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**MENTORING THE PUPAL: PROFESSIONAL  
INDUCTION ALONG THE  
CHAOS-ORDER CONTINUUM**

PROFESSIONAL INDUCTION ALONG THE CHAOS-ORDER CONTINUUM

Mentoring has a long, varied history in the trades and professions, and the developmental or mentoring relationship is seen as critical in many fields and disciplines. Though it might be fair to assume that schools and universities take a developmental view of student learning within their institutions, senior faculty have been accused of *eating their young* when initiating new faculty who get the most challenging teaching assignments and undesirable duties. Even though formal and informal mentoring is offered in many academic settings, novice educators still struggle to interpret the demands of their new workplaces. Using the chaos-order continuum as a metaphoric gauge running along the zone of complexity within the context of academic workplaces, we see a chaotic swirl of new teaching assignments, students, and professional acclimation on one end and excessively-ordered orientation procedures and paperwork at the other end. In a manner so disorienting that their identities and purposes can seem to disintegrate, novices experience a pupal stage before emergence as a reassembled, integrated whole. The analogy invites a consideration of academic induction through the lens of complexity theory. Mentoring cannot eliminate novices' awkward and self-conscious experiences of induction, but mentoring might ameliorate the sting of initiation passages. Optimally, mentors help novices interpret and navigate the academic workplace and move toward complex, creative emergence in the new context.

YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN, KID

Mentoring the apprentice conjures images of an elder tradesman guiding the younger on the technical and finer points of plying a trade. And those images certainly still hold true in many trades, arts, and professions. The notion of mentoring the apprentice is hardly new, but the implementation of formal and informal mentoring systems to help educators acclimate to the complex demands of academic workplaces has become recently commonplace. Formal mentoring in academia responded to challenges faced by women and other minority groups who tried to survive and thrive in the academic work force. Mentoring is described as a developmentally

oriented relationship between someone who is younger or less experienced and someone who is older or more experienced.

No one would deny that it is ultimately and undeniably the candidates' individual responsibility to land and keep the academic job. Sternberg (2013) advises new academics to seek out multiple mentors and "...seek out multiple sources of advice, sort the good from the bad, and take responsibility for your own career development." Such advice reveals a decidedly *sink or swim* pragmatism that reflects a range of senior faculty attitudes conveyed to novices in academic settings—indifference, caring, jealousy, challenge. Mentoring attempts to mediate the attitudes and comments of senior faculty and administrators so that novices might interpret signals dispassionately and distinguish imperatives from whimsies. An important assumption underlying mentoring is that it is a temporary developmental relationship to help novice educators emerge successfully from their career induction within the academic context.

This liminal phase of induction—between being the novice's being hired and established as successful educator in a given setting—is the most vulnerable phase of the novitiate. Liminality describes the *betwixt and between* aspect of novices' experiences at the start of their academic careers where they are invited into the setting but where full acceptance and tenure are withheld formally for a period of time. The novices' vulnerability within the new culture is complex and influenced by various elements within the various systems operating in the larger system of the academic setting—which is why complexity theory seems especially useful for descriptive analysis of the novices' liminality and mentors' potential for coaxing complex emergence.

Turner (1969/1995) describes the liminality of *threshold people*—typically the adolescents—who undergo ritualised social and cultural transitions. During such transitions, the initiates are depicted as invisible, *neither here nor there* as they move through this liminal phase. Turner further explains that liminal entities, such as neophytes in initiation rites, behave passively or humbly; they obey their instructors and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint (p. 95). Successful induction is not mere survival and compliance with institutional codes. Successful induction is realised when the novice emerges from a liminal or pupal stage having integrated a unique, creative personal and professional identity adaptable yet sturdy in the context.

Complexity theory metaphorically explains how academic settings operate as large systems containing mutually shaping subsystems. Trying to survive and adapting to their new systems, novice educators are enmeshed in an underlying tangle of liminal experiences where they have been accepted—but not totally—by the system where they begin their work. Complexity theory helps describe a way out for novices who can be seen as complex systems in and of themselves, and complexity theory suggests that chaotic and overly organised and rule-bound induction practices can optimally create conditions for novices' successful survival and creative emergence. Ambrose (2009) says that complexity theory explains relationships among elements

in dynamic systems that emerge as something new or of a higher order. In this case, a novice is able to organise without being trapped at either end of the chaos-order continuum. Too much order or too much chaos inhibits the development of a complex system (p. 41). The most important notion in complexity theory is the concept of *emergence* describing the transition state that occurs at the edges of chaos where the system develops or emerges into higher levels of organisation (Ambrose, 2009; Davis & Sumara, 2006; Mason, 2008).

#### ACADEMIC SETTINGS AS WORKPLACES

The most costly budget item by far in the academic setting is faculty salaries, and universities need the creative workforce of teachers to accomplish their missions to educate students and produce knowledge. Hired for their scholarly expertise in particular disciplines, novice educators take up their academic work as both employees in a workplace and as educators in the complex system of students and curriculum in every classroom where they teach. Novices are reminded daily of their liminal status within the academic setting. Through good-natured teasing by colleagues, admonitions of administrators, and challenges from students, the induction phase is riddled with reminders of novices' temporary-until-proven-tenurable standing. Perturbing the complex systems and subsystems in which novice educators operate is the specter of promotion and tenure. Add the burden of interpreting successfully the instrumental and psychosocial aspects of achieving tenure to the novices' pupal stew of personal and professional identity formation in the academic workplace.

Unquestionably, novice educators are on their own to evolve into independent academic careers. However, appropriate mentoring during the liminality phase seems to offer novices both constraints and triggers to nudge them toward creative, complex emergence and away from entrapment at either end of the chaos-order continuum accompanying professional induction.

Just as the induction phase is ephemeral, so too is the window for mentoring novices in the academic workplace. According to Kram's study of workplace mentorship, mentoring relationships are constricted by time since the greatest opportunities for developmental learning occur earlier in the relationship (Eby et al., 2012). In beginning the complex work of teaching a variety of students in a variety of classes within a new school culture and work environment, novices work for professional survival yet cannot assess the context for themselves for appropriate mentorship. Realising this, many academic workplaces institute some type of formal and informal mentoring for new faculty.

#### MENTORING'S MANY FACES

The field of mentoring literature roughly corresponds to the developmental stages in the lifespan—youth, academic, and workplace. Nevertheless, while the areas of mentoring/lifespan scholarship have developed independently, they all describe mentoring in

similar ways and “share the common belief that through sustained interactions marked by trust, empathy, and authentic concern, mentoring can have positive, significant, and enduring effects on protégés” according to Eby et al. (2012, p. 442).

The academic workplace straddles the mentoring literature because the context is academic, yet the mentoring specifically supports the educator as worker. Mentoring in academic settings tends to help protégés develop personally and professionally in their careers, and workplace mentors help orient novices to organisation and socialisation within the profession.

Given the novelty and liminality of new academic careers, novices are unable to impose order on their professional lives, they must integrate experiences and interpretations as well as learn adaptations within the new context. Theoretically, mentors can offer personal, professional, or combined personal/professional perspectives that can help novice educators interpret their early experiences in academic settings and determine informed action and adaptation. Depending on the institution and individuals involved, mentoring can look very different and serve various functions.

Researchers (Eby et al., 2013; Ghosh & Reio, 2013) indicate that there are characteristic features of mentoring in terms of likely support offered alone or in combination; these common characteristics include psychosocial support, instrumental support (specific to work-related goals), and/or relational support.

Owing to the independent nature of teaching and researching within specific disciplines and the need for novices to establish themselves as scholars within their new institutions, the option to accept a mentor is an important feature of mentoring the professoriate. When university mentoring programs exist, they generally do not consider their purposes to be epistemological per se. University mentoring programs urge the assignment of mentors within novices' home departments and presumably their disciplines to support candidates through the particulars of the promotion and tenure (P&T) process. By virtue of their missions and governance structures, universities enact various P&T rituals, procedures, and processes. Regardless of particulars, the P&T criteria spell out the conditions for ensuring life or death for faculty employment. Because successful P&T is paramount, mentoring can offer vital support to the novice.

Many academic settings offer formal and informal support for novices' acclimation. For instance, some campuses use their Teaching and Learning centres as faculty welcome centres and sites of ongoing informal mentoring around teaching and research on teaching. Given that few members of the professoriate are trained in pedagogy, mentoring around teaching can provide substantial help for faculty navigating complexity, chaos, and order within their own classrooms. Berberet (2008) reports that new faculty say graduate work did not prepare “them to teach, advise students, serve on committees, collaborate with colleagues, and think across disciplines,” so hiring institutions use faculty mentoring, learning communities, and professional development planning to “maintain the currency of faculty expertise and enhance student learning outcomes” (p. 4).

Bell and Treleaven (2011) cite studies of mentoring in university settings that demonstrate positive outcomes for mentors and their mentees including collegiality, networking, professional development, and personal satisfaction. According to Bell and Treleaven, mentoring at universities has been informal traditionally, yet there are examples of formal mentoring for staff induction, improvement of teaching, assisting early career research, and “to actively facilitate academic women’s development” (p. 547).

#### COMPETENCE AND PROMOTION AND TENURE

Even where formal mentoring programs are established and mentoring arrangements facilitated, mentoring is still offered to novices as a personal, professional choice and not a mandate. Granted, novice educators must make their own ways toward establishing themselves within academe, but theories of competence suggest that a sense of agency and competence can best be developed—might only be developed—in relation to others.

As novices try to adapt to their academic contexts and veer toward orderly compliance on one side and chaotic creativity or confusion at the other side of the chaos-order continuum, a sense of emerging competence in the new context seems a necessary adaptation. Complexity theory holds that there is a tipping point toward emergence of a self-organising system, but control of such emergence cannot be externally imposed.

However, a sense of agency might also be more socially or interpersonally driven than autonomous. Citing Markus and Kitayama, Plaut and Markus (2006) explain that even as the autonomous self tries to express itself through action,

it requires a relationship or a social setting in order to ‘be,’ then the characterization of motivation will take new forms....Motivation will involve other people and social situations, and independent action or achievements will be less relevant or significant. Of greater importance will be behaving according to obligations, duties, rules and privileges. (p. 465)

Erikson saw identity formation as a lifelong process and maintained that identity formation occurs in relation to the interpersonal context and specifically in light of how people sense they are being judged by others (Flum and Kaplan, 2012, p. 241). Within the academic setting, induction rituals and protocols emphasise the external judgment of others culminating in P&T processes that are very public exhibitions of individual competence. Higgins and Kram (2001) indicate that satisfaction with one’s work is positively associated with an individual’s sense of success probability. They additionally theorize: Without high levels of career and psychosocial support from within one’s own organization, individuals are likely to feel less confident that they are valued for their own abilities, thus decreasing their sense of potential (p. 281).

The tumult that novice educators experience in the academic setting seems analogous to shuttling along the chaos-order continuum with the chaotic realities of teaching, scholarship, and students at one end and the rules for P&T at the other. Mentors who engage with novices in shared work like collaborative investigations and writing demonstrate concrete ways to enact the role of mentor in support of junior faculty. Cowin, Cohen, Ciechanowski, & Orozco (2011/2012) explain how the intentional method of their co-writing helped break down the inherent power relationship between senior and junior faculty. The impetus for their study on mentoring relationships in academia was to address the "...stress, vulnerability, critical period in self-identity..." that characterises novices' liminal phases (p. 37). Cowin, Cohen, Ciechanowski, & Orozco describe themselves and their shared work and writing among junior and senior as that of novices and mentor deliberately trying to break down power structures inherent in the mentoring relationship. Such deliberate and deliberately self-conscious mentoring that addresses or even engages the novices in actual work encourages complex emergence. The potential for mentoring to combine psychosocial, relational, and instrumental support suggests that mentoring can create outlets for novices to escape entrapment in the chaos-order continuum.

#### MENTORING A CREATIVE PROFESSIONAL SELF

On the surface, induction and the road to promotion and tenure are prescribed for fledgling academics, but the rituals of induction unfold across dynamic and ritualised contexts of social interaction. Complexity theory helps us understand how awkward and fraught the novice can become entrapped between chaos and excessive order underlying academic workplace contexts.

For all the excitement and promises within the new academic context, novice academics must undergo a ritualised phase of acclimation and transformation. The view of academic induction afforded through complexity theory suggests how purposeful mentoring might help novices express their integrated complexity. Given the complexity of systems and individuals, effective mentoring cannot be prescribed nor its results predicted in advance. But timing and purposes seem crucial for effective mentoring of novice educators. Whether it is formal or informal, mentoring should allow novices to speak for themselves, to talk about their work, or even to collaborate in work.

Practically, mentors can help novices understand the many contexts in which they find themselves in the academic setting. Complexity theory helps us understand the pupal stew of novices' induction on the chaos-order continuum, yet complexity begs for emergence. Mentoring seems uniquely capable of influencing conditions of complex emergence. Over a cup of coffee, through co-teaching, or during discussion about dissertation findings, mentors build social relationships that help novices express themselves, explain their work, and begin to understand their identity in the new context. Most significantly, mentors can help self-organising, creative novices over the threshold of their academic careers. The casual even ephemeral nature

of mentoring relationships can be nevertheless crucially instrumental for novice educators grappling toward integrative expression of identity emergent at the edge of induction chaos.

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