ANNATJIE J. M. PRETORIUS AND GERT J. VAN DER WESTHUIZEN

9. SPACE MAKING IN MENTORING CONVERSATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Mentoring conversations involve differences in knowledge and expertise which are often significant. In their review of literature on the role of knowledge in conversations, Stivers, Mondala and Steensig (2011) noted how participants use their 'epistemic authority' (Heritage & Raymond, 2005), to guide a conversation. Because the mentor has epistemic authority in a conversation with a mentee,this epistemic status and epistemic authority could inhibit the co-construction of knowledge due to the social and institutional rules or norms which govern mentoring conversations.

This chapter is concerned with the issue of space for learning in mentoring interactions, i.e. the opportunity for the mentee to participate and contribute to knowledge construction. This would involve the mentor playing downplaying her role in offering knowledge ideas, and allowing the mentee to'take the chair', a phrase borrowed from Goffman (2007:221). This could disregard the social and institutional norms of mentoring and conversing. In pedagogical context, however, the mentor's holding back and refraining from expressing her knowledge views (i.e. epistemic authority), does not mean that she compromises her authority. It is merely a matter of allowing and making the conversational space in which the mentee could explore her own views. The argument here is that a professor of teacher education, for example, may, in a mentoring situation, keep quiet and/or do her talking in ways that, on a level of social interaction and conversation, be accepted as puzzling, while the pedagogical intention is to create space and invite the mentee to present her own thoughts. Because the mentor is assumed to be the knowledgeable person, with knowledge authority, the challenge lies with him/her to create space for learning and exploration (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002).

This chapter is about mentoring interactions which are knowledge productive, i.e. interactions which involve the construction of meaningful conceptual artefacts in student teacher mentoring (Pretorius, 2013). The focus here is on *how* mentors create space for knowledge productive learning, i.e. learning aimed at knowledge on the topic of the interaction (Tillema & Van der Westhuizen, 2003). This study explored the notion of 'ostensible uncertainty' as a conversational strategy to create the mental freedom and space for mentees to enter into the knowledge construction process in conversations. It explores ostensible uncertainty in a mentoring conversation in terms of what Clark (1996:378) refer to as *'ostensible, communicative acts'*. Such

acts are pretended and they conceal that the mentor is not really uncertain about the topic of discussion, but show uncertainty so as to invite the mentee to think more and respond.

The problem focus of this inquiry is the mediating role of the mentor, and the strategies that are involved in creating space for learning and the co-construction of knowledge between mentor and student teacher. The assumption is that learning is enhanced in what Baker, Jensen and Kolb (2002:62, 64) calls '*hospitable space*' or *'receptive space'*. Our purpose is to explore what is involved in space-making in mentoring, and how a mentor uses uncertainty as a strategy to allow the mentee to take part in knowledge construction. We assume that there could be various strategies which would contribute to the creation of a safe conversational space for mentees in interactional learning, such as justified compliments, but the scope of this study only covers the element of uncertainty as a space making agent.

The study considered questions about the differences/asymmetries in knowledge between mentor and mentee, and the creation of space for co-construction of knowledge. The main question asked: How can a mentor get a novice to co-construct knowledge despite vast differences in their current knowledge and experience? The inductive nature of the study allowed the following sub-question to contribute an answer: Can ostensible uncertainty be used to contribute to a 'hospitable space' for co-construction of knowledge?

It is important to note that before this study was conducted, the data set used here had already been identified by Pretorius (2013) in a parallel study (see Chapter… in this book), as a conversation in which meaningful learning had been achieved by co-construction of knowledge. This study thus took a conversation in which co-construction of knowledge had already been identified as a vantage point and explored ostensible uncertainty as a facilitating strategy.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The mentoring interaction, as a face-to-face interaction between lecturers and student teachers may be conceived of, in Goffman's (2007:219) terms, as *'focussed interaction'* in which people effectively agree to sustain focus, such as learning about teaching, for a period of time.

In mentoring conversations, the mentor assumes 'epistemic authority', i.e. a stance of being more knowledgeable (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Heritage, 2012; see also Stivers et al., 2011). The mentor usually determines the format and topics of the conversation (Strong & Baron, 2004:53, see Gerretzen, 2012:4). In the quest for collaborative knowledge construction, the mentor inevitably has to surrender some of his authority in order to make space for the mentee to contribute towards knowledge construction – an idea shared with Baker et al. (2002). In pedagogical terms, however, the mentor's refraining from expression of his epistemic authority does not mean that he compromises his role. It is, as mentioned earlier, merely a matter of allowing and making the conversational space in which the mentee could

explore. In the process, the mentee finds her own '*voice*' (Mkhize et al., 2004:5–14), which relates to the Bakhtinian idea of *'ideological becoming'* (Rule, 2006). This notion will be explored in more detail in the next section.

Magano, Mostert & van der Westhuizen (2010:11) highlight the benefits of learning conversations in an idealistic way. They postulate that roles are not fixed in learning conversations. Where there is an atmosphere of trust, openness and collaboration facilitates learning in the conversation. Learning conversations provide a safe atmosphere for learners to make attempts to learn and to pursuit and investigate new ideas or meaning. Participants are made curious and challenged to reach higher levels of development (Magano et al., 2010). Their description of the benefits of interactional learning, as set out above, is without doubt the ideal, but Stivers et al. (2011) reveal complex dynamics, such as the social norms behind epistemic access and epistemic primacy shaping conversations in very specific ways. In this regard, Stivers et al. (2011:3, 8) refer to 'knowledge asymmetries' or 'epistemic asymmetries' (see also Pomerantz, 1980) in social interaction and mention that such asymmetries are transparent in lay-professional contexts. In interactional learning encounters, such as mentoring conversations, knowledge asymmetries form a significant part of the dynamics in the conversation (Pomerantz, 1980). Epistemic primacy, i.e., the authoritative stance or position of the speaker is governed by social norms, as summarised by Stivers et al. (2011:14), see also (Heritage & Raymond, 2005), as that a speaker may only make assertions if she has sufficient knowledge and if she has the right to do so. Further, a speaker with more in-depth knowledge has primary rights to make assertions and assessments in the relevant domain given her epistemic authority. This would for example be the situation in a case where a professor of teacher education uses what she knows to lead the conversation, assesses what the student knows, and shares her views about the topic of mentoring.

Stivers et al. (2011:10) also highlight asymmetries relating to epistemic access, which is about access to knowledge. In conversation, it is a social norm that a speaker should not make claims for which he/she does not have a sufficient degree of access (Heritage, 2005; Stivers et al., 2011). Given the epistemic asymmetries, i.e. differences in knowledge content in a mentor-mentee conversation, the interlocutors would have to disregard the social norms underlying epistemic access and primacy if the mentee is to take part in knowledge construction, despite her position of not having epistemic authority. When the mentor allows the mentee to 'take the chair' while he allows himself to play a minor role, (Goffman, 2007:22), it does not mean that the mentor compromises on his epistemic authority or -primacy. It is a matter of deliberately allowing some space in which the mentee could explore.

When space is created, 'short-sightedness' and 'tunnel vision' are prevented (Magano et al., 2010). This short-sightedness and tunnel vision could occur when the mentor abuses his epistemic authority as a position from which to dominate instead of leading by carefully and tactfully allowing the mentee to 'take the chair', as Goffman (2007:221) suggested, or in context of this discussion, one could say the mentee, at least temporarily, takes the epistemic chair. The mentee, after all,

has epistemic access to her own experiences in teaching practice, as in the case study referred to in this paper. The mentee in this study, for example, experienced first-hand during her teaching practicum how discipline was handled and spelling was taught at a school in a community with certain social challenges. The mentor, who is a university professor with many years of teaching experience himself, did not experience the needs and challenges of this particular school on a day-to day basis. For this reason, in order to make the transition from theory to practice in a meaningful way, the mentee should be not only allowed, but invited to take part in the process of situated knowledge construction. The question is thus not *whether* it is necessary to create space for the mentee in the knowledge construction, but rather *how* this space could be created in a scenario where the epistemic asymmetries are so prominent that it is the very reason for the conversation, and not forgetting the social norms governing the conversation.

While Magano et al. (2010:26) touch on the idea that participants in learning conversations need 'room to move' mentally and physically, Baker et al. (2002:64) postulate that space making in learning conversations can be facilitated in many different dimensions, such as *temporal space*, in which time is set apart for the conversation, *physical space,* which refers to the physical placement of the participants and *emotional space* which is constructed through receptive listening. In their view the receptive space 'holds the conversation'.This chapter takes particular interest in the creation of *mental space* (Magano et al. 2010:26) in which the mentee has room to explore ideas and to find a 'voice' (Mkhize, 2004:5–14; 5–15; Rule, 2006:96).

Baker et al. (2002:53, 62–64) explore five dialectics, by which they say, conversational learning is guided and sustained. One of these dialectics is '*status*' and '*solidarity*' which *'shape the social realm of conversation'* (Baker et al., 2002:53). They cite Schwitzgabel and Kolb (1974), (see Baker et al., 2002:62) who worked with the notion of relationships among human beings as "*a two dimensional, interpersonal space of status and solidarity"*. *Status* is explained to be an individual's positioning or ranking in a group (Baker et al., 2002), or in a conversation in this case. This relates to the already mentioned notion of 'epistemic authority' (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Heritage, 2013) in a learning conversation. In this case study, status translates to the positioning of the mentor due to his vast knowledge and experience. *Solidarity,* on the other hand, refers to the extent of interpersonal linkage with others in a network of relationships (Baker et al., 2002). It is this interplay which will ultimately define and create a hospitable space which is conducive to conversational learning (Baker, 2002). Baker et al. (2002), postulate that both status and solidarity are necessary to sustain conversation. Further, status, which in this study relates to'epistemic authority', is necessary because, without status or authority, which allow one participant to take initiative or lead, the conversation can 'lose direction' (Baker, 2002:62). They also caution that if any pole in this dialectic is dominating, it could impede or cease learning in the conversation (Baker et al., 2002:62). The mentor's position of status could thus be a guiding element in the learning interaction. On the other hand however,without

solidarity, where mentor and mentee form linkages with each other, the conversation can lose the sense of connection and relevance, as explained by Baker et al. (2002:62), because the conversation will not benefit from the perspectives and diverse expertise of each person. Thus, the input of the mentee, who holds epistemic authority and access over her own experiences in teaching practice, contributes to keeping the knowledge which is constructed in the conversation, connected to her own practice, which ensures relevance.

In this study, tension is created by the discrepancy in knowledge and experience of the mentor and mentee. Considering that the mentee is expected to collaborate in knowledge construction, the tension lies within the unequal status which is socially very natural here. If the mentor is perceived to be the dominant and authoritative source of knowledge, this could result in traditional learning in which the mentee remains dependant on the mentor for one-way knowledge transfer. The focus of the study is to explore how space-making occurs in mentoring conversations in order for the mentee to contribute to knowledge construction, despite the dialectic tension. The mentor's conversational strategy of handling the boundaries of status is expected to facilitate the conceptual contributions of the mentee in the interactional learning.

The purpose of mentoring conversations with student teachers, as in this case study, is to guide the mentee towards *'higher teaching proficiency'* (Gerretzen, 2012; Tillema & Van der Westhuizen, 2013). From the work of Baker et al. (2002) it is inferred that successful mentoring conversations require a balance within the status-solidarity dialectic. In mentoring conversations, the *'temporary inequality'* (Miller, 1986, cited in Baker, 2002:63) should gradually be replaced by a balance in the status-solidarity dialectic between mentor and mentee. In a relationship where the in equality is seen as temporary, the mentor will assist the mentee to develop (Baker, 2002:63). The development, from unequal to equal status is the primary purpose of the mentoring interaction. The ultimate goal of this type of relationship is thus to even out the epistemic in equality (inferred from Miller, 1986, cited in Baker, 2002).

While acknowledging the in equality, it is to be noted too, that the mentee does not enter the learning conversation without any epistemic authority at all. The mentor cannot claim sovereign expertise. In this case study, where the mentee just completed an eight week teaching practicum, she is, to a certain extent at least, knowledgeable on the day-to-day running of the school she visited and on the specific issues and challenges which the school faces. The student thus has some contextual knowledge of the school and learners which she taught during her practicum. So, while the mentor might be in a position of status or epistemic authority on sound pedagogical practices in general, it is assumed that the student teacher is, to some degree, in a position of status or epistemic authority, as far as the appropriation of the knowledge in the specific socio-cultural setting in which she practiced is concerned.

It seems crucial for mentors to firstly understand and embrace the temporary nature of their authoritative status in the conversation and secondly, to be knowledgeable about strategies which they can adopt in order to allow and create the necessary

space in which their mentees can find a '*voice*' (Mkhize, 2004:5–14 – 5–15; Rule, 2006:96) and co-construct knowledge. The creation of 'ostensible uncertainty' in the conversation is proposed to be one such strategy.

OSTENSIBLE UNCERTAINTY

In this study, the notion of 'ostensible uncertainty' is explored as a space making strategy in mentoring conversations. Clark (1996:378–383) postulates that *'ostensible communicative acts'* such as ostensible invitations, greetings, congratulations and apologies are not just rituals but instead, are *'subtle and effective tools'*. This study identified and explored the use of uncertainty as such a tool in mentoring conversations. We refer to uncertainty as displayed in this study as *ostensible* because the mentor, a professor in education, had, as implied by his curriculum vitae, more knowledge about the topics than he revealed and that his uncertainty was not authentic. Given the context of mentoring, we postulate that mentors can use this strategy in order to create what is noted in Baker et al. (2002) as 'hospitable space' in a learning conversation. The possibility will be explored in this chapter and illustrated by conversation samples of mentoring interactions.

The review thus far clarified the interactional nature of learning, outlined in terms of complex dynamics of epistemic primacy in a learning conversation and highlighting the importance of space making in mentoring.Our empirical inquiry is built around the question: How can hospitable mental space be created in a mentoring conversation which is marked by differences in epistemic status?

THE STUDY

Purpose and Design

This qualitative study is an analysis of space making in a mentoring conversation – how a mentor created space to enhance learning. The purpose is to explore how space is created and used as a strategy to balance the status-solidarity polarization, as indicated in the work of Baker et al. (2002), in an interactive learning conversation.

A video recorded mentoring conversation was transcribed. It was first noticed that the mentor's utterances in this conversation often displayed uncertainty. Conversation analysis followed in order to find what effect the expression of uncertainty had on the conversation.The analysis was done by looking at speech turns in pairs, which is explained in more detail later on. At first, the analysis was paper based, using a hard copy of the transcription. In order to better manage the analysis, a trial version of Atlas.ti was used and this proved to be a more effective tool in the analysis which could be used in subsequent studies with more data. The software proved to be of particular value when the expression of uncertainty was categorised into various types.

Participants in this single case study involved an experienced staff member (lecturer) in teacher education and final year student teacher.

Two factors rendered the conversation between these participants particularly suitable for this study: a) the significant difference in academic and professional background and experience of the two participants and b) the evidence of collaboration and co-construction of knowledge in their conversation despite the difference mentioned in (a).

Data and Analysis

The data collection involved the mentoring session being conducted in the office of the mentor. The office furniture in this particular office is arranged in such a way that there is a designated physical space for conversation. The mentor's personal work station faces the window while a round table and four chairs provide a practical space for meetings and discussions. The mentor's sensitivity to conversational dimensions is subtly but clearly depicted, not only in the physical arrangement of space, but also in various multi-cultural artefacts which are displayed in the office, such as a small hand-carved wooden ornament in the centre of the round table. The ornament depicts tribal figurines who are sitting in a circle, having a conversation. The office thus displays an element of openness on the mentor's side. However, like all the other office doors along the corridor, a name plate indicates theoffice number with the occupant's title and surname. The title of *Professor* on the name plate implies a substantial contribution to academia. With this contextual setting as backdrop for the conversation, it is to be considered that, even if the mentee would be unaware of the detail of her mentor's professional and academic achievements, and even if she feels welcomed by the physical arrangement of furniture and artefacts, his title indicates substantial knowledge and experience which could be an intimidating factor in her contribution to the conversation, given her relatively limited knowledge and experience as a student teacher. The very practical and essential office name plate further indicates the occupant's epistemic status in a covert way. It is a symbol of status that the mentee encountered before she entered his office. Thus, although the mentor created a very hospitable physical space for all his conversations by the furniture arrangement and cultural artefacts (physical space), the mentee cannot miss the clues which indicate that he is a seasoned and accomplished academic (epistemic authority). Without any dialogic display thereof, the mere physical surroundings display indications of the mentor's epistemic authority.

Data analysis included conversation analysis methods following the analytic principles mentioned in the studies of Edwards (1993), Nakamura (2008) and others. Conversation analysis (CA) was steered by the question: 'What does the talk do?' (based on Edwards, 1993).

For CA purposes, speech turns were paired by using a mentor's turn as the first half of the unit of analysis and the mentee's response as the second half of the unit.

187

Thus, each unit of analysis consisted of a mentor utterance, followed by a mentee response. Fifty one sequences of utterances were identified. Five of these units of analysis were coded as O, which means that it was not focused on the topic of the mentoring interaction. The remaining 46 identified sequences were coded in terms of the sequence patterns.

The units of analysis (paired speech turns) were categorised in terms of the mentor's expression of certainty or uncertainty and the mentee's subsequent responses.

Each sequences of paired speech turns was assigned to one of four categories, as inductively created from the data:

Sequence pattern A – Ostensible uncertainty appears in the mentor's utterance and it is followed by uncertainty in the mentee's response.

Sequence pattern B – No signs of uncertainty appear in the mentor's utterance which is followed by no uncertainty in the mentee's response.

Sequence pattern C– Exceptions to the patterns in categories A and B.

O sequences – These sequences was labelled 'other'. It contained talk which was not directly linked to the focus of the mentoring conversation and is thus not of relevance for this study.

In a parallel study (Pretorius, 2013), which also included this data set, it was found that this particular conversation has produced meaningful and significant learning. The analysis of the same data set in this study revealed the role of the spatial dimensions in the construction of knowledge. The mentee's response utterances suggest that a safe space or 'hospitable conversational space' (Baker et al., 2002) was created in which conversational learning took place, despite the potential polarization in the dialectic of status-solidarity, due to the vast difference in knowledge and experience between the two conversational partners. What the study revealed, was how the mentor facilitated the student's participation.

The data analysis was guided by the following leading questions:

- How can a mentor get a novice to co-construct knowledge despite vast differences in their current knowledge and experience?
- Can ostensible uncertainty be used to contribute to a 'hospitable space' for co-construction of knowledge?

Findings

What was of central interest in the analysis is the space the mentor's talk seemed to create for the mentee in which she could participate, explore and collaborate in knowledge construction. On single speech turn level, this seemed to be done by the following forms of expression of uncertainty which were evident in the data, as will be illustrated in conversation samples 1 to 5 below, and explained there after: (L= lecturer and S=student).

Conversation sample 1

37	S	=Sit and copy:: so:: that's why that (.) troubled <u>me::</u> feeling that
38		(2) maybe she needed to interact with them <u>mo::re</u> (.) so. °ja.°-
39	L	So what would be ↑<u>be</u>↓tte::r than just sit and- eh- eh- sit and ah-
40		ah-copying notes from the bo::ard?
41	S	°Uhm° (.) I feel that (1)<u>maybe</u>>↑even if she<↑<u>di::d</u> write all those
42		notes↑(2) maybe be more inter<u>active</u> with the::m and trying to
43		<u>teach</u> them what's going o::n >because< even when she <u>did</u> stand
44		up it was "Oh this is what's on the ↓bo↑::a::rd, okay-" >you
45		know< feeling that she should <u>interact</u> with them <u>mo::re</u>- try to get
		them invo::lved (.)>You know <it's more like a free (.) period
46	L	So it's not ha::rd wo::rk to sit an::: ah copy no::tes
47	S	No not at a::ll
48	L	Jah:::Its also::-its also::-ah(.)ahm:: (1) maybe ah establishing some
49		kind of ah. relationship wher::e (.) you don't have to <u>work</u> hard,
50		you can just come here and make ↑no::tes (.)Ah.and I think you're
51		ri::ght ↑(.) the ah. the alternative is to be much more interactive
52		a::h and ahm. to let the ↑learning happen ↑<u>in</u> the interaction (.)and
53		then where would the ah. note taking ↓fit (1) into such
		interactions(2) ahm. would you say.?

Conversation sample 2

| 82 | L | Okay. What about writing (.) ah.notes ↑<u>while</u> (.)ah.the lesson's |
| 83 | | going °↓on::?° |

Conversation sample 3

136	S	I think what troubles me is the schoo::l where <u>I</u> came from::
137		reading was ↑never a problem but (2) the school experience <u>taught</u>
138		me that (2) I ↑can't just assume (2) all grade tens can rea::d.
139	L	So what would you advi::se the:: teachers in that school:: (.) to do
140		about reading- >the Life Orientation teachers<?
141	S	I think (1)ma::ybe::>especially what we were talking about<ahm
142		(.)en↑<u>couraging</u> the learners to read 'cause it's not just something
143		that (.) they did do(.) ahm- ↑asking them more <u>questions</u> about
144		what it <u>is</u> that they read – Ahm what was ↑<u>difficult</u> while reading
145		this for you? How can I <u>help</u> you:: to under↑stand it better? Ahm-
146		>you know< asking them those kinds of questions that (.)they can
		think about (.) Why can't I read?
147	L	And also <u>teach</u> them the skill::s (.) to distinguish- to understand
148		the main idea:: and to summari::::ze and those kinds of things.
149	S	Yes that's very important.

Conversations sample 4

160	L	Was…was..<u>that</u> an opportunity where ah…ah…ah::m:: where you
161		had to do ↑discipline with the learners? Ah::that was interesting (.)
162		ah in your ↑notes her::e (.) tell me about that↑.

Conversation sample 5

192	L	Well::you're saying that there should be a more positive response
193		and I agree with that. I think ah::it is more <u>constructive</u>> you
194		know < (.) to work out the discipline (.) ahin class in a <u>different</u>
		way=
195	S	Ye::s
196	L	=ah-ah- ↑<u>rather</u> than being ah:: (1) punitive. Its better to ahm (.)
197		try to be more constructive and have other ways of establishing (1)
		ahthediscipline- yah:: yah::
198	S	°Yes°
199	L	Ahm.youahm ((clearing throat)) also ah.made one… you
200		referred in your notes to a method of spelling tests (.) ah:::::m ah::
		let's ah:: talk about that please↑.
201	S	So that was mainly in the English class that they did the spelling
202		test was on a Friday. They'd look at what they di::d and then (.)
203		they'd also do spelling tests on (.)↑work that they did.
204	L	Yes
205	S	Ahm-
206	L	What were your thoughts about ↑tha::t(1) as a (.) ↑method?
207	S	So I ↑think I had mixed emotions >actually about it<ah::m…
208		because it's::there was a child particularly in the class- he'd
209		really get like ↑<u>one</u> out of twenty every time (1) and the boys
		would tease him about it.

Conversation sample 5

224	L	So but you're also saying it's ↑<u>not</u> just the ↑<u>spelling</u> its also
225		spelling words that you ↑kno:::w >or that you can <↑get to kno::w
226		and then <u>using</u> the words in- in different ah::settings::.
227	S	Yes
228	L	So you want to go <u>beyond</u> the spelling part (1)>and ah.I agree
229		with you I think< language learning is about <u>communication::</u> not
		so?
230	S	Ye::s

Expression of uncertainty:

- *Non-linguistic indicators of uncertainty*

This group includes non-linguistic utterances which indicate uncertainty. These could include non-words, for example, "Uhm" or "ah" which indicates thinking or wondering about something (For example, lines 48–53).

- *Broken speech*

This group indicates sentences which are self-interrupted. It is often interrupted by repetition of parts of the sentence, or a pause of one second or more in the flow of the utterance (For example, lines 160–162).

- *Words of uncertainty*

This includes words which relates directly to uncertainty, such as "maybe" or "kind of", etc. (For example, lines 48, 50, 192,193).

- *Pretended ignorance*

This is any utterance in which the mentor seems to withhold knowledge deliberately or pretend not to have the answer to the question, despite his knowledge status or his epistemic authority over the particular domain (For example, lines 39–40, 52–53).

- *Disguising knowledge as a question/suggestion*

Instead of prescribing to the mentee, the mentor turns the statement into a question or a suggestion in order to keep it open for discussion (For example, lines 82, 228–229).

- *Re-phrasing – acknowledging by apparent 'clarification'*

The re-phrasing seems to clarify uncertainty but instead, it seems from the context that he is actually acknowledging the mentee's contribution or seems to use it as a basis to subtly expand the mentee's conceptualization (For example, lines 224–228).

- *Asking for the student's opinion/advice/suggestions*

Talk in which the mentor openly encourages the mentee to express her own views. This is seen as a form of ostensible uncertainty because the mentor withholds his knowledge and creates the impression that there is more that he wants to learn from the mentee (Lines 39–40; 52–53; 139–140).

- *Pretending to think/explore*

Where the mentor or mentee indicates thinking before or during answering (Line 82).

The above forms of expression of uncertainty in itself indicates conversational strategies which the mentor used to create the hospitable conversational learning space on an utterance level.

On the level of utterance pairs or sequences, analysis yielded certain sequence patterns. Table 1 provides a description of each pattern as well as a summary of the data analysis.

Table 1. Frequency of sequences by sequence pattern

Sequence pattern A	*Sequence pattern B*	*Sequence pattern C*
Ostensible uncertainty appears in the mentor's utterance and it is followed by uncertainty in the mentee's response	No signs of uncertainty appears in the mentor's utterance which is followed by no uncertainty in the mentee's response	Exceptions to the patterns in types A and B
24 units	15 units	7 units
52%	33%	15%

Table 1 indicates that 52% of the identified sequences reflected a reciprocal pattern (Sequence pattern A) where the mentor's expression of what seemed to be ostensible uncertainty was followed by expression of uncertainty by the mentee (Lines 39–45 provide an example). By definition, these were the sequences which created conversational space for the student to test her ideas, as will be discussed later. The opposite pattern (B) made up 33% of the units of analysis, which indicate that when the mentor spoke in direct and to-the-point-sentences without creating ostensible uncertainty, the mentee's responses also followed with direct answers with no traces of uncertainty or further exploration (see lines 46–47 as an example).

Pattern A and B are two sides of the same coin: Pattern A (52%), which is supported by the opposite as pattern B (33%), thus totals 85% of the units of analysis which indicates that the notion that openness, created by the mentor's ostensible uncertainty, is reciprocal and is determined by the mentor's utterance. 15% of the units of analysis were exceptions to this notion of reciprocal openness. In other words, 85% of the sequences displayed the following: When the mentor uses uncertainty in his utterances, it is followed by uncertainty in the mentee's reply. When the mentor does not utter any form of uncertainty, it is followed by mentee utterances without signs of uncertainty. So, no uncertainty – no further exploration of knowledge which is offered as tentative.

The following conversation samples will illustrate the two main sequence patterns and explain it in terms of space making:

Sequence Pattern A

In conversation sample 6, ostensible uncertainty appears in the mentor's utterance in various forms, including exploration, speculating, wondering, thinking out loud and invitation. These are followed by uncertainty in the mentee's response, which include exploration or thinking out loud. The mentor's utterances in sample sequence 6, with reference to lines 48 and 52–53, are of particular interest: What it does, is to offer his knowledge as negotiable. This is followed by the mentee's indication of uncertainty in her opening in line 54. By replying with uncertainty, she offers a contribution of knowledge but keeps her contribution negotiable too. It is within this openness to negotiate the knowledge that the mentee has the freedom to try out her ideas. Apparently, if the professor uses utterances such as "ah.ahm:: maybe" and offer an invitation for the mentee's ideas by "Ahm. would you say.?", then the student could offer an answer about which she is not sure, and join in the exploration, speculating and wondering out loud. In the spirit of wondering about good teaching practice, the mentee is safe to offer her knowledge as tentative which could be confirmed by the mentor, or not. If the mentor does not confirm the mentee's knowledge offering, then there is no shame about her attempt because she was also just testing her current knowledge which is offered as tentative. '(L)oss of face' (Clark, 1996:379) is not a risk or at least a minimized risk because of the 'hospitable conversational space' (Baker, 2002).

Conversation sample 6

48	L	Jah:::Its also::- its also::- *ah(.)ahm::* (1) *may be ah* establishing
49		some kind of ah. relationship wher::e (.) you don't have to <u>work</u>
50		hard, you can just come here and make ↑no::tes (.) Ah.and I
51		think you're ri::ght ↑(.) the ah. the alternative is to be much more
52		interactive a::h and ahm. to let the ↑learning happen ↑in the
53		interaction (.) and then *where would the ah. note taking ↓fit (1)*
		into such interactions (2) ahm. would you say.?
54	S	*I think may be*firstly explaining (.) what it is that they're doing.
55		They can't take notes:: coming to cla::ss::. "This is what we're
56		↑doi::ng. This is what it's ab↑ou::t." Ahm<u>telling</u> (.) the students
57		what they're doing. <u>Then</u> they can write their notes, because
58		they know what it i::s and they know what they're doing or
59		alternatively let them write the notes and the ↑next day explaining
		everything to them.

Sequence Pattern B

It appears that where no uncertainty is created in the mentor's utterances, it is followed by responses from mentee with no display of uncertainty which marks

exploration in the talk (See conversation sample 7). There is a distinct difference between the knowledge offered in the mentee's responses when conversation sample6 is compared conversation sample 7. What distinguishes the type A sequence, as in conversation sample 6, from the type B sequence in conversation sample 7, is that the mentee's responses to the mentor's utterances in sample 7 are, in essence, only paraphrasing of the knowledge offered by the mentor, in a way that does not invite negotiation. Line 91 – 93 shows how the mentor displays his conception about note taking during lessons. There is no invitation or indication that this knowledge is negotiable. The mentee's response does not bring anything new to the conversation, but simply summarise what the mentor already expressed.

Judging from the "yes" of the mentor in line 95, it seems that he accepts her summary. She repeats the mentor's conceptions in line 96–97 by means of paraphrasing.

Conversation sample 7

91	L	So its listen and wri::te but it's also identifying the main idea::
92		and to distinguish what's good and what's not goo::d; I should
93		write this and not tha::t and not- not copy everything.
94	S	It's like reasoning as well in a sense because=
95	L	Yes
96	S	=You're <u>thinking</u> about what you're writing and you're thinking
97		about what you're hearing instead of me::re (.) just copying.

DISCUSSION

The data, viewed in context of the participants' epistemic backgrounds, indicates that this mentor did not display his full range of knowledge or experience on the topics of discussion in his interaction with the mentee. This became clear within the dialogue in his withholding of knowledge only to fill in the conceptual gaps of the mentee at a point where he possibly realized that the mentees contribution to the topic is depleted. At a first glance, the mentor's contribution does not seem significant if it is viewed in context of the status he holds due to his expertise. However, from a CA point of view, it seems that he created ostensible uncertainty with the specific purpose of creating 'mental space' (Magano et al. 2010:26) in the conversation in which the mentee could test her views and ideas with her own future teaching practice in mind. Lines 52–53 in samples 3 and 6 serve as an example. Only later in this conversation, when the mentee could not depart from the idea of note taking being a form of copying from the board (see lines 54–59 in sample 6), despite her expressed feeling earlier that there should have been more interaction around the note taking, the mentor 'scaffolded' (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976:90) with his own knowledge and expertise when he contributed the idea that the learners

194

could be encouraged to decide what is important and what not before they write down notes, instead of copying everything. After this contribution by the mentor, the mentee came to the conclusion that *"It's like reasoning as well in a sense"* and *"You're thinking about what you're writing and you're thinking about what you're hearing instead of mere. just copying"* (see sample 7). What is of importance here is that space was created for the mentee's ideas before the mentor intervened by scaffolding.

Whether this strategy was deliberately implemented or whether it was followed intuitively, is irrelevant. Its functionality in the creation of 'hospitable conversational space' (Baker, 2002) is of interest. How it was achieved, is found among the codes that emerged from the data, such as a) indicating thinking (out loud) and indicating thinking by non-linguistic utterances such as "uhm… ahh…" or "m::" b) words of uncertainty such as "maybe" c) broken speech in which the flow of his thoughts is self-interrupted; d) asking for the mentee's opinion, advice or suggestions; e) pretended ignorance; f) apparent clarification by re-phrasing and g) disguising knowledge by posing it as a question or open suggestion.

Edwards' (1993) question, "What does the talk do?", guided the exploration of functionality of these conversational 'actions'.

Firstly, it seemed to create an atmosphere of openness in which no fixed answers were expected or pre-supposed. The mentee responded by working words of uncertainty into her replyso that she too kept her ideas open and flexible.

Secondly, Stivers et al. (2011:14) indicate that the phrases "I think" or "maybe" could be used as downgrading the claim of epistemic primacy as an attempt of 'epistemic mitigation'. This epistemic mitigation seems to be a pragmatic component of space creation in dialogic learning, viewed in the context of significant discrepancies in knowledge and expertise between interlocutors.

It is however possible that the student could be using words such as 'maybe' as some sort of an emergency exit in case the mentor would not agree with her contribution. Never the less, it kept her options open for further exploration, in case the mentor should disagree. The use of 'maybe' indicates the mentee's exploration of tentative ideas which is still open for change and can thus not be criticised on the same level as when she would present the view without 'maybe', and thus as a fixed belief. In this study, the use of uncertainty, expressed as 'maybe', seems to be an attempt to avoid 'loss of face', as Clark (2002:379) puts it.

The notion of reciprocal uncertainty which, in context of the conversation, indicates openness is highlighted by an opposite pattern in the data. Where the mentor's utterances did not contain any indication of uncertainty, the mentee's replies followed the same suit. As discussed earlier, it seems as though uncertainty creates a safe conversational space in which the knowledge is offered as tentative and open for negotiation. In this context, the mentee has the 'freedom to move mentally' (Magano et al., 2010:26) and to co-construct knowledge.

This study describes one possible strategy for creating a safe conversational space and, in particular, safe mental space between mentor and mentee. On a practical

level, it indicates specific conversational actions with which this strategy can be executed. The point made by this study is that mentors could deliberately use the strategy of creating ostensible uncertainty to create hospitable mental space in which the mentee is invited to contribute to the knowledge construction.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study was based on a single conversation which involved a single mentor-mentee pair, selected by convenience sampling. The scope of the study was narrowed down to exploration of a single strategy of space creation. Future studies which include multiple conversational pairs would give access to a wider variety of conversational mentoring strategies in general but also other ways in which the strategy of ostensible uncertainty could be executed in creating hospitable space. Other dialogic strategies in hospitable space making could also be explored across multiple mentoring conversations.

CONCLUSION

This study used, as a point of departure, a mentoring conversation which already proofed to be an example of meaningful learning (Pretorius, 2013). The meaningfulness of the learning in this conversation was established before this study commenced. What first sparked interest for further exploration was the observation that the mentor often expressed uncertainty in his utterances, despite being a professor in his field. This observation placed the focus on the differences in the knowledge and expertise of the mentor and mentee and more specifically the mentor's 'epistemic authority' (Heritage & Raymond, 2005). Because mentors have epistemic authority in conversations with a mentees, this status could potentially be an inhibiting factor in the co-construction of knowledge, due to the social and institutional rules or norms which govern mentoring conversations, as described by Stivers et al. (2011). This study took interest in the aspect of creating '*hospitable space*' (Baker et al., 2002) for collaborative knowledge conversation, given the position of epistemic authority of the mentor. The use of ostensible uncertainty in mentor utterances, as a strategy to create such space between mentoring speech pairs where there is a vast discrepancy in knowledge and expertise, was explored.

The study found that ostensible uncertainty as a space creating strategy could be executed in a variety of ways such as: indications of thinking out loud; indications of thinking by non-linguistic utterances; words of uncertainty;self-interrupted, broken speech; asking for the mentee's opinion, advice or suggestions; pretended ignorance; apparent clarification by re-phrasing and disguising knowledge by posing it as a question or open suggestion.

The study also found an interesting tendency in which uncertainty in mentor utterances was followed by expressions of uncertainty in the mentee's response. The mentee responses in this pattern consisted of contributions to knowledge

construction where her reciprocal expression of uncertainty offered her contributions as tentative knowledge with a face saving element, which Clark (2002:379) refer to as 'loss of face', in case the mentor would not agree or approve. An opposite pattern, which complimented the first pattern,was also noticed in which no expression of uncertainty by the mentor was followed by brief responses without uncertainty from the mentee. These brief responses were not characterised by exploration of ideas.

It seems from the analysis that the use of ostensible uncertainty in mentor utterances created a safe conversational space in which contributions were offered as tentative and open for negotiation. This seemed to have facilitated the 'freedom to move mentally' (Magano et al., 2010:26) in the co-construction of knowledge.

This study explored only one possible strategy for creating '*hospitable space*' (Baker et al., 2002) in mentoring conversations, which are in essence, based on significant differences in knowledge and expertise. Being aware of the findings of this study, mentors could deliberately use ostensible uncertainty to create hospitable mental space in which their mentees are invited to knowledge construction.

REFERENCES

Baker, A., Jensen, P. J., & Kolb, D. A. (2002). Conversation as experiential learning. In A. Baker, P. J. Jensen, & D. A. Kolb (Eds.), *Conversational learning: An experiential approach to knowledge creation.* Westport, CO: Quorum Books.

Clark, H. H. (1996). *Using language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Edwards, D. (1993). But what do children really think?: Discourse analysis and conceptual content in children's talk. *Cognition and Instruction*, *11*(3/4), 207–225.

Gerretzen, F. (2012). *Effects of mentoring on student teacher's perceived learning outcomes: How mentor's approach and mentoring relationship influence perceived learning outcomes* (Unpublished dissertation), Educational Studies, Leiden University, Leiden.

Goffman, E. (2007). Encounters. In L. Monaghan & J. E. Goodman (Eds.), *A cultural approach to interpersonal communication*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Heritage, J. (2005). Conversation analysis and institutional talk. In K. Fitch & R. Sanders (Eds.), *Handbook of language and social interaction* (pp. 103–147). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Heritage, J. (2012). The epistemic engine: Sequence organization and territories of knowledge. *Research on Language & Social Interaction*, *45*, 30–52.

Heritage, J. (2013). Epistemics in conversation. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 370–394). Boston, MA: Wiley-Blackwell

Heritage, J., & Raymond, G. (2005). The terms of agreement: Indexing epistemic authority and subordination in talk-in-interaction. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *68*(1),15–38.

Magano, M. D., Mostert, P., & Van der Westhuizen, G. (2010). *Learning conversations – The value of interactive learning*. Johannesburg: Heinemann.

Mkhize, N. (2004). Sociocultural approaches to psychology: Diologism and African conceptions of the self. In K. Ratele, N. Duncan, D. Hook, N. Mkhize, P. Kiguwa, & A. Collins (Eds.), *Self, community and psychology*. Cape Town, South Africa: UCT Press.

Nakamura, I. (2008). Understanding how teacher and student talk with each other: An exploration of how repair displays the co-management of talk in interaction. *Language Teaching Research*, *12*(2), 265–283.

Pomerantz, A. (1980). Telling my side: "Limited access' as a "fishing" device. *Sociological Inquiry*, *50*, 186–198.

Pretorius, A. J. M. (2013). *The structural dimensions of mentoring conversations and how they relate to learning outcomes of student teachers* (MEd dissertation). University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg.

Rule, P. (2006). Bakhtin and the poetics of pedagogy. *Journal of Education*, *40*, 79–101.

Stivers, T., Mondala, L., & Steensig, J. (2011). Knowledge, morality and affiliation in social interaction. In T. Stivers, L. Mondala, & J. Steensig (Eds.), *The morality of knowledge in conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tillema, H., & Van der Westhuizen, G. (2003). Knowledge productive learning, a concept and tool for professional development. *Lifelong Learning in Europe*, *3*, 18–26.

Tillema, H., & Van der Westhuizen, G. J. (2013). Mentoring conversations in the professional preparation of teachers. *SAJHE, 27*(5),1305–1323.

Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, *17*, 89–100.

Annatjie J. M. Pretorius
Department of Educational Psychology/Academic Development Centre
University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Gert J. van der Westhuizen
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Johannesburg, South Africa