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Experimenting with dialogic mentoring: a new model

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore mentoring as a dialogic practice in relation to three themes: identity, fear of being judged and respect. It develops Bokenko and Gantt's (2000) concept of dialogic mentoring to propose a new theorisation of mentoring as a relational, embodied, spatial, affective and ethical practice.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper reports on a mentoring project that took place in a UK University which was seeking to enhance its research culture. This project used an innovative methodological approach in which mentor and mentee wrote and shared diary entries as means of building more effective and constructive mentoring experiences, and as a vehicle for reflexively analysing the mentoring process.

Findings – The project outcomes were: first, a deepened appreciation and reflexive evaluation of the role played by diaries and writing in the enactment of dialogic mentoring; second, the development of a theoretical framework to enhance understanding of dialogic mentoring and third, the generation of a dialogic mentoring model encompassing multiple dimensions of the process.

Practical implications – The paper provides insights to support methodological innovation in mentoring practice; it links mentoring practice with theory development to enhance mentor and mentee collaboration and reflexivity; it offers an example of good mentoring practice that could be scaled up within educational institutions wishing to enhance their research culture.

Originality/value – The paper offers, first, a reflexive account of a methodologically innovative mentoring practice to enhance mentoring; and second, it proposes a new theorisation and model of dialogic mentoring practices.

Keywords Higher education, Dialogue, Mentoring, Ethical, Reflexive

Paper type Research paper

The beginning

This paper is purposefully written in two voices – Lindy, the mentee and Carol, the mentor – to reflect the ongoing nature of the collaborative process we have been engaged in. We have used different fonts to indicate our respective voices.

I (Lindy) was seeking a space for research and scholarly development. I had made the decision to leave my post in teacher education because I felt constrained by the pressures of Teacher Standards (which I saw as “teaching by numbers”), the constant flow of new educational initiatives in schools, and performative Ofsted regimes. I had previously written books for practitioners and wanted to engage in more research which would provide me with the opportunity to write academic articles. When Carol and I had a conversation about the possibility of doing a departmentally-resourced project we decided to shape the project on mentoring.

I (Carol) had been appointed as Reader[1] three months before Lindy started her post as Senior Lecturer in Education Studies. The role still felt very new to me. There wasn't a mentoring strategy in our department at that point and I felt both as if I was “making it up” in the sense that I was working from my own inclinations, knowledge and experience of mentoring, and that I wanted to do it “properly” (whatever that meant). My previous research had focused on analyses of power relations in educational practices and I was interested in continuing this line of



thinking. I wanted to see how Lindy and I could work together as mentor and mentee to diminish (if not do away with) hierarchical relations. For me, the project was an opportunity to get inside the dynamics of mentoring relations.

We both had a purpose in initiating this mentoring relationship. We wrote a bid together for a departmentally resourced project which had a range of individual and collaborative outputs. For Lindy, these outputs were to produce an article and a publication plan, while Carol's outputs were to mentor Lindy in achieving her aims, and carry out a literature review of mentoring practices. Collaborative outputs included a series of texts reflecting on the mentoring process, and a departmental seminar presentation to disseminate good practice arising from insights from the project. The bid was explicitly constructed to inform the development of the departmental research strategy. What was also explicit from the start was our wish to frame the project as a way to explore "how to have an equal relationship in an unequal relationship". This framing arises from a number of factors. First, Lindy was interviewed by Carol for the post of Senior Lecturer. Second, Carol was an experienced member of the University staff. Third, Carol was the course leader. Lindy worried that she would not live up to Carol's expectations. From Carol's perspective it did not seem that the power difference was so great. As a new Reader, Carol felt unsure what her role involved. She had done informal mentoring before but the responsibility of a formal mentoring arrangement felt weighty. What excited both of us was the potential to turn Lindy's fascinating PhD into academic articles.

We did not want to engage in a traditional, hierarchical, expert/novice approach to mentoring but wished, instead, to enact a mutual, potentially transformative process centred on dialogue. Accordingly, we worked with Bokenko and Gantt's (2000) notion of dialogic mentoring which conceptualises mentoring as a collaborative and reciprocal partnership based on the mutuality of talk. Dialogic mentoring encourages both participants to use the dialogic process to challenge and extend their thinking, re-shape their understanding and work collaboratively to create meaning. This paper analyses our embodied praxis of dialogic mentoring during this project and the reflexive process in which it was collaboratively embedded via shared diary writing. We analyse the relational dynamics of this praxis through the three themes of identity, the fear of being judged and the importance of respect. These themes emerged during the mentoring process itself, through our ongoing reflections on that process, and through our subsequent analysis of the diary entries we each wrote. The themes helped inform our reflexive development of a new model of dialogic mentoring – the Relational-Ethical-Affective-Dialogic (READ) Mentoring Model. In the main part of the paper we interweave diary entries extracts with the three themes, and use both to trace the development of the model. We end the paper with some reflections on the utility of the model, and on the methodology of diary-writing, for developing mentoring relationships. We begin with what we did and why we did it like this.

What we did and why we did it like this

The practical mechanics of the mentoring involved regular, scheduled meetings with deadlines for Lindy to send drafts of sections and later whole paper drafts to Carol. Carol read these, annotated them, used track changes and sent them back, so Lindy had time to think about the comments prior to the meeting. This freed up the meeting itself to focus on the ongoing shaping and direction of Lindy's paper, to decide what to do next, and discuss the mentoring process via the diary entries. In the first meeting we discussed the two strands of the project: how we wanted the process of mentoring to

run (i.e. the “doing” of mentoring); and how we were going to reflexively examine the process of mentoring. The first strand – the “doing” of mentoring – was firmly tied to an outcome: Lindy would produce an article from her PhD. The second strand – a reflexive exploration of the process of mentoring via sharing diary entries – arose from our desire to experiment with doing dialogic mentoring.

We wrote and shared our diary entries between each meeting. This allowed us to individually reflect on the mentoring process, while the sharing of them allowed us to reflect on each other’s perspective. The subsequent discussion of the diary entries created an open conversational space for us to reflexively analyse the mentoring process as well as getting to know each other better as human beings and work colleagues. That is, they led us into talk about our respective motivations, histories, identities, feelings, perspectives, likes and dislikes – all the minutiae that go into what makes us tick as individuals and which help to promote successful collaborative working. We soon realised that writing and sharing diary entries deepened and expanded the already intense one-to-one relationship that mentoring normally demands. As material artefacts, the diary entries turned talk into text and produced a permanent record of moments in time. The diary entries were individual accounts and, as such, there were no rules in terms of length and content. The only “rule” we agreed was that we would send them to each other on a set date and that we would not read the other person’s until we had sent our own entry to them. However, we wrote them knowing that we would be sharing them, so to that extent they were written as “public” documents. As collaborative products, the diaries were vehicles to enact dialogue in a different way from face-to-face meetings. From the start, it was crucial to our sense of mentoring that we were writing for ourselves and for and to each other.

Our mentoring meetings took place in a University café. This was a determinedly public not private space which lent a shared, social aspect to the meetings. For Lindy, this relaxed, informal environment where we were able to grab a coffee and sit and chat seemed far less intimidating than knocking on Carol’s door and entering her office, her space. Carol enjoyed getting away from her desk, e-mails and lists. When we were sitting having coffee and chatting it felt like we were nestled within a small and comfortable space – “our space” – surrounded by hubbub and noise. We both felt that this many-layered public/private/personal space promoted genuine dialogue as opposed to an office space which we feared would be more constraining and likely to produce a more “didactic” approach. The structures for mentoring, for example the frequency and length of meetings, expectations around writing, roles and responsibilities, emerged and were continually negotiated. We felt this organic, open and flexible approach contrasted with the more formalised mentoring codes which are often externally imposed and regulated.

Bokenko and Gantt (2000, p. 247) refer to these conventional forms of mentoring as “monological”. In the monological mentoring model, there are measurable outcomes towards which the mentee “progresses” in a linear manner. In monological mentoring, the process is founded on assumptions of certainty and rationality; it is sender and expertise-focused and oriented towards a definable end product. Mentoring, in this model, is characterised by closed interactions which are “impermeable to new, intersubjective, innovative, or constructed meanings” (Bokenko and Gantt, 2000, p. 248). It is not to say that such mentoring processes are not highly successful. Indeed, as we have indicated, our project included an outcomes-focused element. One criticism of this model, though, is that it is a mechanism for confirming dominant, normative institutional practices. It is not oriented towards change.

As indicated earlier, our initial goal was to mix the mentoring process up a bit, do something different. It was only later that we realised how different it was. At the start of the project, we were both inspired by Bokenko and Gantt's (2000, p. 238) notion of dialogic mentoring, which aimed to promote "exploration, experimentation and risk". The mentoring we embarked on was, therefore, an explicit attempt to put Bokenko and Gantt's (2000) concept of dialogic mentoring to work. To us, this mode of mentoring, centred as it is in relational practice, promised to carry us both "forward in the unfolding history of organizational life" (Bokenko and Gantt, 2000, pp. 246-247). Our shared hope was that this would involve an unfolding of mentoring as a significant mutual learning process, and an unfolding of ourselves in ways which felt "true" to our emerging academic identities. Our intention to experiment with undoing the formal roles and hierarchical relationships we inhabited and which, we felt, would have led to mentoring as an unequal discourse – a monological mentoring mode – provoked us to experiment with mentoring that was less formal, more conversational and differently productive. To enact this dialogic mode, we began in a spirit of openness, a commitment to honesty and with a will to embody trust. Moving out of the grooved patterns of institutional roles and behaviour was an act of risk and self-exposure, necessary to create the conditions for us to "cultivate the difference between the known and the to-be-experienced- and-discovered" (Bokenko and Gantt, 2000, p. 252). The method of writing and sharing diary entries felt more authentic and generative but far from "safe".

Mentoring is a well-explored field and the collaborative nature of mentoring endeavours in both schools and higher education has received considerable attention (Burley and Pomphrey, 2011; Christie, 2014; Felten *et al.*, 2013; Fletcher and Mullen, 2012). Empirical research indicates that mentoring "enhances growth in individuals (educators and non-educators) and in organizations of all types" (Brondyk and Searby, 2013, pp. 189-190). However, mentoring is a practice that is notoriously difficult to define. According to Dawson (2014, p. 137) "by 2007 there were more than 50 definitions of mentoring used in the research literature". These definitions further multiply in the mentoring literature on mentoring frameworks (Dominguez and Hager, 2013), programmes (Kent *et al.*, 2013) and models (Buell, 2004). Much of this literature focuses on the roles, procedures, functions and outcomes of mentoring. However, while it often discusses collaborative and dialogic approaches within mentoring communities of practice, the dimensions of mentoring that we are interested in and discuss further below – the affective, relational and ethical – are usually contained within this broader discussion, rather than being specifically considered as central. It is these features our model puts the spotlight on. In doing so, we take forward Bokenko and Gantt's (2000) notion of dialogic mentoring in new and generative ways which understand mentoring practice as rooted in densities, specificities and particularities that align to a place, time and institutional context. Like Clutterbuck (2013), we note the impossibility of accounting for and measuring all the variables that a mentoring encounter entails.

Our paper adds to current understandings by offering: first, an account of an innovative mentoring methodology (diary entries); second, a reflexive account of theory-building arising from this methodology and third, a new dialogic mentoring model. Both model and theory emerged from the mentoring process, concretising in and taking shape from our face-to-face mentoring sessions, reflexive diary entries and during the process of writing this paper together. In what follows, we capture this sense of emergence by weaving the development of our dialogic mentoring

model into an analysis of those aspects of the mentoring process which seemed most significant: identity; fear of being judged and respect. These three themes emerged through the reflexive dialogic process we engaged in throughout the entirety of the project. Over the period of an academic year we had six meetings, each of which was between one and two hours long and collectively, we wrote 14 diary entries. The diary entries varied in length: Lindy's tended to be shorter (but were never less than 1000 words), usually more "on task" and focused than Carol's; Carol's were longer, often included images or photos and pondered a range of things that concerned her at the time, not all to do with mentoring. As indicated earlier, we did not impose a structure, style or word length. In fact, quite the opposite. We wanted our diaries to be free from constraints and to embody our feelings and reflect our individuality. Unsurprisingly, the diary entries stimulated lots of reflexive talk which in turn generated a range of different themes. During later discussions (particularly once we began drafting this paper), these themes were synthesised into a smaller number in order to focus on and clarify what seemed to us the most important aspects of the project.

We do not claim to have followed a systematic mode of data analysis, such as that recommended by qualitative research experts like Huberman and Miles (1998). We did not code our "data". Instead, it was through our ongoing conversations about our diary entries, and the mentoring process we had engaged in, that meaning and significance slowly emerged. This joint and collaborative dealing with the "data" entailed approaching the diary entries with ideas from the mentoring literature, looking at the entries from different theoretical angles, trying out different ideas with each other about what they meant and what their significance was. Such an approach is a careful, cautious and time-consuming one but it is an approach we felt was necessary to enable a shared interpretation to emerge. Our rather painstaking way of working with the "data" – of turning the "gestalt of the events" (Flick, 2006, p. 292) into themes – accords well, we think, with the dialogic spirit of the project. The development of our dialogic mentoring READ model occurred in much the same way: the dimensions emerged as we continued to work reflexively and dialogically with the diary entries and the themes. As Creswell (2003, p. 183) explains, such "cycling back and forth from data collection and analysis to problem reformulation and back" is a usual practice in iterative analysis. However, this iterative process was even more complex for us as the analysis proceeded through reaching agreement via extensive and reflexive dialogue.

In the following sections, we deal with each of our three themes in turn by using extracts from our diary entries, a commentary on those extracts and an analytical discussion on how each theme became a dimension of our READ mentoring model. Our first theme of Identity gave rise to the Relational dimension; the second theme of Fear of Being Judged, the Affective dimension; the third theme of Respect enabled us to identify the importance of the Ethical Dimension. We now turn to our first theme: identity.

First theme: identity

My identity at work has always been that of a professional or practitioner: a primary school teacher; a curriculum support teacher; a teacher training tutor. When I began my PhD I was still a practitioner in my full time post but I gained another parallel identity – that of a part-time PhD student. My insecurities about writing at doctoral level were countered by the fact I had two supervisors to guide me in this more "academic" pursuit. It became apparent

on starting my new post that this notion of an academic identity was causing me anxiety. This anxiety is illustrated by my first diary entry:

"I have always had this paradox – I enjoy developing as an "academic" but I do not feel very academic. That is, I am not naturally scholarly. I hate all the jargon of research and dislike the academic snobbery that is sometimes apparent when reading articles, talking to people at conferences, etc. [...] But at the same time I want to stretch and challenge myself. It is apparent that I lack confidence in my ability to "be" an academic. Perhaps I should just concentrate on writing an article rather than seeing it as something that gives me an identity or something that defines who I am. It is just an article – keep things in perspective" (11 October 2012).

But, on reflection, how was I defining academic identity? It seems to me now that my belief about what "being" an academic is derived from my experiences of reading academic publications and seeing academic communities at conferences. I saw academics as a homogenized entity rather than a set of individuals with different experiences and roles. I felt that I did not fit in. When doing my PhD I did not feel my identity was being challenged because it sat neatly within the boundaries of being a student. As a student my identity was constructed by other people guiding me and telling me what to do. As an academic I assumed I would be independent and self-directing. The complexities of "getting" an academic identity began to emerge once I started my new post. These experiences reinforced what I knew, i.e. that "identity is a dynamic construct, as one's individual identity emerges from a personal, ethnic and national context, but is also socially constructed over time" (Billot, 2010, p. 711). I was expecting to experience a sudden metamorphosis into an "academic" but my anxieties about sending my first draft to Carol made me question my ability and, furthermore, has since made me question what having an academic identity actually means. Kogan (2000) positions academic identity within the construct of the institution and notes tensions with personal academic endeavour and institutional pressures. My definition was far simpler – if Carol provided me with positive feedback on aspects of my draft then I was on my way to "being" an academic.

My professional and academic identities have never been fixed. I have always been situated at the interstices: between disciplines (cultural studies – sociology – education – feminism – philosophy); between locations (a northerner in a southern university; someone with a research-led university background who found a congenial home within teaching-led institutions) and between sectors (higher education, sixth form education, further education, adult education, distance learning). These "in-between" locations mean I have always situated myself, my pedagogic practice and my research within the counter-hegemonic stream of educational research. Having a hybrid identity as a central part of my intellectual biography has helped me enact a nomad identity in navigating what Gillen and Petersen (2005, p. 146) call the "interdisciplinary meadow" of educational theory and practice in ways which have often been energizing if, at times, uneasy.

On a practical level, though, I felt a desire to do a "good" job as a mentor, given that writing is deeply tied into our identities. As I note elsewhere: "Writing is a matter in which concerns about who we are, and how we matter to others, are entangled with what we write about [...] the 'content' of our writing is bound up with our perceptions

and experiences of what we mean to ourselves and what we think we mean to others” (Taylor and Stevenson, forthcoming). My new Reader role threw me into a state of doubt about what “good” might mean as I wrote in my first diary entry:

As I sat and listened to Lindy talk at length, fluently and enthusiastically about her methodological journey I relived my own doctoral delights and frights, I caught at the fizz of possibility, felt a bit heady with the responsibility (oh, god, she’s relying on ME!!!), and got totally fired by the brand shiny newness of it – for her, for us together. To ground myself, I grabbed at the practical, the mundane, the institutional – have you booked self-managed time yet? We discussed three possible chapters from her PhD and their order. A plan. I love a plan. It feels safe, comfortable, possible, practical. We talked about the dialogic impulse of this project [...] At the heart of it, I know, are relations and ethics, which position me as responsible guide and fellow traveller. Open the gate. The road is made by walking (11 October 2012).

And in the second diary entry:

I worried about mentoring Lindy because she is my “first” mentee in my new role. As usual, I’ve set myself incredibly high standards and want to do everything properly but what does “properly” mean? After all, I’ve done this before – I’m doing it with Joanne and the book chapter, I’ve done it with the students on recent projects, my writing with a colleague has tons of mentoring, then there’s the article with Zorah, Simon and Jonathan. Each time is different as each person and configuration of people is different (4 December 2012).

I grappled with two interlinked questions: “What does mentoring for academic article writing entail in this institutional context?” and “How do I learn how to be a mentor for/with Lindy?” My own formative mentoring experiences were within two very different relationships. My doctoral supervisor encouraged me to go “out there”, swim the theoretical depths without her and write experimentally. My external examiner became my post-doctoral mentor. I admire these two people. Their mentoring made me feel inspired, challenged and brought face-to-face with my own limitations. I asked myself, my diary (and through sharing the diary, Lindy): “If mentoring is not about being better but being a guide, what sort of guide will I be?”

Dialogic mentoring model first dimension: mentoring as a relationally embodied spatial event

What emerged in our mentoring meetings was the importance of the place and space to how we experienced the particular meeting and, from this, how the place-space constituted our identities as mentor-mentee in the mentoring exchange. We came to realise that our relationally embodied experiences of the place-space in which we met and talked (the café where we met face-to-face, then our own home spaces as we wrote virtual entries and e-mails to each other, then Carol’s hot office as we wrote this paper) took us beyond saying “the mentoring took place here” and towards the perception and

experience of mentoring as a relationally embodied spatial event. This is a complex phrase so it is worth unpacking each of these aspects. First, the relational, and here we agree with Bokenko and Gantt (2000, p. 250) that dialogue is “a collaborative, mutually constructive, critically reflective, participatory and emergent engagement of relationships among self, other, and world”. Second, these relations are embodied, which draws attention to the fact that we experience relationships subjectively, through our senses, emotions, moods and memories; and that these embodied experiences shape our actions, interpretations and judgements (Ropo *et al.*, 2013, p. 381). Third, the spatial alludes to the fact that all experience happens somewhere and we argue that the particularity of that somewhere is important. We suggest that any model of mentoring needs to recognise that space is not a “backdrop” to mentoring activity but a constitutive factor of that activity (Massey, 2005). Mentoring then can be considered as a moment-by-moment spatialization of embodied relations, constituted by a complex of decisions: being in this café and not that one, sitting at this table not that, orienting our bodies this way and not that, the coffee or tea we drank, the surrounding noise, atmosphere and light, as well as prefacing our mentoring talk with “chit-chat”, such that the social helped the spatial and dialogic take form. Our occupancy of these spatial and material particularities were productive forces in our knowing, being and relating, and helped form our ongoing identities. The final term is “event”, and here we grasp at a concept from Deleuze (1990), which helps explain our understanding of mentoring as both a forceful and evanescent experience. For Deleuze, an “event” is not something which disrupts the normal flow (which is what the word usually implies) but, instead, is a series of ordinary moments of ongoing transformation in which productive forces and interactions are imminently actualised. Deleuze (1990, p. 52) explains events as points of “inflection”, they are “bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, ‘sensitive’ points”. The event folds into itself the intimacies of the unspoken and the tangibly felt, as well as that which is articulated. We argue that the ebb and flow of dialogic mentoring – facing each other and talking intensely – happens in this relational “ongoing” of space-time as much as in any outcomes or goals from each session. Therefore, this is the first dimension of our model.

Second theme: fear of being judged

Sent the first piece of writing to Carol. I feel quite apprehensive. I know the style is not quite right for a journal article but also worry that the content is not “academic” enough [...].

I passed my viva with just one sentence to delete, taking content out of one table and presenting it as prose (no change to the content – just changing the presentation format) and about six typing errors. I realise I have just written that so that Carol can see how little I had to do. I think I want to reassure her that my work is worthy! [...].

I am not sure Carol will like my writing style [...] I am more concerned about Carol’s approval than the process of writing a journal article. This makes me realise that when working with somebody else you want to show them that you meet their standards. Perhaps at the moment I am viewing the mentoring process as somebody making judgements about me (or my work) rather than seeing it as a supportive process [...] I await Carol’s feedback with trepidation (23 November 2012).

Lindy is a time-keeper which is a joy. She sent me her draft article by the deadline and her diary entry. I managed to contain myself and not read her diary entry until I had sent her mine. It seemed only fair. My heart lurched when I saw what she'd written in her diary: about how she hoped her work was "worthy"; that she feels "under scrutiny", that she's worried I won't "like" her writing style. She implies I have "high" standards and that she wants to meet them! And there's the idea that this process may be about "judging". I recognise all of that, and the fears, worries and sense of exposure that comes with sending your work (your PhD "baby") to someone else.

I work on her draft, over it, under it, through it, imagining myself in her research shoes in the moments she passes through. I work and time passes as I sit in my study getting colder and colder. Its 6.30. I stop and look at what I've done and I suddenly feel horrified. Why are track changes red? The sign of school, of wrongness, of that which is subject to correction. There's red on every page, did I mean to do that? What will she think? Whose story is this? What sort of intervention am I making here? Have I re-written Lindy's research story as my own? Appropriated it? Turned it round? Used it as a palimpsest to scribble over with my own imaginings? Stop, stop, time to stop. I send it off to her with trepidation. I want to email it with a "health warning" – take a deep breath etc – but I stop myself (4 December, 2012).

What shines out from these entries are the emotions – joy, worry, fear, horror – and what they give rise to: fear of being judged but also the trepidation attending doing the judging. And yet, what these diary entries also record is the honesty with which we are taking ourselves and each other into account. Perhaps what they are disclosing is accountability as an authenticity to self and other, such that mentoring is not just about Lindy "progressing" towards writing an article but also about mentoring as an affective space for telling our fears about "standards" and relating the historical wrongs that the disciplinary practices of the "right ways" of doing things have inflicted on us. Carol worried about how she gave feedback whereas Lindy worried about what she wrote and how Carol would judge it. Lindy's worries exemplify what Hobson and Malderez (2013) have referred to as "judgementoring", a form of mentoring that is typical in schools which situates the mentor as judge, jury and assessor and which works against the creation of a reciprocal relationship.

Dialogic mentoring model second dimension: mentoring as an affective flow of risky encounters

We have both inhabited the educational practices of judgement for many years. As markers, moderators and examiners we judge students. We judge colleagues during peer review and as external examiners. We ourselves are judged in the UK through two national systems designed to measure different aspects of quality across the higher education section. The first is the National Student Survey (NSS), which is a survey of all final year undergraduate students and aims to provide national benchmarks of student satisfaction with their course; the second is the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which is a national mechanism for assessing the quality of research. Individual academics submit four of their "best" research outputs which are judged by panels of expert peers and rated according to national quality criteria. As academics, we inhabit and embody these modes of judgement

and want to be seen to be good at what we are doing. So how do these institutional, national and international judgement regimes infuse our expectations and fears of mentoring? Strathern (2000, p. 309) argues that the social world of accountability in higher education is about making the “invisible visible” and she warns that “visibility is all too easily shown to have a tyrannous side – there is nothing innocent about making the invisible visible”. Mentoring partakes of this process of “making visible” but it has a dual aspect. On the one hand, the tyranny of transparency is allied with forms of biopower, governmentality and surveillance that Foucault (1991) critiques as endemic in the modern state. On the other, dialogic mentoring in academic research requires we make our writing (and ourselves) visible. It contends that, for the mentoring process to be genuinely productive and successful, we have to engage in an open but essentially risky encounter in which our perceived and real insufficiencies are “laid bare” to the gaze of another. Doing this means we had to take a leap of faith – we had to trust that the other person would treat us and our “faults” kindly; that they would regard us with understanding and empathy (Jewett and Macphee, 2012).

Bokenko and Gantt (2000, p. 238) talk about dialogic mentoring as a form of organizational learning which “encourages experimentation, risk taking, openness” along with “creativity, authenticity, imagination, and innovation”. Such learning/mentoring is grounded in dialogue which exhibits “(a) a genuine care and respect for the other in interaction; (b) the ability and willingness to engage in reflection, both individually and collectively; and (c) the ability and willingness to speak authentically of one’s thoughts, ideas, and assumptions” (Bokenko and Gantt, 2000, p. 241). This theorisation of dialogue echoes Rogers’ (1986) person-centred approach with its principles of unconditional positive regard and congruence. However, what was particularly acute in our mentoring project was its purpose to develop Lindy’s article writing capacities in relation to “external” standards of such writing, and it was Carol’s role as mentor to make visible where and how Lindy was currently “falling short”. Given that we often see our writing as an intimate and public expression of our “self”, the giving and accepting of critique in research mentoring in higher education is potentially a fraught affair. The self-exposure endemic to “ordinary” article writing mentoring in a performative higher education research context was exacerbated in our project through the use of the private-public diary entries. But what we found was that the diary entries invited ever more risky dialogue than face-to-face interaction might have done. Indeed, the written diary entries deepened our “unscripted exploration, unfettered by correct or appropriate answers and actions” (Bokenko and Gantt, 2000, p. 252), provoking greater reflexivity at a far more complex level than transient, verbal exchanges might have done.

One of the key findings from the project is that the diary format facilitated the affective dimension of the mentoring relationship, making already “risky” encounters more so – but productively so by, paradoxically, increasing trust, authenticity and honesty. Massumi (2002) speaks of affect as transpersonal in that it circulates amongst and between people, places and things, and is always embodied and situated. In our project, affects flowed between us (cf. how we both independently used the word “trepidation” to describe our emotions in our diary entries above). Our mutual fear of being judged concretised a range of subjective affects that linked the bodily, the personal and the relational. Fear, apprehension, worry circulated between us but, likewise, generosity, kindness and joy.

Affect and emotion are often unnoticed or ignored in traditional higher education mentoring practices. We argue that affective flows in dialogic mentoring need to be given greater attention. Affective practices deepen relations and engage mentor and mentee more openly, honestly and reflexively in mutually productive joint experiences and actions. This is the second dimension of our model.

Third theme: respect

I have tried to respond to Carol's comments but the last section does not include everything [...] I know this is down to my pathological hatred of research terminology [...] I would love to write a paper on it but it would never be accepted. Sorry, Carol – had to get that one off my chest. I know it will run counter to all your beliefs about the subject. I will try but with gritted teeth! This might be another interesting research study – a mentor steeped in the language of research trying to work with a mentee with an aversion to it! (6 March 2013).

I have [...] not read Lindy's diary entry yet, although I felt provoked by her email comment – “you won't like it – I had a rant about methodology” to open it immediately. I stopped myself. Although I am as curious about why she thinks I won't like it as about what she's said about methodology – I love any sort of discussion about methodology, I say to myself half-defensively, half-assertively. And I wonder what idea she has of me, or of my reception of her writing, which makes her say that. I hope we can discuss this when we meet. I feel like we've lost touch a bit (for entirely understandable reasons – course re-approval etc) and want to get back to things with her (11 March 2013).

Should not language convey meaning not conceal it? Sociologists are interested in social class, exclusion, inequalities and yet the language they use to describe their position is elitist and excludes readers not in the “club”. It exemplifies all they despise about society. Oh well. I think I am a lone voice. I will chunter away to myself.

I am not alone! Carol has sent me an article by Badley.

I am grateful that Carol isn't just looking at me sympathetically with a smile that says “oh dear – why did we employ her?” The fact she is responding to me and entering into discussion makes me feel she respects, if not agrees with, my views (17 April 2013).

In an earlier draft of this paper we included a brief commentary on our diary excerpts, as we did with the other two preceding themes, but found we were repeating what was already in the excerpts. On reflection, we realised that our diary entries had become dialogue. We were using our diaries to bounce ideas off each other, debate, argue, chat and joke. Lindy refers to Carol “entering into discussion”. Carol sent a diary entry to Lindy on the concept of “haecceity” as a provocation to prompt further dialogue on style, meaning and communication in our respective writing; Lindy felt her diary was “a safe space to vent”. The subject of the entries was no longer tied to the mentoring process or the development of Lindy's article. What had started as individual reflections and musings had become a two-way discourse, both to exchange ideas and

to challenge each other's ways of thinking. Occurring as they do towards the end of the mentoring process, these entries instantiate the embodied praxis of dialogic mentoring we aimed for at the start and which we attempted to create the conditions to support.

Dialogic mentoring model third dimension: mentoring as an ethical encounter in which every moment matters

Lindy ended this last diary entry with the words: "respect. That is an important characteristic of the mentor/mentee experience". What emerged in sharing the diaries, through our face-to-face relational reflexive encounters, and in the to-and-fro working on Lindy's article, was that – relationally, collaboratively – we came to inhabit and embody an ethic of respect for the other. Maya Angelou said: "at the end of the day people won't remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel" (Angelou, cited in Kelly, 2003, p. 263). As we reflect on the ethical dimensions of our mentoring encounters this rather homely phrase guides our theorising.

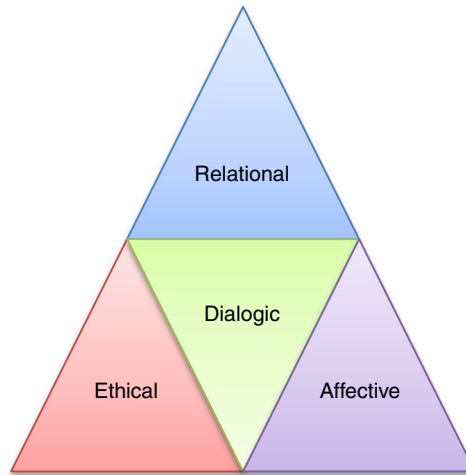
The diary entries just cited illuminate how dialogic mentoring is morphing into a co-constitutive ethical engagement. The diaries' presentation of our differing respective epistemological and ontological stances quite clearly work at the intellectual and affective dimensions of mentoring, in ways that recall Bokenko and Gantt's (2000, p. 253) comment that "dialogic mentoring celebrates contradiction and difference rather than resolving, reconciling, preventing, or otherwise managing it". But something else is being layered in here. A relational ethic is emerging – an ethic of mutual equitability prompted by a collaborative engagement in empathic interactions. In these diary entries we see judgement being re-formed by respect; difference being re-cast as reciprocal, mindful and authentic expressions of the multivocality of our inquiry and the risk of self-exposure shading into confidence in making the invisible visible. As we reflect on these subtle shifts in relations, we now see that sharing the diary entries prompted us to instantiate an ethical relation that corresponds with Buber's I-Thou. This was not something we could have considered "in advance" nor did we reflect on it or take it into account "as it happened". Instead, as the I-Thou relation emerged, we intuitively came to inhabit and embody it.

Buber (2013) explains that "I-Thou establishes the world of relation" (p. 5), a relation which is "spoken with the whole being" (p. 1). The key point is that the I-Thou relation enacts a world diametrically opposite to the I-It relation. In the latter, the I turns people, experiences and events into things. This is the world of having, getting and displaying. In higher education, we might say it is the terrain of instrumentality, credentialism, performativity and measurement, the terrain of the NSS and the REF. In contrast, the I-Thou relation happens in being present, in meeting, in directness. It is an event that occurs in the space of "actual presentness" (p. 9) and requires directness, responsibility, tenderness and love. Buber says that "*Thou* is more than *It* realises. No deception penetrates here" (p. 7) and avers that "all real living is meeting [because] I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*" (p. 9). Therefore, the third dimension of our model is mentoring that creates the conditions for a non-instrumental *I-Thou* ethic which confirms our existence-in-relation, and is an affirmation of our worth and potential (Figure 1).

Dialogic mentoring model: mentoring as a relational, ethical, affective, encounter

The model includes the three dimensions of mentoring and provides an illustration of the theoretically rich underpinning we have developed on dialogic mentoring

Figure 1.
Relational-ethical-
affective-dialogic
(READ) mentoring
model



throughout this paper. Thus the relational dimension arises from encounters which are embodied, material and spatial; the affective dimension incorporates emotions and the attendant risk of expressing difficulties and differences; and the ethical proposes an affirmative account of being and developing in-relation.

The utility of the model inheres in its ease of adoption and adaptability to person, place and circumstance. Envisaging mentoring as embodied praxis, the resources it requires are inherent to the mentoring relationship itself – principally investments of time and commitment – but putting the model to work in practice may require staff development and training. The model offers organisations a tacit “bottom-up” model of change, but one that we think can have profound effects on institutional cultures of belonging and self-development, working as it does via embodied diffusion. We propose that our model helps to shift power relations in ways which enable more productive, less hierarchical relations between mentor and mentee based in dialogue and founded on trust and respect. However, we know that power circulates and is used in all sorts of subtle ways within mentoring relationships. The model doesn’t seek to ignore this but rather offers a way to notice how power works by paying attention to mentoring at the micro-level – and from this encourages us to find positive, indeed ethical, ways to struggle with power in order to shift hierarchical institutional relationships.

The model offers individuals and institutions the scope to develop dialogical mentoring grounded in an ethical relationality oriented to the development of self and agency. The theoretical discussion underpinning the model affords insights into the personal aspects of mentoring as a face-to-face practice that is evanescent but emotionally charged; into the practical-pragmatic aspects of mentoring as an institutional practice oriented to particular outcomes; and into the political aspects of mentoring, in that participants bring a multiplicity of reasons, motivations and differences to the mentoring encounter.

The model emerged from a methodological innovation. Our reflexive use of written diary entries worked for us as a means to effect personal transformation through mentoring, but other approaches are possible – for example, photographs, mood boards, audio records and/or journaling, may work equally well for others.

Conclusion: dialogic mentoring, diary entries and academic identity

The diary entries stand now as a permanent record of the mentoring process we undertook. Their words record our becoming identities-in-relation as mentee and mentor, a good deal of which is about what we came to call “developing your voice”. In this, dialogic mentoring meshes with academic requirements as we learned to use our voices in more nuanced ways with colleagues, in the department and in the institution, all of which require different modes of voice and writing for different purposes. Thus, the diary entries facilitated the deployment of our multiple voices (spoken, private, negotiated, shared, collaborative voices). The diary entries, perhaps even more than the face-to-face mentoring meetings, tuned us into words and language. They enabled us to explore our mutual love of writing (Lindy talked about “losing time” during writing) and to do so in entirely personal and idiosyncratic ways. They encouraged us to joke with each other – about what Lindy thought were the “pretensions” of academic language and Carol considered necessary entry to a discourse community. The diary entries were woven into biographical ruminations that furthered our knowledge of each other, and thus they also constitute a form of collective biography or a pleated text as each entry speaks to other entries back and forward in time, and also intersects with the notes Carol made on Lindy’s drafts. Most of all, the diary entries enabled us to be braver, to take more risks, disclose more insecurities, than we would have done in entirely face-to-face interactions. Without them, we would not really have got “inside” dialogic mentoring, we would not have worked towards an I-Thou ethic of relation and this paper would not have been written in the way it has. The diary format created a safe ontological space for self-development in ways which fed productively into our respective developing identities as academics. Mentoring enacted through writing and dialogue is as an act of trust, an investment of faith, a risky encounter, but one which produces results. Lindy wrote an article from her PhD; Carol increasingly felt more comfortable in her Reader role. As Bokenko and Gantt (2000, p. 256) put it, dialogic mentoring “plays the real game”.

Note

1. The role of Reader is offered to senior academics in the UK who have attained high standing in research. The role is usually considered as a stepping stone between Senior Lecturer and Professor. Universities which have the Reader role use it as an established career route for research staff, and the role is often positioned as a key institutional resource for developing research capacity. However, its distribution across the higher education sector is very uneven and varies with university type, history and departmental culture.

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