



## Mentoring relationships through technology in the third space

**Grace Yue Qi<sup>1</sup>, Nona Press<sup>2</sup> and Michael Sankey<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Massey University, <sup>2</sup>Queensland University of Technology, <sup>3</sup>Charles Darwin University

This study has its genesis in the ASCILITE Community Mentoring Program (CMP), in which the authors are active participants. This program runs primarily for the benefit of ASCILITE Members and involves partnering members from across the sector in professional mentoring relationships. The CMP is a vehicle designed to enhance specific knowledge, skills and capacities among the membership, where more experienced members work with those wishing to develop their expertise in agreed areas (ASCILITE, 2022).

Mentoring has been recognised as an important professional development medium for academics and professional staff working in higher education. These relationships are seen to provide personal growth opportunities that contribute to an individual's career development and professional identity (re)formation (Qi, in press). Individuals who engage in mentoring are generally team-players, able to function flexibly and in an agile fashion in challenging work environments (Fenwick, 2016; Fenwick et al., 2012). These attributes bode well in building mentoring relationships and sense of belonging. During the mentorship, mentees and mentors build upon their multifaceted competences needed for collaborative, critical and creative work. They take an inquiry-based and reflective approach to build and expand connections, interactions and relational endeavours to potentially align with their personal and professional agenda. They constantly negotiate and self-position in the mentoring space to transcend disciplinary boundaries (Manoharan, 2020). Here, we are conscious of a fundamental question which alludes to mentees and mentors in how they might traverse and relate to their respective professional contexts and concurrently their learning and development opportunities within the mentoring relationships through technology.

More recently, Mentors and Mentees leverage the affordances of digital technologies to enhance access to each other, resources and learning across a multitude of contexts. In response to ever-diversified academia in Australasia, mentoring has been perceived as a deep, meaningful and reciprocal learning and developmental avenue. The hybridity of learning and development has created greater opportunities for richer learning experiences and ways to belong (Press et al., 2022).

This study employs 'Third Space' as a metaphor to reimagine and analyse the relationships and learning of mentors in the mentorship as a co-developmental opportunity. The idea of Third Space derived from cultural theory explores spatial relationships (Padro, 2022; Whitchurch, 2012) and rejects the dichotomy of relationships. It however takes into consideration the contemporary, blended, socially enabled sites for participation and collaboration (Soja, 1996) intersecting with digital technologies. In this sense, mentoring is characterised by the hybrid nature of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning and development to seed opportunities for new ways of interactions and collaborations across disciplines, to help address the challenges of the modern university (Manoharan, 2020). To help the researchers understand the lived experiences and learnings derived from mentoring, this study has adopted a phenomenological approach that explore the nexus of learning, mentoring and digital technologies. The well-established ASCILITE CMP program then provides the ideal analytical lens into the Third Space, to address the following research questions:

1. How do Mentors experience mentoring, and what do their relationships, learning and development look like?
2. How and in what ways does the Third Space construct position a Mentor's approach in framing their CMP mentoring activities?
3. To what extent do digital technologies promote a sense of belonging for learning and

- development in the Third Space?
4. How might mentoring be designed for the Third Space (re)shaped by digital technologies?

These questions pose complex concerns. Our empirical study is not necessarily to resolve all these challenging issues. Our point of departure is to raise awareness of mentorship through ongoing critical inquiries, reflexivity and considerations that contribute to the higher education community.

Keywords: mentoring; lived experience; third space; digital technology; higher education

## References

- ASCILITE (2022) Community Mentoring Program. Available from: <https://ascilite.org/get-involved/community-mentoring-program/>
- Fenwick, T. (2016). Social media, professionalism and higher education: a sociomaterial consideration. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(4), 664-677. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.942275>
- Fenwick, T., Nerland, M., & Jensen, K. (2012, 2012/02/01). Sociomaterial approaches to conceptualising professional learning and practice. *Journal of Education and Work*, 25(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2012.644901>
- Manoharan, A. (2020). Creating connections: polymathy and the value of third space professionals in higher education. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 24(2), 56-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603108.2019.1698475>
- Padró F. F. (2022). Preface. In H. Huijser, H. M. Kek & Padró F. F. (Eds), *Student support services. University development and administration*. Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3364-4\\_43-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3364-4_43-1)
- Press, N., Andrew, M. B., Percy, A., & Pollard, V. A. (2022). Pedagogies of belonging in an anxious world: A collaborative autoethnography of four practitioners. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 19(4). <https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol19/iss4/01>
- Qi, G. Y. (in press). Virtual peer mentoring for language teacher professional development: A framework towards the Aotearoa/New Zealand context. In D. Wang & M. East (Eds.), *Chinese language education in Anglophone countries: Perspectives from New Zealand*. Springer.
- Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. Blackwell.
- Whitchurch, C. (2012). *Reconstructing identities in higher education: The rise of 'Third Space' professionals*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203098301>

Qi, G. Y., Press, N., & Sankey, M. (2022, December 4-7). *Mentoring relationships through technology in the third space* [Pecha Kucha Presentation]. 39<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Innovation, Practice and Research in the Use of Educational Technologies in Tertiary Education, ASCILITE 2022, Sydney, NSW, Australia. <https://doi.org/10.14742/apubs.2022.247>

The author(s) assign a Creative Commons by attribution licence enabling others to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon their work, even commercially, as long as credit is given to the author(s) for the original creation.

© Qi, G. Y., Press, N., & Sankey, M. 2022