

Mentoring as a Long-Term Relationship: Situated Learning in a Doctoral Program

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Learning cannot be designed: it can only be designed for—that is, facilitated or frustrated.

(Wenger, 1998, p. 229)

An important part of professionalization in graduate school is working with faculty members. The faculty-student relationship in graduate school is institutionalized in many ways, including: teacher and student in graduate seminars; advisor and advisee in independent study courses; researcher and research assistant; and thesis or dissertation committee member and advisee. While these institutionalized relationships are essential components of the graduate school experience, what is often more important to the professional socialization process is the mentoring relationship that takes place outside these formal structures. The mentoring relationship can be especially important at the doctoral level, where the student is not only trying to enter the profession but, in many ways, learning to do what faculty members do.

In this chapter, we—the co-authors of this chapter—describe our mentoring relationship during the first two years of Steve’s doctoral studies. First, we contextualize the relationship by describing Paul’s approach to mentoring and the institutional arrangement. We then discuss our mentoring relationship, focusing on two of the key issues in mentoring, including the issue of overcoming the initial barrier in establishing a men-

toring relationship, and the issue of identifying and negotiating tasks that facilitate the mentee's professional development. We conclude this chapter by reflecting on the long-term nature of the mentoring relationship and by sharing some thoughts on how to make the relationship healthy and sustainable. We should also note that we relate our experience in several voices: We use a joint voice in the introduction and conclusion, but we switch to our individual voices when narrating our individual perspectives on the mentoring relationship.

We acknowledge that our experience is not necessarily representative of a typical mentoring relationship. Our relationship has been more deliberate than usual because of our common theoretical interest in situated learning. Yet, by sharing our experience, we hope to show what a productive mentoring relationship could look like—to provide a point of reference as mentors and mentees at other institutions reflect on their own mentoring relationships and as prospective mentees look for appropriate mentors for their own professionalization.

An Approach to Mentoring: Paul's Perspective

In the late 1990s, when I was completing my Ph.D. with emphases on both rhetoric and composition and applied linguistics at Purdue, the number of doctoral programs that had faculty members specializing in my field of specialization—second language (L2) writing—seemed few and far between; as Dwight Atkinson put it rather pessimistically, the field of L2 writing was “dying before our eyes” because there were not enough Ph.D. programs producing specialists in the field (Santos, Atkinson, Erickson, Matsuda, & Silva, 2000, p. 2). Since I was interested in contributing to the development of L2 writing as a field, mentoring the next generation of L2 writing researchers at the doctoral level became one of my important professional goals. For that reason, I was determined to obtain a faculty position at an institution with a nationally-known doctoral program and worked toward building my professional profile with that goal in mind.

My previous institution, the University of New Hampshire, where I worked with Steve, provided an institutional context conducive to my professional agenda—to mentor the next generation of L2 writing specialists. It had the national reputation to attract strong graduate students. When I arrived at UNH, I already had two doctoral students who were interested in L2 writing, and have been able to collaborate with

both of them on a number of projects (e.g., Knoblauch & Matsuda, in press; Matsuda & Cox, 2004; Matsuda, Cox, Jordan, & Ortmeier-Hooper, 2006; Matsuda, Ortmeier-Hooper, & You, 2006). The doctoral program was small enough to allow me to play a central role, participating in the admission decision, offering graduate courses regularly, and working closely with individual graduate students. My current institution, Arizona State University, also provides opportunities for me to work closely with doctoral students in Rhetoric, Composition, and Linguistics as well as applied linguistics, and to teach an advanced graduate seminar on second language writing on a regular basis.

I am quite explicit about my approach to mentoring, which draws heavily on situated learning—the idea that learning is facilitated by various forms of participation in real or realistic activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990)—and activity theory—the idea that people’s activities are intertwined with the object of the activities and are facilitated or mediated by various cultural tools such as language that they learn to use in the process (Leont’ev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1991, 1998).

In the classroom, I resort to what Freedman and Adam (1996) have called, “facilitated performance” (p. 399; cf. Rogoff). My graduate seminars are organized around activities that involve realistic tasks and contexts; I provide lectures and readings to help create the context or to provide tools for completing the activity, and use discussion to facilitate reflection and sharing of insights. I take Wenger’s idea seriously—that “one can design a curriculum but not learning” (p. 229). Although I do provide a detailed list of learning objectives on the syllabus, it is phrased in broad terms to allow for incidental learning based on what students are ready to learn. To me, the purpose of the classroom instruction is to provide controlled exposure to ideas and practices in the field—to serve as a catalyst for further learning through participation in various professional activities.

The most important part of mentoring, it seems to me, happens outside the classroom, where I strive to provide opportunities for “attenuated authentic participation” (Freedman & Adam, p. 399; cf. Lave & Wenger). That is, I invite promising graduate students who have indicated some interest in working with me to take part in my professional activities. It is attenuated in the sense that I choose, in consultation with each individual collaborator, an activity that is somewhat challenging yet manageable. It is authentic in the sense that the activities are what I normally do; they are, for the most part, not modified for the purpose of teaching. It is participation—rather than mere performance—in the

sense that the outcome of the activity has real professional implications and consequences. In general, my role as a mentor involves the following: (1) creating opportunities for attenuated authentic participation; (2) providing resources and support to help my collaborators succeed; (3) providing examples by sharing what I have done or by inviting mentees to observe what I do; and (4) introducing my mentees to the social network of professionals in the field.

Having a well-situated faculty member who is interested in mentoring graduate students is one important pre-condition for a successful mentoring relationship, but that is not sufficient. A mentoring relationship does not just happen; it needs to be initiated by someone and taken up by another. Initiating the mentoring relationship might be one of the most formidable challenges for graduate students. It is true that some graduate students actively seek these mentoring relationships while researching possible graduate programs. For instance, when I was looking for a doctoral program, I visited Purdue and met with Tony Silva, who became my mentor and colleague, to ask about the future of the program and the field. Yet, others may find initiating a relationship with a faculty mentor rather intimidating. In the following sections, Steve describes some of his experiences in his first few years of doctoral work.

A Mentoring Relationship in Action: Steve's Perspective

Overcoming the Intimidation Factor

As Casanave demonstrated in the first chapter of this book, learning to “do” graduate school entails a movement from the periphery of a community of practice toward fuller participation within it. Participation, according to Wenger, involves acquiring a community of practice’s shared repertoire of tools such as language and artifacts to engage in “actions whose meanings [members] negotiate with one another” (p. 73). Participating in this way, however, requires learners to construct and negotiate their own unique identities within the existing community (p. 76). That is, new doctoral students need to fashion for themselves an image of what it means for them to *be* participants in their field. For most—if not all—new doctoral students, there are moments early in the professionalization process when it becomes painfully clear (to themselves, at least) that they lack the language and tools necessary to engage others in the community, and that their attempts to participate fall short of

the community's expectations. *Some* students—the exceptionally brave ones—are not deterred by this period of acculturation. Others—and I would put myself in this category—are petrified, or at least they are overly conscious of their shortcomings and intimidated by others in the community who seem to know what they are doing. For this reason, it can be very difficult for some of us to take that first step toward “doing” graduate school.

In my case, I knew I wanted to work with Paul before applying to UNH, and I had considered emailing him or introducing myself at conferences numerous times, but frankly I felt a little intimidated by Paul's accomplishments, and perhaps a bit awkward, too. I have always had trouble knowing just *how* I should introduce myself in academic contexts, as I fear coming off as too effusive (i.e., “I *really* like your work; I've read everything you've ever written!”) or too pretentious (i.e., “In my *own* research on such-and-such...”). In fact, I missed a perfect opportunity to discuss my work with him at a conference a year before starting school at UNH. I was giving my very first conference presentation at the 2003 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in New York City. I had presented second on a fairly eclectic panel of relative newcomers to the field of L2 writing. Mere moments after I finished presenting, the rear door of the auditorium opened and a very tall Japanese man in a trim suit strode in purposefully and sat quietly in the back row. Somehow, I knew this was Paul, and I can remember mentally running through all the ways I might initiate a conversation with him afterward. Granted, I would have benefited from talking to Paul about the presentation; my project, while provocative, was methodologically unorthodox and not very well situated in the field. However, I was oddly relieved that Paul had missed my presentation, and I declined the chance to introduce myself. As an inexperienced researcher, I simply lacked the confidence to *perform* academically before an established member of the field, and as a somewhat introverted person, I felt hesitant to start a conversation I was not sure I could properly sustain.

Paul was the one who eventually initiated our mentoring relationship after I had been accepted to UNH. In April 2004, he emailed everyone who had been accepted to the program that year to congratulate them. We exchanged a couple emails and eventually agreed to meet for coffee after I had moved to New Hampshire. We met officially for the first time at a coffeehouse in Durham on a hot August day, and I can remember thinking, as the two of us sat at a table out on the sidewalk, that Paul did not look quite so tall when he was sitting down—he seemed to be

talking, both literally and figuratively, at my level. The casual nature of this encounter removed the pressure of having to *perform* for Paul. Instead, we could speak more frankly about the program, about my research interests, and about life in Durham, in general. While I might have been intimidated by Paul initially, I soon found him to be welcoming and eager to step into the mentor role.

That same summer, Paul emailed all the new doctoral students to ask if we were interested in chairing a session and staffing a booth at the Symposium on Second Language Writing, which he was organizing at Purdue University. In exchange, he offered a registration waiver and assistance in finding a crash space. I was among the three students who had accepted the invitation. In addition, because Paul knew Joleen Hanson (another new doctoral student who had written an M.A. thesis on L2 writing under Paul's guidance) and I were interested in L2 writing, he invited us to work as his paid research assistants in the Fall. I took up this invitation and became one of his research assistants before my first semester at UNH even started.

Identifying and Negotiating Appropriate Tasks

A major challenge in mentoring is identifying and negotiating appropriate tasks. In Paul's case, I noticed that he tries to line up a series of tasks designed to move his mentees toward increased participation in the field, but he knows when doing so that the exact trajectory of a mentees' development cannot be predetermined, as the professionalization process is not codifiable. In many cases, the nature of the tasks he assigns is based on the individual mentees' interests and their strengths and weaknesses as scholars and researchers. Throughout the mentoring relationship, however, Paul and his mentees regularly assess both their progress and their professional goals and renegotiate the nature of the tasks accordingly.

The first of Paul's tasks for me involved copyediting the final proofs of *Second Language Writing Research (SLWR)*, a collection of papers from the 2002 Symposium on Second Language Writing (Matsuda & Silva, 2005). It exposed me to the field's major research concerns, to key scholars and seminal works in L2 writing and composition, and to accepted genres and discourse conventions. To some extent, the act of copyediting, even at such a late stage in the publication process, demystified the act of academic writing for me. The thought of having to publish—of crafting

an essay *good enough* to be accepted by the academic community—was often paralyzing to me because my impression of the process was shaped largely by the final, *published* versions of academic writing (see Casanave, 2005, this volume; Matsuda & Silva). In particular, I realized that the polished nature of published research removed traces of all the collaboration that went into their composition. As I proofread the chapters, I imagined how the *SLWR* contributors might have solicited the thoughts and feedback of their friends and colleagues as they planned their papers and conference presentations; how they might have asked other professionals in the field for comments on earlier versions of their drafts; and how they *might* have even accounted for the questions and criticism they received from 2002 Symposium participants or from the *SLWR* editors.

Through this experience, I realized that writing an academic article was a process, and that the authors knew that they could rely on the constructive support of the community—they were not just throwing scraps of meat to the wolves. I have mentally revisited this experience countless times as I have taken on other copyediting jobs and as I have drafted my own papers. This experience helped me feel at least a little more confident about putting my own ideas into print. Furthermore, by participating in this process, I became personally invested in the finished product and the impact it would have on the field.

From this first task, Paul noticed my inclination toward detail-oriented work. For a follow-up project, he asked me to transcribe a conversation he had had with Dwight Atkinson (Matsuda & Atkinson, in press). The transcribed conversation in which Paul and Dwight discussed the future of contrastive rhetoric research would later be edited for inclusion in *Contrastive Rhetoric: Reaching to Intercultural Rhetoric* (Connor, Nagelhout, & Rozycki, in press). Since I have an interest in both qualitative research methods and in L2 writing research, the transcription task had several immediate applications for me. Naturally, the task familiarized me with the transcription process itself and many of the problems associated with putting human speech into writing. From the content of the conversation, I learned numerous unfamiliar terms and concepts that would eventually factor into some of my own research interests, such as “distributed cognition,” the notion that thought and knowledge are not situated in an individual mind but are distributed across an array of mediating tools, people and places (Salomon, 1996). I also encountered names and terms that I had seen in print many times but had never heard used in conversation, such as *ki-shoo-ten-ketsu* organization of Japanese

prose and "William Grabe." I must have replayed Paul and Dwight's reference to "Bill Grabe" 20 to 30 times trying to figure out who they were talking about. Unfortunately, "Bill Grumpy" was the best I could do at the time. Later, I learned that, contrary to my expectations, the "e" in Grabe is not silent.

Most importantly, eavesdropping on Paul and Dwight's conversation allowed me to hear how they articulated their own ideas on what has become a highly sensitive yet critical topic in our field, how they incorporated and synthesized others' works, and how they responded to and even critiqued each other's ideas in a manner that preserved their relationship as colleagues and as friends. In a portion of the dialogue that did not make the final cut, Paul and Dwight entered into a debate on the extent to which it was possible for a professional in our field to position herself or himself within both the fields of composition/rhetoric and ESL/applied linguistics. From the start of this debate, I realized that it had a *very* long history, that each man had a professional and personal stake in the conversation, and that they were not likely to settle their differences at that juncture, nor would they have to. As a future professional in the field, I knew I had stumbled upon a pivotal insider conversation that I would probably enter myself at some point in my career, a conversation that forces participants to explore the field's purpose, boundaries, and definition. I came to understand the importance of having scholars approach such issues from different perspectives. Paul and Dwight, I realized, were friends and colleagues, but they have their differences on a number of issues. Further, they knew from the onset of the conversation that these differences would emerge at some point. However, they also knew that by participating in (and publishing) this dialogue, they were entering into a collaboration that *could* produce new ideas and perspectives, new theoretical approaches, and new directions.

The project that has had the most significant impact on my socialization into the field was my work with a long-term, meta-disciplinary study of research in second language studies, which I presented in a poster session with Paul and Joleen at the 2005 CCCC in San Francisco. This project benefited me in numerous ways: It exposed me to a wide range of research in second language writing, and it granted some legitimacy to my participation in the field, which according to Wenger is crucial if a newcomer's "inevitable stumblings and violations" are to be "opportunities for learning" (p.101). Most important, it gave me the opportunity to dialogue with others in the field, an opportunity I had been too timid to accept at my first conference presentation two years earlier.

Much like my first presentation, this presentation had its share of bobbles, though I now had the opportunity to bumble in full view of people who could gently point out my errors, and in the guidance of a mentor who could mitigate the “damage.” The most educative part for me came when a well-known scholar in composition and rhetoric (whom I will refer to as “Dr. Smith”) visited our booth and asked about our project. I recall launching into a spiel I had prepared on the plane to San Francisco only to find that Dr. Smith already knew everything I was telling her, and that I was not really answering the question she had asked, at least not to her satisfaction. A bit rattled, I attempted a few more explanations, none of which satisfied Dr. Smith’s curiosity. I remember thinking that I had no shortage of information; my studies and my work on previous tasks had given me a broad overview of major issues in the field. At this point, my problem was with the *synthesis* and *use* of this information—the ability to discern which information was needed as background information, which information I could assume my audience knew, and which information might best drive home my point in this instance.

Eventually, Paul stepped in, and I watched him as he carefully attempted to address Dr. Smith’s concerns. Later, Paul confided in me that even he found her questions hard to answer, as he was not always clear what her *specific* concerns were. Nonetheless, watching Paul interact with Dr. Smith taught me much about the importance and collaborative nature of academic dialogue and helped me more rationally examine my academic “performance” anxiety. Dr. Smith’s questions, I realized, were not intended to dismantle me. Rather they were simply inquisitive and constructive—they were meant to engage my ideas and further the knowledge-making process I had entered into with my colleagues. Like the conversation I had transcribed between Paul and Dwight, my exchange with Dr. Smith was a collaboration. In a sense, I was presenting *with* her, and not necessarily *for* her.

Reflecting on the “Layered” Learning Experience

While these projects marked only the beginning stages of our mentoring relationship, I feel that the “lessons” I learned from them have become a significant foundation for subsequent learning in the field. In fact, I continue to learn from these experiences. To me, learning to become a professional has been a gradual process involving engagement in a

series of tasks and, more importantly, continual reflections. There was not a single glorious moment over the past two years when everything “clicked” and I understood completely the “big picture.” Rather, I learned these aspects of graduate school gradually, and it has largely been through opportunities such as writing this chapter that I have had the occasion to take stock of my experiences and evaluate my progress. That is, my learning has occurred in layers. While completing a task, I would sometimes notice only the more immediate applications (e.g., the transcription process), but after further reflection—and after embarking on new tasks that forced me to draw from my previous experiences—I was often able to see the subtler aspects of the field to which these tasks exposed me (e.g., the various ways one collaborates with other professionals, and the reasons for doing so).

My reflections on the process of “doing” graduate school have also highlighted for me the intricate relationship between learning and identity construction, and the layered nature of my own developing professional identity (Wenger; Casanave, 2002). In *Communities of Practice*, Wenger describes identity as a temporally-situated learning trajectory. According to Wenger,

We are always simultaneously dealing with specific situations, participating in the histories of certain practices, and involved in becoming certain persons. As trajectories, our identities incorporate the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present. . . . They provide a context in which to determine what, among all the things that are potentially significant. A sense of trajectory gives us a way of sorting out what matters and what does not, what contributes to our identity and what remains marginal. (p. 155)

In this vein, it has been through my varying degrees of participation with others in my discipline—whether it be with my professors, my fellow graduate students, or others with whom I have collaborated—that I have been able to see how others situate themselves within the field and how they identify as professionals. My own learning trajectory, then, has involved identifying and, to some degree, appropriating *pieces* of others’ identities (i.e., research interests, professional habits, etc.). Thus, by working closely with Paul, I have not simply *become* Paul, but certain aspects of his professional identity have become an integral part of my own. For example, Paul’s use of situated learning and activity theories in his teaching and mentoring has fascinated me, and in turn

I have not only incorporated these ideas into my own teaching, but I have taken them on as research interests. Further, I can identify certain elements of my professional identity that have developed from working closely with Christina, Michelle, and Joleen at UNH, and from working peripherally with other graduate students at Purdue or San Francisco State University. In short, I credit Paul for nudging me deeper into our discipline's network of activities, which has facilitated the development of my professional identity.

Working closely as Paul and I have, however, does not come without its share of hitches, particularly with regard to the negotiation of working styles. Right off the bat, we noted some significant differences in work habits. For example, Paul, a night owl, prefers working late at night into the early morning, while I prefer to work from late morning to early afternoon; Paul tends to work fairly quickly and multi-tasks well, while I like spending more time on fewer simultaneous tasks; Paul seems to favor collaborative environments and is adept at networking on projects, while I tend to approach tasks from a very "individualist" point of view.

These differences in working styles do complicate the mentor-mentee relationship from time-to-time. While I like keeping pace with Paul, for example, I often find that when trying to do so, I take on more than I can handle at any given time, and I find myself frustrated when I fall short of what I believe are Paul's expectations. In one case, when Paul and I sat down to work on this book chapter, I was a bit perplexed to find that Paul had drafted a fairly sizeable chunk of text in the time it took me to revise four small paragraphs. Through working together, however, one does find ways to negotiate these differences, and in my case, to better understand these differences. While Paul appears to work quickly, he has since told me that he is by nature an "excruciatingly slow" writer, and that, when given the choice, he prefers to work independently. The ability to multi-task and to collaborate were work habits he learned out of necessity as he delved further into the profession—a process I am going through.

Conclusion: A Long-Term Relationship

As we have tried to show through our collaborative reflection on our mentoring relationship, mentoring at the doctoral level is a long-term relationship, one that is developed over five or so years. Mentors who

collaborate with their Master's students, who are in early stages of professional development, may be able to draw the distinction between experienced and inexperienced peers more easily (Ferris, 2005). With doctoral students, however, the boundary between experienced and inexperienced is not so clear-cut because being a doctoral student, to many, is the last phase of being a student and the first phase of being a professional (Matsuda, 2003). They are in the process of becoming their mentors' experienced peers—if they are not already. Eventually, the relationship will turn into that between colleagues in the same profession.

Again, the transition from being a student to being a professional does not happen in a flash; as Steve's experience suggests, becoming a professional is a gradual process that requires an ongoing involvement in multiple tasks and reflections. Although the series of tasks that Steve has gone through may seem to work seamlessly in retrospect—partly because we have had to construct a coherent narrative for this chapter—it is not always possible to come up with a series of tasks that can take a mentee from one stage of professional development to another smoothly. As Wenger points out, the tasks cannot be pre-designed; there can be no prescribed mentoring curriculum. Instead, it has to emerge from the ongoing relationship between the mentor and the mentee. The best kinds of tasks cannot be created; they can only be carved out from what projects the mentor happens to be working on at any given moment. The nature and scope of each task also needs to be negotiated based not only on what the mentor needs to have accomplished but also on what the mentee is interested in, capable of, and is ready to learn.

In order to identify appropriate tasks, the mentor needs to have many different projects going on at any given point. The mentor and mentee also need to build a strong working relationship in which their needs and concerns can be expressed freely so that the mentor is aware of the mentee's interests, development and strengths and weaknesses. The relationship also needs to be healthy and sustainable. That is, both parties need to benefit mutually from the experience—and feel that they do. One way to accomplish the sense of mutual benefit is to identify tasks that have some immediate incentives for both parties. When Steve copyedited a book for Paul, for example, it was clear from the outset that the task was something Paul needed to have done, and that Steve would receive a stipend in addition to gaining a glimpse into an aspect of the profession. In another case, Steve did not receive any financial compensation but gained professional recognition as a co-presenter of a poster session at a conference.

Although it is important for each task to have some immediate incentives for both parties, not all the benefits can be instantly clear to either of them. While Steve was always aware of some of the immediate benefits of each task, the long-term implications did not become evident until much later—until when he found himself applying the set of skills he had learned in a previous task or when he reflected on the process through, for example, writing this chapter. It is also important to keep in mind that the mutual benefits do not always correspond one to one. Sometimes one gives more than the other, but in the end, the benefits may balance out. In the initial stage of mentoring, what the mentor can provide—by way of opportunities, guidance, support, and resources to help the mentee get established—may outweigh what the mentees can produce. Later in the relationship, however, the mentee might take on more for the mentor in the process of gaining independence. At this stage, the mentor's role, and challenge, is to trust and encourage the mentee and to be less hands-on, or even to let the mentee take the lead.

For this type of relationship to work, both the mentor and mentee need to see the relationship not just as a short-term bartering of services but as a long-term investment—both for themselves and for the field.

STEVE SIMPSON, UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

Since starting my Ph.D. in composition studies at the University of New Hampshire, I've learned the importance of collaboration in academia. Not only have I had professors who have nurtured my professional development, but I've benefited from other students in the program who have shared with me their knowledge, their time, and their encouragement. As a community of learners, we mentor each other, regardless of our year in the program. Upon completing my Ph.D., I hope to secure a position at a university where I can foster this sort of community among grad students I work with.

PAUL KEI MATSUDA, ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

I have been blessed with mentors with a wide range of mentoring styles at various stages of my professional development. Although each of my mentors has had a profound impact on me, I realize that none of them alone could have provided everything. As a mentor now, I find myself constantly reflecting on my own experiences with my mentors as a way to guide my interactions with my mentees. In addition to playing multiple mentoring roles, I strive to create opportunities for my mentees to network and collaborate with others.

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