mentee are also equally invested in nurturing the mentoring relationship as an ongoing process in a way that exceeds any purely instrumental framework. Mentoring thus has subversive potential in that it enables its participants to necessarily navigate (and transgress) institutional power structures as part of the doctoral journey. Resonating with Atkinson's 'pedagogy of the event' (2013) – and the logic of critical pedagogy – risk and working towards the 'not-known' enable deep learning through a changed ontological state, precisely by disrupting established pedagogical frameworks.

The 'Arts, Design & Media Ph.D. mentoring scheme' was initiated in 2013 at my own U.K. institution as a pilot project, funded by an Interdisciplinary Collaborative Award at the University's Centre for the Enhancement for Learning and Teaching and has both shaped and is shaped by this fluid definition. The award funded projects led by a staff-student team and I was employed as the student partner in the very final stages of my own Ph.D. Informed by my own doctoral experience, the impetus for the mentoring scheme was fourfold, to: enhance the Ph.D. experience; further establish the doctoral community; promote interdisciplinarity and intercultural knowledge exchange; respond to the U.K. government agenda to increase the employability of its doctoral researchers (Vitae, 2008; 2010). The scheme also aligned with the Robert's Agenda (2002) in which U.K. institutions are expected to support the development of their doctoral researchers beyond the production of the thesis[ii]. I remained involved in facilitating the

mentoring scheme beyond its pilot stage as I transitioned myself to becoming a member of staff via negotiating the precarity of fixed-term temporary contracts. The scheme is now embedded into the doctoral curriculum at my institution for Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) and run under the auspices of The PGR Studio, a cross-disciplinary and practice-orientated space of doctoral training excellence, where I am responsible for coordinating doctoral training.

Whilst the pilot scheme was open to Art and Design Ph.D. students, it is now open to the nearly 180 Ph.D. students in the larger Faculty of Arts, Design and Media and over its duration has involved over 61 partnerships and 104 participants. The scheme pairs current Ph.D. students at different stages of their study – from those just beginning their Ph.D. to those coming towards completion – and with recently completed doctoral students. Peer mentoring is not facilitated in the strictest sense of being centered on a student-student relationship. Rather, 'peer' is approached as an expanded term extending to those who are also post-doctoral (but not necessarily having a postdoc position per se) just beyond the threshold of the doctoral community but still with some proximity to the Ph.D. experience. Participants also include accomplished researchers, academic staff undertaking Ph.D.s and experienced Arts, Design and Media practitioners in their respective professional fields. An important characteristic of the scheme, that sets it apart from mentoring in the field of doctoral education, is that it purposefully facilitates another dimension of mentoring beyond – yet complementary to – the supervisory relationship. To follow Johnson (2012), successful mentoring takes place "away from the sometimes intimidating, judgemental eyes of senior colleagues" (p. 976) or in this case, Ph.D. supervisors. Not only does this remove the power dynamic inherent in the supervisor-student relationship but opens up fluid and generative spaces to navigate institutional structures and the supervisory relationship itself at a critical distance where both mentor and mentee can operate on their own terms and with their own agency.

Arts, Design and Media Ph.D. students represent an extremely diverse cohort. They work in and across the Faculty's disciplinary Schools of Architecture and Design, Art, English, Fashion and Textiles, Jewellery, Media, the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and Visual Communication, in ways that are often highly interdisciplinary: from experimental opera to queer performance art and hyperlocal journalism to contemporary poetry and the Anthropocene. As a result, Ph.D students negotiate a multiplicity of research paradigms, languages and conventions including the nuances, complexities, particularities and slipperiness of 'art practice research' that often challenge the very boundaries of the Ph.D. itself. Many schools are geographically disparate and students do not always study on campus with others living outside the region. There are also a mix of full-time, part-time, mature, home and overseas students. Partnerships are matched according to shared goals and aspirations detailed in a short application form rather than the subject specialism of their Ph.D. per se. The mentoring scheme thus seeks to provide mobility and connect students across different arenas – intellectually, methodologically, linguistically, physically, culturally, and otherwise – by eliciting spaces of psychosocial support and meeting both mentor and mentee's research training and development needs.

When embarking on the scheme, participants are expected to commit to attend an off-site 'Launch & Lunch' to meet their mentoring partner, meet at least once a month in person and attend a bi-annual mentoring gathering where mentees and mentors meet to share mentoring experiences, good practice and network. They are also expected to document their mentoring journeys (via photos, notes, social media or otherwise), contribute to The PGR Studio blog about their experience and to follow mentoring ethical principles. The scheme is in many ways an institutional entity (belonging to the space of The PGR Studio) yet it also has a reflexive framework that enables it to be peripheral to the institution. Within these parameters, there is a great degree of flexibility for partnerships in that they are encouraged to be creative, collaborative

and curious, establishing their own mentoring methodologies and ontologies. Importantly, partnerships are encouraged to meet outside – or on the peripheries of – the university, each receiving a £20 voucher to spend off-campus at an independent coffee shop as well as to develop their own teaching-learning spaces as part of their mentoring journey. The mentoring ethos resonates very much with Johnson (2012) who contends that "overinstitutionalization could stifle the vitality of mentoring relationships, which flourish optimally when they are spontaneous, mutual and open-ended" (p. 973). Echoing Freire (1970), and the discourse of critical pedagogy, mentoring here could thus be said to problematize power structures through emancipatory education in which students – as active subjects – are co-creators of their own knowledge rooted in praxis. As I will elaborate, it is the very fluidity and reflexivity of the Arts, Design and Media Ph.D. mentoring scheme and the in-betweenness of the spaces it elicits, that empowers and gives agency to mentors and mentees, to enable its pedagogical and onto-epistemological potential.

## A Multi-layered Methodology

Since its inception, the mentoring scheme has been approached as research. In the pilot phase, in depth evaluations were sought from all participants to understand the ways in which partnerships approached mentoring when working with such a degree of autonomy and in a reflexive and creative framework. It was also to ascertain challenges experienced by participants, the characteristics of successful relationships and inform the future development of the scheme. The mentoring scheme is now one strand amongst a multiplicity of activities conceptualized as a doctoral curriculum as part of The Faculty of Arts, Design & Media's PGR Studio. The PGR Studio itself is unique as one of the only doctoral education spaces in the U.K. that is underpinned by a performative and provocative pedagogy and an ethos of creativity, collaboration and criticality. Part of its uniqueness is that rather than being run by Professional

Services staff (the normative Research Training paradigm in the U.K.), The PGR Studio encompasses a team of academics who are all research-active in their respective fields alongside the employment of Research Assistants who are Arts, Design and Media Ph.D. students or postdoc researchers themselves. Importantly, all of the work of The PGR Studio is approached *as* research – from action research that experiments with and reflects on its pedagogic activity, to measuring, understanding and conceptualizing the doctoral curriculum and doctoral learning – enabling the boundaries of doctoral education to be critically and rigorously expanded.

Throughout the mentoring scheme, data has been gathered as part of an ongoing process through what I have called a 'multi-layered methodology'. This reflects the prevalence of the artist-research as a bricoleur as used in arts-based research (Biggs, 2006; Vaughan 2009; Stewart, 2007) in which multiple methods are appropriated, juxtaposed and woven together to work within an across different research paradigms. Social media platforms used by participants including posts on Twitter (see figure 1) and accounts set up collaboratively by partnerships on platforms such as Tumblr, Instagram, and WordPress to document their mentoring journeys were analyzed



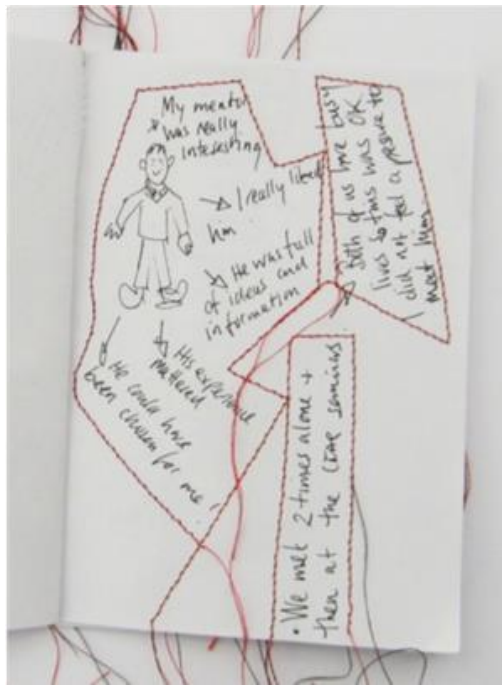Figure 1. Images posted by mentor on Twitter

Figure 2. Documentation of meeting by mentee in handmade sketchbook.

visually and textually to unveil the different facets of mentoring. Data was gathered through

'creative methods,' such as activities at mentoring workshops and mentoring gatherings that

elicited objects, artefacts and words associated with the mentoring experience to understand a

mentoring lexicon. Evaluations and the documentation of mentoring partnerships encompassing

photographs, reports, creative writing, drawing, and even short videos (see figure 2), were also

analyzed to yield insights into the dynamics of mentoring. In addition, application forms from

participants across the five years were thematically analyzed to understand the aspirations of

participants in becoming mentors and mentors and how mentoring aligned with their future

professional aspirations.

As the mentoring scheme came towards the end of its fifth year, this information was

systematically gathered together. Participants in the fifth year of the scheme were also invited to

take part in an in-depth online questionnaire or a semi-structured interview, both structured

around three areas: 'mentoring mapping' (when, where and how often partnerships met); the

'mentoring experience' (the impact this had on partnerships and individual participants); and 'mentoring pedagogies' (the ways that mentoring enabled learning). In total, 12 questionnaires were completed alongside 8 interviews (a response rate of 84%),[iii] with both methods complementing one another to elicit a depth and breadth of qualitative data. The responses represented a mix of mentees and mentors at different stages of the doctoral journey and a small number of mentors who had recently completed their own Ph.Ds. It also included partnerships of different durations including the only two participants who had been involved in the scheme since the pilot phase as both mentees and mentors.

## Towards a Mentoring Ecology

This chapter is grounded in data gathered over the duration of the mentoring scheme with a particular focus on the questionnaires and interviews in the latter stages of the project. Whilst the research has elicited a significant amount of narrative and qualitive information, I focus specifically on four interconnecting themes identified as: 'inside-outside', 'space-place', 'friendship-professional' and 'experience and learning.' I propose that these themes together constitute a mentoring ecology; one conceptualized as a complex system of intra-actions (Barad, 2007) between mentees, mentors, and their environment. In doing so, I elaborate on how the fluid, reflexive and creative nature of the mentoring scheme enables multiple teaching-learning spaces to be opened up, transformative for both mentors and mentees on an onto-epistemological level.

## Inside-Outside: At the Edges of the Institution

The mentoring scheme happens *inside* the university; it is part of the institution and its participants, as part of the scheme, too exist inside this sphere. Yet at the same time, the

mentoring scheme productively sits *outside*; of the supervisory team, institutional progression points and, more often than not, the physical university. Rather, mentoring here inhabits an in-between space that traverses the inside *and* outside at the edges of the institution. This fluid relation is evident in the places where mentoring happens and the spaces that are opened up. Interestingly, whilst participants did communicate via email, text and Facebook, this was perceived to simply be a mechanism to keep in touch, with all participants articulating mentoring in the context of face-to-face interaction as a site of interpersonal and intersubjective exchange. Even though partnerships were encouraged to meet monthly in person, the frequency of meetings were not rigidly enforced to enable partnerships to grow organically. As a result, partnerships met at different frequencies and for different durations; about half meeting every month and others either every 2-3 weeks or every other month. Whilst many partnerships initially met for an hour, a large proportion met for anywhere between 2-6 hours at a time. As such, the dominant narrative was the importance of the *quality* rather than quantity of mentoring exchanges, resonating with research in which an increase in mentoring does not lead to higher satisfaction if there is already satisfaction with the relationship (Terrion & Leonard, 2007).

Whilst a small number of partnerships did meet on campus in coffee shops and break-out spaces, these were all noted for convenience. Apart from two partnerships, all eventually ventured further afield with one mentee commenting that the shift from inside to "being out of the institution meant we could be completely open about what we were talking about." The majority of partnerships purposefully chose to meet outside the university or use the university as a starting point from which to move beyond it. As perhaps might be expected (especially with complementary coffee vouchers), many partnerships met in coffee shops, cafés and pubs. However, over half of the mentoring exchanges also traversed 'other' spaces including art galleries, museums, botanical gardens, and urban walking.

Every single questionnaire respondent and interviewee who met off-campus said that being outside the university had a positive impact on the mentoring experience and relationship, enabling a more informal, supportive, and relaxed environment. There was also an awareness of being able to generatively transcend institutional power structures in some way. Indeed, one mentee described their mentoring meetings in a coffee shop outside the university as "a neutral place" to talk about the Ph.D. and another stated that "it *removed* us from the institution, allowing for a more relaxing exchange" (emphasis added). As one mentor explicitly noted:

> It's definitely different meeting outside the university … the things that happen here,
>
> inside the institution, are more formalized activities. As soon as you take it outside
>
> the university then it's up for grabs. That's where the power [of mentoring] lies.

The mentoring scheme could be argued to facilitate alternative spaces *outside* institutional structures that enable a critical distance to navigate precisely being *inside* the university as a Ph.D. student. This was especially evident for those navigating the in-between position of being both a Ph.D. student and member of staff. For example, one mentor asserted that the mentoring helped them to transition to "a space outside the institution/workplace" to one more "relaxed" and conducive to talking about the Ph.D., and one mentee said that it was crucial that the mentoring took place outside the university to open up a "safe space" to discuss the Ph.D. away from work. Aligned with the logic of critical pedagogy, the 'in-between' of mentoring relates closely to the concept of the 'paraversity' in that it forms a subversive and powerful space to approach the Ph.D., alongside and in parallel to the university's doxa (Rolfe, 2014, p. 3).

The tensions and possibilities of the inside-outside resonate in particular with one comment by a mentor that the mentoring "is about the Ph.D. but it's not the Ph.D." They highlighted the importance of mentoring as providing a space to discuss "all the emotions and the lifechanging stuff that goes on during the Ph.D." In other words, that which might normally be

considered to be *outside* or peripheral to the Ph.D. proper, and the sole remit of the Ph.D. supervisory team, as opposed to the research itself. Mentoring also enables a way to necessarily disrupt the neoliberal logic of overwork and enable emotional and academic spheres to intersect; as one mentee stated, it made them "physically get … outside the institution at a time I just felt totally overloaded." Mentoring thus provides a way to enable different aspects of the Ph.D. to be addressed, precisely by inhabiting an in-between space at the edges of the institution that do not necessarily overtly address the Ph.D. (as a research degree) per se.

**Negotiating Space-Place**

The nuances of the inside-outside also explicitly relate to space-place as inherently interconnected spheres, again revealing a complexity and in-between dimension between the two. Notably, coffee vouchers given to partnerships were cited as an impetus to meet outside the university in a more relaxed environment. However, they unexpectedly also served as a starting point for mentoring partnerships to wander in a more meandering and spontaneous way beyond the coffee shop itself allowing exchanges to take place via the navigation of multiple places and spaces. Indeed, one mentor commented on how they wandered with their mentee to the city museum and art gallery after initially meeting at the coffee shop, meaning they "were able to meet intellectually at lots of different points … there was more chance of us making a connection in that space [the art gallery] than anywhere else." Another mentor stated that they first met their mentor at the coffee shop where "the coffee and cake provided a focus," however, as the relationship developed they increasingly met around the city to walk and talk where mentoring exchanges traversed stretches of the canal, different cultural quarters of the city, cemeteries, and art galleries.

The language used by participants to articulate mentoring exchanges revealed that the places were navigated predominantly via a sense of wandering and exploration as a collaborative, performative and facilitative act. For example, one mentee talked about how they spent time with their mentor walking through the city in which they "often *explored* places neither of us had been to before, which served as a nice distraction from Ph.D. worries" (emphasis added). Interestingly, one mentor stated that:

> We tried to use all the vouchers, but it rather constrained our wanderings, so we pretty much gave up on them after a while. It seemed better to be mobile and to explore. The conversations were fairly unstructured, and this was reflected in the open-ended nature of our explorations.

In the context of participants being Arts, Design and Media researchers, which often requires a systematic yet playful, experimental and creative approach to research, it is interesting to note the resonances with the highly experiential way that many of the participants embraced the mentoring exchanges both as a process of discovery and of finding something new.

Within the nexus of space-place, many participants also discussed how being outside the university challenged the spaces and structures of the institution. As one mentee noted:

> It got us out of here [the university] because that felt hierarchical and I think the very nature of doing a PhD is hierarchical. It shouldn't be but there is that power structure between supervisor and supervisee. I thought those roles might transfer over into the mentor/mentee one, but not at all … it just dissolved.

By being outside the institution, mentoring has the potential to both create a productive non-hierarchical relationship between mentee and mentor as well as elicit alternative spaces to approach the Ph.D. Indeed, one mentor reflecting on meeting their mentee at a botanical garden, said that "it didn't feel like this space, this place [the university]. It felt like a holiday

space and an *escape* place" (emphasis added). They referred in positive terms to a need to enter another world to talk about the Ph.D. free from the university. This also resonates with one mentee who said that they felt "a sense of *emancipation* about being outside and walking around outside of here [the university]" (emphasis added).

Rather like Rolfe's 'paraversity', it might be argued then, that subversive spaces can be opened up in and amongst the places navigated and inhabited as part of the mentoring journey in which both mentee and mentor are necessarily liberated (physically and emotionally) from the institution. The ways that these places and spaces are navigated, negotiated and traversed, in particular through walking, wandering and exploring, are all highly embodied (Middleton, 2010) and enable a different kind of learning, being and becoming than one might find *inside* the institution. They also offer an/other space to connect on a very human level; as one mentor notes, it affords a way to "communicate properly about the realness of the Ph.D." as different to "performing achieving the Ph.D. in institutional spaces" and as one mentee describes, "a more fluid and discursive space" than that of Ph.D. supervision where "there's no need to impress … or be clear or concise in the same way."

**Amidst Friendship and Professional**

The overwhelming majority of participants referred in some way to their mentoring partnership in terms of friendship, in particular when exchanges traversed multiple places *outside* the university. Indeed, one mentor commented that by meeting beyond the institution, mentoring became a social experience enabling both mentor and mentee to "empathize on personal and professional levels." Another mentor noted that "the more we met outside the university, the more it seemed like a friendship rather than solely professional." For many, unexpected

commonalities beyond the Ph.D. emerged – including cocktail tasting, music and even dog walking – becoming the catalyst for other places where mentoring exchanges took place. Interestingly, gender or demographic dynamics also did not seem to overtly impact partnerships. In fact, one female mentee stated she was surprised to develop such a close friendship with her mentor (male and considerably older) but that they had connected by meeting in waterside locations as they each missed the seaside which they had each grown up. Whilst seemingly *outside* the Ph.D., such commonalities were cited as linked to the personal meaning that "conversation became less formal and circulated more about life matters around the PhD, which was helpful." This is embodied in the way that many partnerships spoke of the mentor and mentee as occupying a non-hierarchical relation whereby in becoming friends they are seen "on an equal footing. There's absolutely no feeling of one being above the other."

Interestingly, whilst many participants likened their mentoring partnership to friendship, they also elucidated that it was different to or *beyond* friendship. For example, one mentee stated that the most important thing about their mentoring partnership was "how natural it became and was *one step on* from being a friend" (emphasis added). Similarly, one mentor noted that it operated "at a different level [to friendship] … like a love or care for family" and another that "it's not friendship, it's a different type of relationship, it's more. It creates a connection. I've learnt personal things … that binds us." Arguably, it is precisely the in-between qualities of mentoring, in that it is neither quite friendship nor supervision and neither quite outside the institution nor quite inside of it that enables a fluidity to address the multiple needs of PhD students. This fluidity can also be argued to create a kind of care that is not actively cultivated amongst institutional hierarchies and power structures. Following Johnson (2012), instead of being simply 'work-related', such a mutual exchange of mentoring has emotional and intellectual dimensions.

Although a number of participants described their mentoring partnership solely in terms of friendship, they also articulated it as occupying a highly nuanced and peripheral position in relation to the professional. Indeed, some participants described the mentoring partnership as both personal *and* professional, with others as necessarily "somewhere in-between friendship and professional" and "in-between two distinct worlds." One mentee also described their mentoring partnership as "neither one nor the other" but instead as a "professional friendship that exists in and beyond the institution." Mentoring here might thus be considered to be a multidimensional practice in which the personal, emotional and academic are intertwined. In doing so, it could be argued to operate ontologically, resonating with the lived experience of undertaking a Ph.D., as well as epistemologically, whereby certain knowledges and learning take place. As one mentee notes, mentoring feels "more like friendship but the things we discuss are helpful in terms of my Ph.D. research and intellectually."

Whilst participants highlighted the importance of friendship and the personal dimension of mentoring, notably, a number of participants articulated the importance of professional and institutional parameters. Indeed, one mentor who only met their mentee outside the university contended that whilst they consider their mentee as a friend and mentoring occupies an equal partnership, it is still "very much *boundaried* by the fact that we are in a professional relationship" (emphasis added). They continued that although the personal is important, it also needs to be delineated from their "private identity" pointing to a more multifaceted and complex space in-between the personal and professional. This is echoed by another mentor who commented: "I love the idea that the mentoring is an institutional thing … that it has rules. It's not *just* a friendship, it's a structure" (emphasis added). Interestingly, structure is elaborated here as "creative", "embodied" and "performative" in which 'rules' are recognised as part of the scheme but yet have the potential to subvert wider institutional power structures. Such comments

point to the inherently fluid and reflexive nature of the mentoring scheme as nevertheless

constituted in relation to the institution; arguably this enables the very in-betweenness crucial to

the scheme to be legitimized and participants empowered to navigate mentoring (and the Ph.D.)

with their own agency.


**Experience, Ontology, Pedagogy**

Not only did all questionnaire respondents and interviewees mention experience in

relation to their aspirations and expectations of being involved in mentoring, but so did nearly all

of the mentoring applications over the five-year duration of the scheme, pointing to the

importance of both the experiential and ontological dimensions of mentoring. Indeed, mentors

wanted to share their own experience and enhance the Ph.D. experience for mentees. Similarly,

the majority of mentees stated that they wanted to benefit from the experience, expertise and

support of someone ahead of them in the Ph.D. journey. Interestingly, many of these reasons

were related to learning; for example, one mentee noted that that they wanted "another voice of

experience to *guide* and *support* me both as an individual and scholar" (emphasis added).

Whilst not necessarily explicitly acknowledged by participants, I contend that mentoring

functions as a form of learning in highly tacit and embodied ways on personal, practical, and

intellectual levels. Many participants commented on how mentoring transformed them

personally, including through confidence-building and enhancing their mental health. Indeed, one

mentee stated that mentoring allowed them to learn to "take ownership of the doctoral research

process in a way that made sense" and another that it made them realize they were "perfectly

capable of doing a Ph.D." In addition, mentoring enabled 'practical' learning, such as managing

data, networking and "knowing how people put the Ph.D. together." Notably, it offered a means

to navigate the particularities of Arts, Design and Media research, which one mentee noted

helped them "to engage in a non-traditional way with the processes and outputs of academic research." Learning also took place on an intellectual and academic level, albeit in ways peripheral to the Ph.D. research. Indeed, one mentee commented that they talked with their mentor "about general theorists but not the specifics of the Ph.D." and one mentor stated that whilst "the subject of my mentee's research was of little interest to me, our relationship worked because of our underlying interests in epistemological and methodological issues."

Interestingly, the pedagogical potential of mentoring was linked with navigating the vocabularies of the Ph.D., research, and academia. As one mentor summed up: "There's a whole language associated with the Ph.D. that everyone can learn. It was really nice to pass that on, that you *can* do this, you just need to learn the language of this terrain." This was reflected by a number of mentees, with one commenting that they learnt "the nuanced complexities of academic life and expectations of the university" and another "what a Ph.D. is and what it means, as well as to be an academic and part of a research culture." Following Zimmerman (2009), in conversation with Carpenter and Sullivan, Ph.D. researchers need to be acclimated into the intellectual culture of the academe. Mentoring thus has the capacity to prompt an epistemic shift from the unfamiliar to the familiar (and indeed the outside to inside) to become aware of the institutional terrain. This is especially true of Ph.D. supervision, with one mentee commenting on the different languages between supervisor and mentor in that they "wouldn't say 'I'm fed up with my Ph.D.' to my supervisors" but they could say that to their mentor as "they understand what I mean as they've gone through it." Mentoring also enables the navigation of Ph.D. supervision and its vernacular, which as one mentee notes enables "a different sort of conversation and thinking through of the processes and terminology I am expected to grasp."

Mentoring does not necessarily cohere with teaching and learning in the conventional sense but could instead be argued to form an alternative and expanded critical pedagogy. Not

only are the personal, practical, and academic complexly interwoven together but these extend to the emotional, pastoral and Ph.D. research itself in highly nuanced ways. As one mentee noted, mentoring provides "advice and support" from outside the supervisory team "but with experience and empathy of doing a Ph.D." Crucial to this pedagogical potential is foregrounding the experiential and ontological dimensions of the Ph.D. where both mentor and mentee can equally occupy the role of the teacher and learner with their own agency. It is not simply about knowing the answers but, as one mentee points out, is "an opportunity to put yourself in a place of not knowing and … acknowledge that unsafe ground with someone."

## Mentoring as Onto-Epistemology

Ph.D. students experience many challenges, tensions and trepidations in working towards 'doctoralness.' Pedagogically, support tends to focus on Ph.D. supervision, cohort-based learning and research training in which the intellectual, academic and pastoral needs of students are conceptualized as separate arenas, ignoring the highly nuanced, individualized and experiential nature of doctoral study. Mentoring as proposed here offers a radical new mode of support for Ph.D. researchers that moves beyond the academic-student mentoring relationship as found in most doctoral mentoring discourse. In the context of the Arts, Design and Media, I instead contend that mentoring can be reconceptualized as a multidimensional practice, centered on a creative, collaborative and growth-oriented ethos and non-hierarchical relationship between mentor and mentee in which the two have proximity to the Ph.D. experience yet a critical distance from it.

By purposefully and productively traversing the inside and outside of the institution, through mentoring exchanges that embrace an embodied and performative approach, mentoring here also enables alternative teaching-learning spaces to be opened up. In doing so, the

intellectual, academic, and pastoral are intertwined through an expanded pedagogy that extends, for example to psycho-social support, knowledge exchange and enhancing Ph.D. students' employability through skills and professional development. Not only does mentoring elicit subversive spaces to challenge the normative neoliberal logic of being too busy to care for oneself (Hawkins, 2018), but it also has the potential to empower mentees and mentors to negotiate the institution and its power structures on their own terms. Via in-between spheres of inside-outside, space-place and friendship-professional, I contend that mentoring is a complex ecology and, following Barad (2007), can be conceived as a site of intra-actions where agency is constituted through a dynamism of forces that are constantly exchanging and influencing one another where things come into being by their material entanglement. Within its fluid and reflexive framework, mentoring might thus be conceived both as a condition of possibility and space of being and becoming whereby both mentor and mentee produce various knowledges – praxical, embodied and otherwise – and are transformed on an onto-epistemological level.

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[i] The term 'supervisor' is used in this chapter as it is the term adopted in the U.K., which provides the context for this research. Doctoral 'advisor' is normally used as an equivalent term in a U.S. context.

[ii] In 2002, the Roberts Review provided recommendations for the professional development of PGRs. This resulted in the U.K. government allocating a substantial amount of money to Universities and research organisations to invest in PGR development, prompting what is now known as the discourse of 'Researcher Development.'

[iii] Interviewees represented 6 out of the 8 disciplinary schools and those at the early, mid and late stages of the Ph.D. as well as two who had recently completed their own Ph.Ds. 5 out of the 8 interviewees were female and interviewees represented a mixture of ages with 2 under 30, and 3 above 40.