

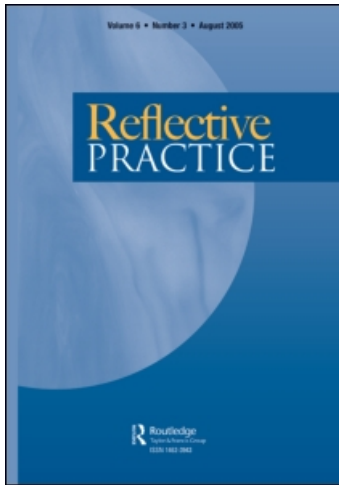
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The cage: stuff, tunes and tales

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The following scenes reveal an emotional dialogue between a graduate supervisor and doctoral student. It reflects the importance of supervisors providing emotional support for graduate students during their academic studies. Although the doctoral student is reflecting upon whether to disclose her personal issues with him, he takes the time to talk and comfort her during a challenging time in her life. Overall, reflecting upon emotional support as part of the mentoring relationship becomes transformative as it deepens their personal and professional relationship.

Keywords: graduate supervision; mentoring; dialogue approach; reflexive inquiry

Prelude

The following three scenes reflect and reveal an emotional dialogue between a graduate supervisor and doctoral student in her fourth year of graduate studies in music education. The thematic analysis culminates in recommending that graduate supervisors become emotionally supportive of doctoral students during challenging times in their academic studies. The scenes highlight a moment in time when the doctoral student suffers a crisis in her life. After 11 years, they begin to share and discuss personal issues in their lives.

‘The Cage’ is based on scenes from a broader dialogue that transforms their personal and professional relationship as the emotional support from the supervisor gives the doctoral student strength to refocus on her doctoral defense presentation. Their relationship ‘has progressed to the point where we communicate on many levels’ (Gouzouasis & Lee, 2002, p. 127). The dialogue invites, ‘qualitative researchers to become engaged pedagogues within our communities and to create spaces for honest talk that opens our hearts and minds to the pains and joys of social diversity’ (Pilcher, 2001, p. 283). A dialogue approach invites readers into the writer’s world (Plummer, 2001) of social science research and emphasizes how qualitative researchers are searching for ways to tell stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Writing the dialogue ‘provides a deeper understanding about how reflexive inquiry facilitates teacher learning and development’ (Lee, 2007, p. 545) surrounding mentoring issues.

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Scene 1: Stuff

(This scene begins in the office of the university graduate supervisor. It is a large room with a bookshelf and articles stacked on the counter. There is an area carpet. The walls display photos and drawings from his son, and quotes from musicians.)

Peter, a professor of Greek descent, sits at his desk in the middle of the office. He wears jeans and a light blue Oxford shirt. A short ponytail is tied at the back of his head. He talks to Karen, his doctoral student, who sits in a chair across from his desk. Karen, a Chinese Canadian, has shoulder length black hair, and wears cream dress pants with a black leather jacket.)

Peter: KV, what's wrong?

Karen: Nothing. *(Stuffs a tissue into her pocket.)*

(Pause.)

Peter: So, how is your defense script coming along? *(Leans back, and folds his hands.)*

Karen: Okay, but I need to practice it. Two weeks to go. *(Stares out the window, where the sky darkens.)*

Peter: Want to present it to the FAME cohort this Thursday?

Karen: What time? *(She searches her pockets. Papers fall to the floor. Unfolding them, she stares at the words, 'Law Agreement'. She sniffs and stuffs the papers into her purse.)*

Peter: 10.30 am?

(Karen turns around and blows her nose.)

Peter: *(Turns off his computer monitor and stands.)* KV, let's go for a walk.

Karen: *(She does not answer. Instead, she stares out the window.)*

Peter: Want a coffee from Blue Chip? It'll be a treat for the walk.

Karen: Okay. *(Rubs eyes.)*

(Phone rings. Ignoring it, Peter puts on his Mariners baseball cap and leather jacket.)

Peter: And thanks for the Magic Eye Calendar, but I can't see those hidden pictures.

Karen: Squint more.

(Peter squints. Karen forces a smile. They exit.)

Karen: Peter, you are always ahead of me. *(She quickly walks to catch up.)*

Peter: Sorry, KV. *(He turns around.)* Sometimes, I forget I'm walking with someone. *(Outside, it is cloudy but warm for the month of January. Students eat on the grass. A freckle-faced man drops his knapsack. As he picks it up, his glasses fall off his face.)*

Peter: So, how are things?

(Long pause.)

Karen: Just a lot going on.

Peter: Well, you're about to defend your doctoral thesis. That's a long road you've been on.

Are you sad it's ending?

Karen: Maybe. Guess I don't know what's coming.

Peter: Look at the up side. Now we can do some serious writing together.

(Karen does not answer. She is watching a young couple embrace.)

Peter: *(Looks at the ground.)* Ever heard the tune 'Never Gonna Fall In Love Again'?

Karen: Yes.

Peter: The melody is from the second movement of Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony. Thing is, it evolves from a brew of ideas that just hits you all of a sudden. Pow! Right at the heart. *(Pause.)* When the main theme is revealed, it swells with powerful emotions. No wonder someone took that stuff and made a pop tune out of it. I saw Ormandy conduct it with the Philadelphia Orchestra in the 70's. Was it that pop singer Eric Carmen?

Karen: I guess so ... Are you being ... metaphysical?

Peter: *(Singing the first phrase.)* Never gonna fall in love again, I don't wanna start da da da da, da da da ... Huh? *(Stops walking.)*

Karen: Are you being metaphysical? *(Pause.)*
 Peter: Ha?
 Karen: I remember that research course you taught. It changed me, that stuff.
 Peter: *(Guffaws and continues to walk.)* Stuff, tunes and tales.
(Peter opens the door of the student union building and signals for Karen to enter.)

Scene 2: Tunes

(2.00 pm. It is busy in the student union building. Students gather around vendor's tables. Peter walks toward Blue Chip Cookies.)

Peter: Thirsty?
(There is no answer. Peter turns around. Not far away, Karen hovers over a vendor with earrings for sale. She holds a pair in her hands. Peter walks toward her.)
 Karen: They don't match, but they're a pair.
 Peter: Uh-huh.
 Karen: I want to buy 10 pairs of earrings! *(She says with emphatic tone.)*
(He pulls her to some chairs at the side. Motions her to sit. Tears roll down her face.)
 Peter: What's going on?
 Karen: *(Sobs.)* They need to be a matched pair.
 Peter: Really?
(She wipes her face with her right hand.)
(Peter pulls a napkin out of his pocket and hands it to her. After a moment, she blows her nose.)
 Peter: I've lived a long time, KV. And I have tales about stuff that I thought wasn't going to work but ended up working. *(He takes off his baseball cap.)*
 Karen: *(Does not answer.)*
 Peter: But people go through so much crap to make things work in their lives. And I mean real crap. Believe me, I've been there. I've dealt with a lot of heavy stuff. *(Pause.)*
 Karen: I'm so worried about my daughter. *(Tears roll down her face.)* I want her to be okay.
 Peter: *(He places his hand on her shoulder.)* She'll be fine.
 Karen: And it doesn't help that I live off soft money either. *(There are more tears.)*
 Peter: *(Speaks softly and soothingly.)* Take it easy, KV. Take it easy.
(Peter takes the napkin from Karen's hand and wipes her face. In a few minutes, her crying slows down. There is a long pause. They sit and watch people walk by.)
 Karen: Remember *(she hesitates)* the cage?
 Peter: The cage? What story is that?
 Karen: Ten years ago, I met you in that classroom that had a huge wire fence dividing it. We were trapped in there with computers. The cage.
 Peter: *(He laughs.)* That was a long time ago. I used to say they put us in there 'cause of all the crazy music we were composing.
 Karen: It's like I'm still in it.
(Peter and Karen continue to watch people walk by. After a long time, Peter puts his baseball cap on and turns toward Karen. She stands. Slowly, they walk to Blue Chip Cookies.)

Scene 3: Tales

(Peter and Karen stand third in line.)

Karen: Maybe I'll wear mismatched earrings to my defense.
 Peter: *(Laughs.)* Now you're talking.
 Karen: I'll show how relationships can change trends. A whole new fashion statement.
 Peter: Sometimes, people don't factor in the role of change in relationships. Evolution. Some are stuck in modernism, others in post modernism. They're hung up

on dualisms and manufactured binaries. They're stuck on their own stance and afraid to change, but we have to rethink the way we see the world. When people stop growing they can't connect ideas any more.

Karen: (*Sighs.*) Change?

Peter: Yes. Change brings about the need to reconstruct and reconnect, to rethink the ways that we see the world, to adopt a new set of lenses. Sometimes, that doesn't happen. People stop growing, they can't connect anymore, probably because they can't get away from relativistic stances to see how the relative-relative supercedes the mere relative.

Karen: Relative-relative? (*A tinge of sarcasm in her voice.*)

Peter: Think about the Escher graphic of the two hands drawing each other. It's not about differences, not about one thing or another. We've gotta find a meaningful way to see connections between stuff – how one thing defines another, how things are both relative and related to each other.

Karen: Stuff. (*She laughs.*) Sometimes I wish you would speak to me, not at me.

Peter: Lord I was born a rambling prof ... 'dee-dle dee'. (*A parody of the Allman Brothers tune.*) Our lives change. You know, some good, some bad. That's the way it goes. When things get tough, you carry on. And if you can fix it, that's great. Otherwise, you move on.

Karen: (*She nods her head.*)

Peter: I've got my problems but keep going. I play my guitar, and it takes me to another realm. I spend time with my son. I tell you, he's my boy. We go swimming and do stuff together, and did I tell you he plays the drums? I bought him a professional drum set with hand hammered cymbals. We have such a special bond, and I want to be there for him. He's my responsibility and I want him to remember 30 years from now the things we did together.

Karen: I am carrying on, but I want to have faith in relationships.

Peter: Sometimes, things change for the better. You know, you can do one thing that moves your life in a completely different direction and it can change your life forever. Looking back, things could have been different. But I'm where I am based on how my life's web was intricately knitted. Forget about things being split into categories and hierarchies. Look for connections. You know, it's about point of view. Look at the road ahead and check the rear view mirror at the same time.

Karen: Okay, look forwards and backwards at the same time. And for connections.

Peter: Yeah, 'Ta matia sou decca' my grandma used to say – 'ten eyes all around your head'. And don't dwell – don't sweat the small stuff. You can't allow some stuff to eat away at you and take over. We can't allow for random viewpoints to overtake our beliefs without scrutinizing them. If nothing else, strive to see the hidden meanings in things. Only then can we go with the flow. Life is ever unfolding. We're ever becoming.

Karen: Becoming.

(*They advance to the front of the line.*)

Peter: Yeah. In the sense that where we're at in this moment of time is an aspect of being, a snapshot in our lifelong quest for learning about ourselves and about others. And becoming is like a lifelong movie.

Karen: (*She nods as they advance to the front of the line.*)

Peter: What do you want to drink?

Karen: Short, decaf cappuccino, low fat.

Peter: Anything else? A chocolate, marbleous cookie?

Karen: (*Smiles.*) Maybe next time. But I'm ready to present my defense to your class Thursday.

Coda

The dialogue highlights the mentoring process for readers 'interested in improving their mentoring and broadening their conceptions and repertoire of mentoring' (Johnson,

2007, p. 1). Supervising a doctoral student is complex and requires a substantial commitment of time and energy by both supervisor and advisee (Connell, 1985). This article is a discursive turn toward 'alternative forms of representation' (Eisner, 1997, p. 4) as narrative research is a 'form that moves from interpretation to emotional evocation to praxis, empowerment, and social change' (Denzin, 2003, p. 133).

The narrative is situated as a/r/tographic inquiry (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004), and 'how artography has evolved as dynamic form of arts-based educational research' (Gouzouasis, 2006, p. 34), which is a discursive turn toward 'alternative forms of representation' (Eisner, 1997, p.4). 'Artists, researchers, teachers engaged in a/r/tography are living lives of inquiry: lives full of curiosity punctuated by questions searching for deeper understandings while interrogating assumptions' (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 901). As researchers, we 'become completely caught up in what one knows and does' (Sumara & Carson, 1997, p. xvii).

'Mentoring relationships in academic settings are crucial for students and junior faculty who benefit as protégés, for institutions who benefit secondarily, and also for the faculty who reap a range of positive outcomes – personally and professionally' (Johnson, 2007, p. 5). The experience has many implications about the way mentorship is constructed. For example, one needs to review the importance of deeper relationships between student-supervisor that involve trust and disclosure. Overall, writing about the three scenes becomes transformative as it provides a heightened awareness about how emotional support during graduate supervision can deepen personal and professional relationships.

Notes on contributors

Peter Gouzouasis is a lifelong learner of music and still pursues serious studies, studio work, and performance of guitar and other fretted instruments in jazz, North American folk, Celtic and Greek music contexts. He is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum Studies and Coordinator of Fine Arts and New Media Education cohort in education. At UBC, he teaches perspectives on music acquisition and music learning and his work as a studio musician have led him to explore research in both traditional and new media contexts. Peter is the former music director of WRTI, JAZZ 90 in Philadelphia (1983–1988), which was the most listened to 24 hour jazz radio station in North America during 1980s, and is also recognized for his work in writing television and radio commercials that have been broadcasted across North America. He actively promotes art-based educational researcher with the A/r/tography Research group at UBC.

Karen V. Lee is Faculty Advisor and co-founder of the Teaching Initiative for Music Educators cohort (TIME), at the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada. Her research interests include issues of music/teacher education, performance ethnography, memoir, women's life histories, autoethnography, writing practices and arts-based approaches to qualitative research. Her doctoral dissertation was a book of short stories titled 'Riffs of Change: Musicians Becoming Music Educators'. She is a musician, writer, music educator and researcher. Currently, she teaches undergraduate and graduate students at the university in both traditional and online contexts.

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