

Book Review—*Mentorship/Methodology: Reflections, Praxis, Futures* edited by Leigh Gruwell and Charles N. Lesh

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Mentoring practices exist across disciplines, fields, and vocations and have been key to pursuits in higher education (Johnson and Griffin). As with so many of us in rhetoric and composition, mentoring has been crucial to my development as a scholar and teacher, but even as I voice my staunch support of mentoring—in practice and in scholarship—I have to wonder *why* it's of particular, sustained interest in our field. Discussion of mentoring in rhetoric and composition, in its early iterations, has been tied to teacher training and WPA work (Gaillet). The conversation has developed to better understand how mentoring is especially important and complicated for folks who are vulnerable and underrepresented in the field and in academia (Ore, Weisser, and Cedillo; Ribero and Arellano). Additionally, conceptions of the configurations of mentorships have broadened beyond one-to-one, expert-novice connections. Instead, scholars have explored the profound effects that horizontal and community mentoring have on the ways that teacher-scholars develop and navigate the field, their institutions, and their professional trajectories (Ballif, Davis, and Mountford; Cahill, Miller-Cochran, Pantoja, and Rodrigo; Clary-Lemon and Roen; VanHaitsma and Ceraso). By linking mentorship and methodology, Leigh Gruwell and Charles N. Lesh's edited collection, *Mentorship/Methodology: Reflections, Praxis, Futures*, carries this conversation forward and pushes the field to think about this question—Why is mentorship so crucial to rhetoric and composition?—in new and fruitful ways.

Meditating on this question focused my attention on how relationality operates through the field and especially the practice of mentorship. Ann Shivers-McNair traces the relationality of rhetoric—across Indigenous, Black, feminist, and Western traditions—as it emerges from and continually unfolds across humans, nonhumans, materials, and environments. As such, “Rhetoric is relational. *What* and *how* we know and do is inseparable from *where*, *when*, *in what bodies*, and *with whom* we know and do” (Shivers-McNair 23, emphasis in original). Mentorship is also, by definition, relational, although how that relationship is defined, enacted, and valued can vary (Gaillet). Gruwell and Lesh's collection argues that mentorship is inextricable from our methodologies—that the relationality of rhetoric and composition is foundational to how we make knowledge and meaning in our field. Mentorship is not only a means to an end (e.g., completing the dissertation; securing a job)—it is, to echo Shivers-McNair, an enactment of how our methodologies are “constitutively tied up in who we know and how we know them” (Gruwell and Lesh 4). Going a step further, mentorship becomes a site and practice for building a literacy of relationality that can infuse into, permeate, and bridge our theories and practices. When we consider mentorship through the lens of literacy-as-event, it

is about how literacy is “lived in relations” that open “multiple potentialities, including multiple possibilities for what might materialise as well as what does not” (Burnett and Merchant 46, 49). The contours of mentorship in rhetoric and composition that may once have been defined by a project or context are now, as this collection shows, woven into the very fabric of the field, creating space to gain and perform the literacies that are necessary for our methodologies—in research, teaching, administration, and community engagement.

This collection argues for the co-constitutiveness of mentorship and methodology—as indicated by the slash in the title. Each section offers contributions from mentor-researchers who explore a different relationship between mentorship and methodology—a different construction of the intersection, entanglement, and repercussions of who we know, what we know, and how we come to that knowledge. Part 1 focuses on “making space” to open new questions about mentorship and methodology, ranging from cultural rhetorics to grad methodology courses. Part 2 articulates the need and possibility for sustainability of both our methodologies and our mentoring practices across WPA, WAC, publishing, and self-organized writing groups. Part 3 provides potential innovations in methodology for research and mentorship. Finally, in Part 4, the contributors take a forward view, offering complications and possibilities for the future of methodology, mentorship, and (perhaps) the field, itself.

Although I appreciated the organization of the collection based on themes prompted by a particular understanding of the slash, I found myself a bit ungrounded when trying to envision these big ideas in my daily practice. I approached my reading of the collection through a different configuration, thinking about the range of scholar-teacher-mentors who might pick up this collection and the literacies they might build and apply in their work. As such, I rearranged and clustered the essays based on my view of a reader perspective, as follows: methodology of mentoring practices, reciprocity of mentorship and methodology, identity and belonging for mentoring and methodology, and professionalization through mentoring and methodology.

Methodology of Mentoring Practices: These authors offer a way to consider mentorship as a system that encompasses not only the *what* of the relationship (structure, model, site), but also the *how* (e.g., its processes; how it functions). Readers who have multiple mentoring responsibilities will find these chapters rich for thinking about how they approach and adapt their mentoring work. As Gruwell and Lesh point out, “methodologies are the larger epistemic commitments that guide how a researcher understands processes of knowledge-making” (12); thus, applying this insight to a methodology of mentoring reveals the epistemic commitments of a shared process of making knowledge. For example, Devon Fitzgerald Ralston (Chapter 4) considers a methodology of mentoring in the writing center as central to the administrative work done in that space, which supports the relationality of a writing center space and the literacy practices that rest on those relationships. Equally focused on relationality, Lesley Erin Bartlett, Jessica Rivera-Mueller, and Sandra L. Tarabochia (Chapter 8) apply the slow movement to mentoring, celebrating messiness, recursivity, and process, including the spaces between rigorous academic projects. They articulate a methodology of slow mentorship as a holistic approach that values “‘excess,’ identity work, and

agency” (145). However, mentoring doesn’t always work as anticipated. In a study of undergraduate embedded mentoring, Keaton Kirkpatrick (Chapter 11) reveals that a methodology of mentoring may not be clear to all participants, even as they navigate the same context. This cluster helped me see that I might choose a different methodology for each of my mentoring engagements, just as I would for different research projects, and that my epistemic commitments have potential to reproduce or subvert existing systems.

Reciprocity of Mentorship and Methodology: In previous discussions, reciprocity has been focused on the connection between mentor and mentee (Abbott, Bellwoar, and Hall; Mullin and Braun), but the authors in this cluster reveal a robust form of reciprocity that views mentoring and research as co-constitutive and relational practices—of particular interest to readers navigating collaborative projects. Reciprocity is key to the generational mentoring that Gregory J. Palermo, Qianqian Zhang-Wu, Devon Skyler Regan, and Mya Poe (Chapter 5) describe as crucial for sustaining a collaborative project, while also contributing to individual research trajectories. Their observation about “witnessing, supporting, and regrounding each other” (102) articulates a methods goal and a mentoring goal—reciprocity across researchers and research goals. Similarly, Anna Sicari (Chapter 10) explains that “mentorship is relational—it is dynamic and should be a space of reciprocal learning” (181). Her contribution positions institutional ethnography as a method to help us study mentoring and, simultaneously, how mentorship can help us use institutional ethnography. As such, “mentoring models can and should shape our research methodologies (and vice versa)” (185), especially as we work to transform institutional structures that exclude and marginalize. Michelle Flahive (Chapter 13) makes a similar claim in the reciprocity of mentorship and methodology through testimonio, particularly how the connection is collaborative and empowering for studying mentorship. Expanding the view of mentorship in writing centers, Elizabeth Geib Chavin and Beth A. Towle (Chapter 9) describe the “methodological framework in which WCAs, WC scholars, and consultants support one another in research through formal and informal networks” (164). The supportive networks and research practices are inseparable, mirroring Gruwell and Lesh’s larger argument for the reciprocity of methodology and mentorship in the field.

Identity and Belonging for Mentorship and Methodology: Readers who are actively engaged in dismantling inequities in the field will benefit from this cluster, which builds on the ongoing conversation about community, difference, and mentorship. The contributions from Elise Dixon, Trixie Smith, and Malea Powell (Chapter 1) and from Eric A. House, Kelly Medina-López, and Kellie Sharp-Hoskins (Chapter 3) provide crucial perspectives on the challenges of belonging, particularly within and beyond institutions that continue to marginalize communities and identities. Dixon, et al., argue that cultural rhetorics emphasizes the capacity of communities to teach those of us in academia. Recognizing their expertise informs and shapes our methodologies and mentoring and opens space to work in tension with existing (academic) institutions, values, and assumptions. House, Medina-López, and Sharp-Hoskins ask the pressing question of belonging, “Why do so many BIPGM graduate students in our discipline have mentoring horror stories?” (71), and they

recommend building “methodological homeplaces” via affirmative mentoring practices (58). These considerations of community and belonging have reframed, for me, a sense of the literacies—rural identities, queerness, feminism, first-gen—that I connect with, learn from, and share as I engage in mentorship and research. As Leslie R. Anglesey and Melissa Nicolas (Chapter 12) explain, in crippled mentorship, “mentoring becomes an epistemology. Looking at the world sideways and upside down impacts the kinds of claims we can make about it (research)” (221).

Professionalization through Mentoring and Methodology: Mentoring has high stakes for our professionalization, a literacy in itself, including our understanding, enactment, and innovation with methodologies. These chapters are especially appealing for readers who are navigating the early stages of their careers or those who offer professionalization for early career scholars. For example, Brad Lucas (Chapter 2) challenges us to think about the ways that graduate methodologies courses are (or are not) serving students and how mentoring may offer a stronger methodological education. For Alisa Russell and Thomas Polk (Chapter 6), the necessity of reciprocity and regularity for mentoring to be effective in the WPA Graduate Organization reveals that “the very issues mentorship is meant to address can be the issues that keep it from being successful” in professionalization opportunities (117). Tracing the overlap between mentorship and methodology in making the publishing process more visible, Jessica Clements and John Pell (Chapter 7) show how “explicit (tactical, cross-institutional) mentorship” has been enacted by several journals and editorial teams (128). Mentorship in publishing can be a step toward addressing inequities in the field as a whole (141). The collection usefully ends with Aurora Matzke and John Paul Tassoni’s (Chapter 14) consideration of mentorships that extend and evolve beyond (and after) a particular benchmark has been met. In these cases, “mentorship for mentees/mentors in post-arrival space functions as a simultaneous happened, is happening, and will happen occurrence” (255). I have been experiencing these post-mentorship spaces—co-editing with a former mentor, co-authoring with a former mentee—and Matzke and Tassoni have helped me identify new tensions and possibilities of these evolving dynamics. What comes after a mentorship can “(re)shape our actions in rhet/comp and, perhaps, (re)shape rhet/comp itself” (Matzke and Tassoni 259).

Conclusion

The collection reveals mentorship as a microcosm of the field at large, offering a conceptual way forward by intertwining it with methodology. My reorganization of the chapters helped me navigate the more theoretical themes and orient toward my own priorities in practical application—including the concerns that I continue to have regarding labor and resources. Mentorship “(re)produces different patterns of disciplinarity and disciplinary research [...] both the perpetuation of harmful systems of exclusion and the potential for change, for more equitable forms of mentorship and research to mutually nourish each other and move our field toward more inclusive practices” (Gruwell and Lesh 7). As we think about wanting mentoring to do more, as Lesh and Gruwell’s collection argues, we have a responsibility to think about *who* is doing more; the resources, compensation, and

recognition that they receive for that work; and particularly how it is viewed by administrators and tenure committees. Until then, we continue to lean on the labor of folks who already carry a heavy burden in our departments and communities.

More fully positioning mentorship as a crucial and rigorous activity in the field creates a first step toward legitimizing the time, labor, and energy that goes into mentoring relationships. In other words, as I work to make the case that my efforts in mentoring are worthwhile contributions to the field, this book helps me start to make that case. Mentoring is not just an offshoot of teaching. It's not only service. It's not tangential. It's *foundational*—particularly to a field that is built on relationality and literacy, a field that values knowledge-making as communal and engages in methodologies that reflect these values. As such, we might consider: How does connecting mentorship and methodology create a new literacy of both, and of the field, more generally? Gruwell and Lesh assert that mentorship/methodology opens a broader possibility of engagement—beyond annual reviews and publications, to the very knowledge-making practices of our field—and making them more supportive, especially for underrepresented scholars (11). Mentorship, at its best, functions reciprocally in our ongoing, mutual development as a community of teacher-scholar-mentors as we all “try together” (Matzke and Tassoni 268).