RECIPROCAL MENTORING AS A METHOD TO ENHANCE DOCTORAL SUCCESS

Andrew Mardjetko* & Christina White Prosser

University of Calgary

This article explores peer mentoring in doctoral studies, specifically through the students' lived experiences in an interdisciplinary doctoral program cohort. Through reflexive conceptualization and the definition of mentorship, the lived experiences of the authors are portrayed. The roles and benefits of mentoring activities are identified and connected to the doctoral experiences through the various stages of degree completion, i.e., candidacy and ethics. Although learners were admitted to a doctoral degree in education, the individual's intake education comes from a variety of learning fields including business non-profit, event management, and adult education. The interdisciplinary studies will highlight strengths associated with the various learning fields and how this helps promote and foster a more well-developed network of peer mentors.

The navigation of multiple priorities, deadlines, and unfamiliar processes is the reality for many doctoral students. While generally highly motivated and encouraged by their supervisors and academic supports, these students may sometimes feel their path is isolating, adrift, and dispiriting (Piche & Lapointe, 2019). This is often due to the many elements within the doctoral journey that the student must discover and navigate alone. This article will explore mentoring relationships that develop to mitigate this isolation. Through a discourse on the conceptualization of mentorship, both looking at a classical approach, and exploring peer-pedagogical perspectives, and including a narrative reflection on the authors' mentorship experience as part of their doctoral studies, this article will highlight the distinctive mentoring relationship that may evolve through joint study and shared experiences. It will also discuss how the relationship among the cohort has helped build successes by highlighting individual strengths, skills, and perspectives (Lorenzetti et al., 2019).

Dyad Mentorship, Peer-Pedagogies, and Reciprocal Mentorship

The definition of reciprocal mentorship is dynamic, containing multiple stages that focus on the individual's shifting role within the mentorship relationship. To better understand this definition, it is vital to explore and consider various forms of mentorship. This exploration grounds the understanding of reciprocal mentorship and highlights essential elements that help to make and strengthen the reciprocal mentorship relationship.

Dyad Mentorship

The mentor/mentee relationship is a dynamic connection that can take numerous forms and focus on different benefits and goals. When looking to understand reciprocal mentorship and how the concept, impressions, and goals differ from a traditional mentorship relationship, we

*Corresponding author - amardjet@ucalgary.ca

must first define and understand mentorship. A classic view of mentorship often involves a senior individual with a great deal of experience and knowledge willing to take a more junior individual "under their wing" (Barrette-Ng et al., 2019, p. 13). The senior individual is typically seen as a role model and uses their knowledge and experience to help provide guidance and support to a mentee (Milner & Bossers, 2004). This type of mentorship, described as dyad mentorship, requires shared responsibility and active participation between both the mentor and mentee (Barrette-Ng et al., 2019). One of the considerations implementing this type of mentorship program is the relationship between the mentor and mentee. Was the mentorship relationship developed and selected to focus on the objects of the mentor and mentee, ensuring alignment and dual benefit? (Soklaridis et al., 2014). In addition to determining an alignment between mentorship objectives, the development of mentorship goals and key indicators for success within the mentorship relationship is critical in ensuring benefit for the mentor and mentee while also defining specific duties and responsibilities for each (Soklaridis et al., 2014). This traditional understanding of mentorship within a dyad mentorship relationship provides a robust foundation for exploring reciprocal mentorship, how it is understood, and the benefits it offers in certain situations.

Peer-Pedagogies

Looking to enhance the discussion of mentorship in gaining an increased understanding of reciprocal mentorship, we shift our focus to the idea of peer mentorship. Peer mentorship is typically perceived as "two or more people, often similar in experience or rank, interacting as equal mentoring partners to achieve mutually determined goals" (Barrette-Ng et al., 2019, p. 17). Within doctoral programs, this type of mentorship can take one of two of the following distinct forms.

Formal Peer-Pedagogies

The institution often develops formal peer-pedagogies to strengthen an academic program. One-way formal peer-pedagogy is facilitated is through the development of cohort-based programs, with the understanding that cohort-based students may "develop study groups and provide academic supports to one another" (Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012, p. 76). Another method of engaging in formal peer-pedagogy is by developing a formalized peer mentoring program in which a more senior student is paired up with a more junior student, allowing for the opportunity to provide support through shared experiences (Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012). Often formalized peer-mentorship programs affect students positively in four distinct domains, academic, social, psychological, and career, allowing them to have more success (Lorenzetti et al., 2019).

Informal Peer-Pedagogies

Informal peer-pedagogies allow students the opportunity to develop and interact with each other informally. This method of student interaction is hard to delineate as there are many ways in which students may engage with each other informally (Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012). The idea of mentorship in these types of relationships may be categorized as "personal, professional, reciprocal and collegial" (Noonan et al., p. 256). The main indication is that in an informal peer mentorship approach, doctoral students see each other as learning partners, working together to achieve success (Noonan et al., 2007). Traditional mentorship models such as the dyad model do not support these types of dynamic relationships. Instead, they are typically

focused on the student working with numerous individuals simultaneously, recognizing individuals as experts in specific areas, and engaging with other experts in other multiple areas (Noonan, et al., 2007).

Reciprocal Mentorship

Defining reciprocal mentorship is highly dependent on the experiences of the individual, the group composition, and the environment(s) in which the mentorship exists. In the authors' mentorship experiences, reciprocal mentorship was explored and defined based on philosophical positioning, interactions within the academic cohort, previous experiences with mentorship and mentorship activities, and finally, an acknowledgment of collective critical consciousness (Garza, 2020) and its application to practice**.**

By exploring these shared experiences and being guided by a social constructivist worldview and approach, the authors' developed a working definition of reciprocal mentorship that encompasses and represents their unique and joint experiences. For this article and to bring further clarity to the meaning of reciprocal mentorship, a social constructivist worldview focused on how reality can be socially constructed, with individual perspectives (based on experience) underlying the foundation for how individuals make sense of their world and the interaction within it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By adopting the previous understanding for our definition, reciprocal mentorship focuses on distinct and individual interactions, with various events shaping perspectives that allow for growth, change, and further understanding. Furthermore, the supports, interactions, and shared experiences only represent a small element within our doctoral journey. The individuals within the reciprocal mentorship relationship were also given numerous additional supports through the encouragement and understanding of various instructors, our doctoral supervisors, shared perspectives and expertise of other doctoral cohort members, and other students from different cohorts. The experiences outlined within this article and the definition of reciprocal mentorship represent particular aspects of mentorship within the authors' doctoral experience and demonstrate a shared understanding of reciprocal mentorship.

The definition of reciprocal mentorship outlined below represents how the authors see the dissimilarities and yet relationships between various mentorship constructs. The adopted definition of reciprocal mentoring focuses on two people working together through a mentoring process in which both individuals take on the roles of Mentor and Mentee. The purpose, application, and role of this definition typically consist of both participants being students or colleagues and having a specific skill set or experiences shared within the mentorship relationship. Additionally, sharing knowledge and experiences typically flows both ways, and mentoring may develop in a casual/informal environment. Table 1 defines mentorship constructs representing the authors' experiences and how the diverse application(s) deliver different results. Additionally, the authors have created a reflective activity (see Appendix A) that may be useful to assess and determine the appropriateness of adopting a reciprocal mentorship process.

Table 1

Mentorship Constructs

	Definition	Purpose & Roles
Classic Mentorship (Dyad Mentorship)	"the mentor, who is usually more experienced, works closely with a mentee for the purpose of teaching, guiding, supporting and facilitating professional growth and development" (Milner & Bossers, 2004, p. 96).	One participant (mentor) is usually in a senior position or vastly more experienced, like a supervisor or teacher. They are sharing their knowledge and experiences with a junior person with fewer experiences. Typically, expertise and experiences flow one way. They share this mentoring in a semi-formal or semi-casual, or casual environment.
Peer Mentorship (Formal and Informal Peer Pedagogies)	"peers learn from one another in a reciprocal manner and that peers can teach each other what it means to be a student, a researcher, and an academic" (Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012, p. 77).	Both participants are students or colleagues. One has a specific skill or experience that they are sharing with the other. Typically, knowledge and experiences flow one way. They share this mentoring in a semi-casual or casual environment.
Mentoring Constellations (Closer to Reciprocal Mentorship)	"the set of relationships an individual has with people who take an active interest in and action to advance the individual's career by assisting with his or her personal and professional development" (Higgins & Thomas, 2001, p. 224).	Anyone in constellation provides developmental assistance

In addition to the definitions described above, the authors also engaged in the Pedagogy of Collective Critical Consciousness (Garza, 2015) as a key aspect that influenced the exploration of mentorship. This acknowledged that the authors view the world through a constructivist worldview, where, as students, we collectively participated in critical reflection. The authors explored their reciprocal mentorship experience through shared learning made possible with active dialogue and reflection. Interactive communication applied as part of the reciprocal mentoring relationship ensured trust, authenticity, and veracity. Our dialogue, according to Freire (1970/2018), embodied the "encounter between [individuals], mediated by the world in order to name the world." (p. 88), in mentoring each other allowed for a named growth space and the ability to establish graduate goals. This participatory action encompassed a

large part of the focus of all graduate students navigating the complex world of higher academic studies to accomplish shared but unique goals.

Reciprocal Mentorship Roles

To help more robustly understand the above definition of reciprocal mentorship and its impact, it is essential to recognize the roles engaged by individuals within the mentoring relationship. There are three valuable aspects of mentorship roles within reciprocal mentorship that help provide productive results and support fluid and candid communication. The first recognizes the importance of defining and actioning the duality of the mentorship roles. This acknowledges the power dynamic present in the mentor/mentee relationship and ensures it is equal, authentic, and reciprocal. (Garza, 2020). By identifying spaces to speak and share, it provides a mutual opportunity to participate equitably within the conversation allowing individuals to learn, lead, and develop wisdom by receiving knowledge and developing deep and rich mentorship relationships. The second aspect of mentorship roles recognize qualities of participants and may include:

- Willingness to share skills, knowledge, and expertise. Drawn from concepts described in "Critical Agents in their learning" by Flores-Scott & Nerad (2012)
- Demonstrate a positive attitude and acting as a role model
- Taking a personal interest in the mentoring relationship
- Exhibits enthusiasm
- Valuing ongoing learning and growth through elements such as writing, research techniques, and presentations (Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012)
- Participate in listening as a critical action

The third aspect of mentorship roles looks to define capacity building (or capacity development) as the process by which individuals and organizations improve, obtain, and retain the skills, knowledge, and other resources needed to do their task competently. Examples include Community of Practice (Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012; Wenger, 1998; Noonan, et al., 2007), Building Self Confidence (Milner & Bossers, 2004), and being an Exemplar (Milner & Bossers, 2004). This capacity-building eases academic stage transitions (Piché & Lapointe, 2019) as individuals navigate the various levels/requirements of their program, e.g., ethics, collecting data, analyzing data, course completion, candidacy, dissertation.

Reciprocal Mentorship in Action

The authors of this paper have been fortunate enough to have participated in a reciprocal mentoring relationship. This mentoring relationship began to form in the third year of the authors' doctoral studies and developed organically among five members. This mentorship relationship contains some elements of a classical dyad mentoring relationship, specifically in the development of shared objectives, goals, and measures for success, namely the effective completion of candidacy and the final dissertation, which helped the group formalize the role, purpose and goal of the mentoring relationship (Soklaridis et al., 2014). The relationship also featured elements of formal peer pedagogies, as authors participated in a cohort-based program where all individuals had a common interest and shared experiences within the educational process (Flores-Scott & Nerad, 2012). There was also an element of peer-pedagogy in which the mentoring relationship contained elements of personal, professional, and collegial components

relying on each individual at various times to act as an expert in specific knowledge areas (Noonan, Ballinger, & Black, 2007). The mentorship relationship was dynamic and sometimes included all individuals in the discussion, decision making and support. In contrast, at other times, individuals participated in singular conversations with various members about their particular inquiries and investigations. Both authors reflecting on the mentorship relationship agree that it helped each to navigate the doctoral process better.

An essential item to note within this reciprocal mentoring relationship is that although most of the five individuals have completed their doctoral studies, the mentoring relationship is still functioning with the objective and goals shifting slightly from successful completion of the final dissertation into the successful navigation of post-doctoral life. Discussions have now shifted to conference attendance, article writing, and job opportunities. This example highlights the dynamic nature of a reciprocal mentorship program that combines elements of foundational mentorship principles and components of formal and informal peer pedagogy.

Conclusions

This article has developed a unique conceptualized definition of reciprocal mentorship based on the authors' experiences and reflective practices. This was accomplished by examining various mentorship constructs and personal reflections from the authors' experience as participants within a reciprocal mentoring relationship. As illustrated, reciprocal mentoring is a dynamic process based on participants' collective experiences, meaning-making and portrays the great significance, the members assigned to the mentorship relationship. Reciprocal mentorship can take many forms and encourage and help individuals in numerous ways. This is illustrated by the authors' example of reciprocal mentorship as a method of achieving doctoral success.

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Mardjetko & White Prosser (2022)

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Appendix A

Assessment for Reciprocal Mentorship: Is this the right fit for me/us?

This exercise/reflection tool can be used when considering mentorship benefits, frameworks, and resources.

Reflecting on Experiences	
1. What do meaningful mentorships conversations and relationships look like? Formation, location, population, organization?	
2. What value does reciprocal mentorship bring to the participants? Benefits, skills, tools?	
3. What skills are needed to develop reciprocal mentoring networks? Lists of meaningful questions? Structures that facilitate dialogue (organization)	
Structure, Planning, and Organization	
4. What concerns might you have about reciprocal mentorship?	

• How would you address/resolve these concerns?	
5. What environments would benefit from a reciprocal mentorship experience?	
6. What tools would you use to facilitate mentorship relationships?	

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