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

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Gruwell, Leigh, and Charles Lesh, eds. *Mentorship/Methodology: Reflections, Praxis, and Futures*. University Press of Colorado, 2024.

Mentorship in the field of writing studies is broadly understood to be an essential facet of disciplinary matriculation, but its features are sometimes slippery to define. Indeed, mentorship is difficult to concisely describe and more challenging still to enact in practice. When it does take root, however, both mentor and mentee are aware of the power and benefits of this sometimes-elusive dynamic. In my own experiences both in my MA and PhD programs, my exceptional mentors entered my life through what sometimes felt like

serendipitous chance, as in, I was (luckily) in the right place at the right time to meet them. I know too well how lucky I am to have them as my guides, colleagues, and sometimes even friends, but even as a grateful recipient of the best-case scenario for mentorship, so to speak, I find myself continuing to reflect on how we as a field might better scaffold the dynamic of mentor/mentee.

Seeking to illuminate and clarify the muddy complexities of mentorship within the field, Leigh Gruwell and Charles Lesh invite the reader to consider mentorship as methodology and methodology as method in their edited collection *Mentorship/Methodology: Reflections, Praxis, and Futures*. In this recent collection, the authors offer a generative framework “at the slash” of mentorship/methodology, asking chiefly what the interplay between the loci of method and mentorship might look like, how that dialectic relationship can inform our practice, and how care for the dynamic between the two may posit inventive possibilities for the future (5). Gruwell and Lesh build out a compelling enlivenment of a previously understudied phenomenon that lurks in prior texts such as Michelle Eble and Lynée Lewis Gaillet’s 2008 collection *Stories of Mentoring: Theory and Praxis*. The exploration of identity and methodology also recalls Harry Denny’s *Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-to-One Mentoring of Writing*, as the contributors and editors frame the implications of mentorship, method, and pedagogy across similar contexts. Beyond this monograph, Lindsey Ives and Linnea Spitzer’s 2023 article “Student to Scholar: Mentorship, Recontextualization, and the Threshold of Scholarly Publication in Rhetoric and Composition” calls for practices within the dynamics of mentorship and publication that are further explored in Gruwell and Lesh’s collection. These works are just a few samples in a larger cannon of writing studies (and adjacent fields) scholarship about mentorship that track well with Gruwell and Lesh’s work. Ultimately, Gruwell and Lesh’s collection acts as a constellating connector between existing literatures.

Mentorship/Methodology is divided into four parts, described as “Making Space at the Slash,” “Sustainability at the Slash,” “Methodological Innovations: Bridging at the Slash,” and “Complicating the Slash: Futures in Mentorship/Methodology.” Each of the four sections offers deeply resonant perspectives on the facets and divisions of mentorship and methodology across contexts. These include perspectives from writing centers (Ralston; Chavin and Towle; Sicari), publishing (Clements and Pell), and WAC networks (Russel and Polk). Woven through each section is an emphasis on inclusive, “othered,” and radical perspectives to both mentorship and methodology, supporting the mission of Gruwell and Lesh “to make visible

more ethical mentoring spaces and more ethical methodologies that, taken together, might push the field in more equitable, even radical, directions” (9). Every chapter included in the text is deeply insightful, personal, and well equipped both in takeaways and tangible strategies.

Section one, “Making Space at the Slash,” concerns how scholars can open new conceptualizations of a mentorship space to include methodology (and vice-versa) from a variety of perspectives. Elise Dixon, Trixie Smith, and Malea Powell begin by identifying cultural rhetorics as a rich methodology for knowledge-making and storytelling, and by extension, how storytelling is a critical component of any mentor-mentee relationship. The authors also offer a decolonial framework of mentorship as methodology, simultaneously acknowledging the inherent challenges in the closeness of the relationship, caring about the work of the mentee, and “paying attention to their embodied experiences throughout the project” (33). Brad Lucas, in the next chapter, tells a narrative of his own personal mentorship journey while interrogating the conflicted space of standard “methodology courses” in graduate programs: they are challenging to teach, difficult to conceptualize, and most importantly, the somewhat broad tendencies of the discipline make building a methodology survey quite complicated. Continuing the theme of opening new spaces, Eric A. House, Kelly Medina-López, and Kellie Sharp-Hoskins describe a series of mentorship practices that they articulate as important to building “methodological communities marked by equity, hospitality, and reciprocity” through action and signaling (62). Their framing is accompanied by a notable discussion of *home* and *homeplace*, theorized less as a concrete space and more as an intellectual symbiosis. Finally, Devon Fitzgerald Ralston takes the reader into the writing center, focusing on themes of care and legacy as they correspond to a mentorship pedagogy. What is especially apparent in Ralston’s chapter is that these spaces, whether identifiable by walls, minds, or spirits in the ether of methodology and mentorship, are flexible, sometimes messy, and sometimes liminal in their making.

The second and third sections, “Sustainability at the Slash” and “Methodological Innovation: Bridging the Slash,” offer programmatic surveys and potentially generative methodologies, respectively, continuing to enhance the overall picture of mentorship for the reader. This is an organizational schema that works especially well to guide the reader through models first and innovative possibilities second. In the second section, Jessica Clements and John Pell problematize the world of academic publishing and how the ethos of professionalization mentorship might be reconceptualized, illustrating the pitfalls, frustrations, and experiences of the publication process through a mosaic of tweets. Writing studies journals, they note, are

often programmatically generative in their potential for mentorship, should the editors treat the process with care and relationality. Furthermore, Lesley Erin Bartlett, Jessica Rivera-Mueller, and Sandra L. Tarabochia offer a framework of un/becoming rooted in the feminist foundational principles of “slow” mentorship. This chapter is grounded in both the body as a full participant in the mentorship experience as well as how the process of knowledge making is not limited to a particular timeline or context: “slow mentorship as a methodology values our humanity first... it is not focused primarily on productivity... it is focused on knowledge-making in the context of our lives” (150). This passage captures the overall spirit of this text: mentorship and methodology together “at the slash” is an *experience*, a state of being, a commitment and responsibility, all rooted in humans first and foremost.

Elizabeth Geib Chavin and Beth A. Towle open the third section with a reflection on administrator status, methodology, and mentorship, problematizing a disconnect in the cyclical pipeline of mentor and mentee while also proposing that mentorship is an ideal methodology for disrupting power differences. In a similar vein, Anna Sicari follows with an emphasis on institutional ethnography as a mapping methodology to trace relational binaries: “IE [institutional ethnography] is particularly helpful in that it allows us to be rooted in the relational, in the one-on-one interaction, and to map these experiences to build bigger webs as we start from the local to examine patterns of power that occur naturally” (195). Perhaps one of the greatest takeaways from these chapters as a whole is the importance of careful evaluation of both methodology and mentorship in equitable ratios: as Leigh Gruwell and Charles Lesh describe early in the text, “an impoverished view of one is an impoverished view of both” (17).

The final section of the text, “Complicating the Slash: Futures in Mentorship/Methodology,” scaffolds the concluding three chapters, which are concerned with reliance: on bodies, on tradition, and on other disciplinary framings that give life to our contemporary understanding of mentorship and methodology, collectively and respectively. What this section offers the reader is the opportunity to consider mentorship on the horizons: those close and more distant, proposing that a constant awareness of the future is essential for developing our practice. In their “crippled” approach to mentorship, Leslie R. Anglesey and Melissa Nicolas describe the process of mentoring as alive, circuitous, flexible, and rhetorical. The authors note the importance of stretching and reshaping, even in the course of mentorship as practice, which spills with some inevitability into methodology. Finally, Aurora Matzke and John Paul Tassoni, as Gruwell and Lesh note, offer what is a counter-perspective to the intersectional

angle of mentorship and methodology, leaving the reader with strategies to circumvent the sometimes performative, sometimes limited structures of mentorship.

Mentorship/Methodology: Reflections, Praxis, and Futures offers ample perspectives on its subject matter to benefit both experienced scholars and up-and-coming graduate students. Not only is there great potential for advisors and aspiring advisors to consider how their mentoring practice might be a form and function of methodology, but mentees, after reading this text, will come away with tangible understanding of the many ways in which mentorship works as well as how it bleeds, blurs, and conflates with methodology. Further, Gruwell and Lesh fill a notable gap in the field of writing studies, providing a contemporary text with multiple approaches to mentorship across contexts, place, and time. So too, the authors bridge adjacent fields, collecting chapters that are applicable in ways that prior writing studies mentorship texts have not necessarily replicated. This, in my analysis, is the greatest strength of this text: it is an ample offering, a generative framework, a collection that places two critical components of our field in a conversation that, as the authors imply, is only just beginning. Though mentorship and methodology continue to be complex and sometimes messy in writing studies, Gruwell and Lesh encourage us as a field to embrace the “muddled mosaic” (18).

Works Cited

Denny, Harry C. *Facing the Center Toward an Identity Politics of One-to-One Mentoring*. First edition, Utah State University Press, 2010.

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