Deconstructing Mentoring in Academe: An Essay Review

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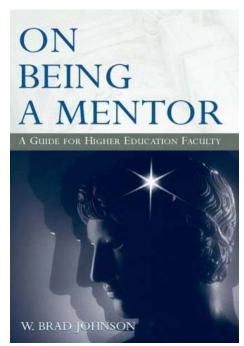
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On Being a Mentor focuses on the challenges and rewards of the faculty–student mentoring relationship in an academic setting. Johnson intends for this book to guide faculty interested in improving their mentoring and broadening their conceptions and repertoire of mentoring. It is also for students and junior faculty seeking positive mentorships and for administrators striving to create cultures conducive to mentoring. He advocates for individual and organizational change in the academy to support human growth and success, declaring that "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" (p. 5).

Higher education faculty invested in learning the complex art of mentoring and, in the process, self-evaluation, should find Johnson's new

release worthwhile. University-based administrators committed to creating a culture of mentoring that prepares faculty for change and the expectation for more active mentoring will glean many practical ideas that span the recruitment and recognition of competent mentors and the development of custom-made mentoring structures. This resource is not only scholarly, then, but also practical in its discussion of mentoring ideas and practices. Johnson's national reputation in the fields of clinical psychology and graduate mentorship, as well as his productivity in the areas of ethical behavior, mentoring, and counseling, has secured his authority and established his credibility. He is an associate professor of psychology at the United States Naval Academy and a faculty associate in the Graduate School of Business and Education at Johns Hopkins University.

The Need for Intentional Mentoring

In his earlier books, Johnson directly addresses both faculty and students regarding the importance and value of effectively mentoring or receiving mentoring in graduate school (e.g., Johnson & Huwe, 2003; Johnson & Ridley, 2004). The themes of intentionality and deliberate action involved in the practice of mentoring for faculty are addressed in *On Being a Mentor*, as are a host of other elements (e.g., salient behaviors, mentoring functions, mentor characteristics, ethical principles) crucial to mentoring. A persistent two-part message in this text revolves around imploring professors "to become intentional and deliberate in arranging and managing relationships with students" (p. 5) and institutions to adopt a serious attitude toward student mentoring that would also benefit faculty.

W. Brad Johnson

Benefits of Mentoring

The book contains 16 chapters organized into 4 sections. Launching this text is a discussion of mentoring concepts (and terms) that range from a discussion of why mentoring matters to the "contours" of mentoring, to mentoring in academe. Mentoring is beneficial for students and faculty, as well as institutions, because it facilitates positive interpersonal and career-based outcomes. Specific benefits of mentoring for students and new faculty include improved academic performance and increased productivity, in addition to enhanced professional skills and self-confidence, expanded networking, and more. Mentors benefit in many ways, too, with positive reinforcement in such areas as personal satisfaction, creative renewal, and friendship and support. In the book, three sections focus on strategies and guidelines for the practice of mentoring—"On

Being a Mentor," "On Mentoring Specific Groups," and "Managing Mentorships."

The discussion of relationship formation with respect to specific groups is still a relatively   new topic in the mentoring and educational literature. Books, in particular, lag behind articles with respect to publication on this topic. One of the major draws of this text is that this very subject is tackled in a comprehensive fashion, relative to undergraduates, graduate students, junior faculty, and cross-sex and cross-race relationships.

Enlivening Research-Based Findings

Many of the foundational ideas throughout the earlier part of the book can be found in the literature, as evidenced by the references to key thinkers, concepts, and sources in the mentoring field. Frameworks of adult development that have influenced mentoring theory and practice are incorporated throughout. Elaborated on are such influential models in the fields of organizational behavior and psychology as Kathy Kram's, Daniel Levinson's, and Lew Schlosser's. Research-based findings serve as the basis for the perspectives offered, arguments developed, and scenarios constructed; for example, we know that mentors are attracted by talented, high-performing individuals, not only those who need help. After establishing this research-based truth about mentoring, Johnson analyzes a scenario in which "Dr. Launch" initiates a mentoring relationship with an unusually talented student. This layered, if not nuanced, writing style is evidenced throughout—and it marries empirical thinking with narrative composition.

Johnson also introduces key ideas with respect to the roles of mentor and learner in higher education. As one example, the crucial distinction is made between academic advising and mentoring: Unlike advising, which "is a structured and assigned role," mentoring, Johnson writes, is "generally longer in duration, more mutual, and more comprehensive over time"—also, "mentors take personal interest in the protégés' long-term success" (pp. 83–84).

Another example is Johnson's description of common relationship phases. These are predicated on Kathy Kram's pioneering work from the 1980s. He contextualizes the phases in such a way that the mentoring commitment of professors comes to life—first, the mentoring relationship with the student is initiated and cultivated, and then separation and redefinition are expected to occur. Sticky issues involving such matters as "contracting" the relationship in the form of formal expectations and documentation is uncovered, with well-reasoned solutions provided (e.g., mentoring contracts can prove useful in many ways, but rigidity in the relationship should be avoided). Johnson provides ample detail for all critical concepts introduced while retaining prose that is theoretically oriented, evidence-based, and accessible to different audiences.

A particularly noteworthy feature of this book is the vignettes, complete with analyses in some of the chapters. Several topics are illustrated in the form of case scenarios, as in ethical situations involving "boundary maintenance," "sexualized mentorships," "self-awareness and impairment," mentorship dysfunction (chapter 14), and more (see chapter 8).

In the case involving boundary maintenance, the mentor "exercised poor judgment in the maintenance of boundaries between professional mentoring and personal counseling" (p. 110), leading to the student's confusion and distress, especially at the point of termination of the relationship.

Mentoring Specific Academic Groups

Undergraduate Students

Theories of young-adult development (e.g., Chickering, Erikson, Levinson) form the basis of chapter 8, "Mentoring Undergraduates." Johnson argues that undergraduates report being mentored to a lesser extent than graduate students. As young students become seniors, they apparently respond well to having more than one mentor, something graduate faculty should keep in mind as they work with incoming students. Mentored college students not only report greater satisfaction with their educational experiences but also graduate more frequently than nonmentored students.

Graduate Students

Chapter 10, "Mentoring Graduate Students," focuses on barriers to mentoring that reduce student access to faculty. Discussion is provided of such obstacles as "disconnection between student and faculty priorities," as in the case of research-oriented faculty and practitioner-oriented students, and "inequity in bearing the mentoring load," which refers to the inequitable distribution of mentoring and advising loads within departmental units (p. 129). Expanding on the author's statements regarding inequitable distribution of mentoring loads, it seems important to flag the issue of faculty load versus faculty completion. Faculty who bear heavy loads but who do not succeed at graduating their capable students are probably burdening the system, just as are faculty who refuse or ignore students.

Crucial components of graduate school mentoring are also covered, including "mutuality and reciprocity" and "mentor[ing] in multiple contexts." In the first instance, students appreciate collegial and mutual mentoring relationships, and they rate this function as more important than any other. Regarding the second instance, students who are on a career track really should be mentored beyond the classroom and office and given opportunities to grow as a scholar through coauthorships, copresentations, and peer reviews.

Junior Faculty

As chapter 11 attests, junior faculty receive less mentoring than graduate and undergraduate students. Fewer than expected develop mentoring relationships with experienced faculty, yet faculty–faculty mentoring offers numerous benefits, from "stronger commitment to a career in academe" to "higher rates of achieving tenure and promotion"

(p. 141). Obviously, junior faculty should seek out positive and healthy mentorships not only with their peers but, importantly, with senior colleagues.

Formats for Mentorships

Formats for mentoring graduate students should be given close consideration in higher education circles, argues Johnson. While formal and informal approaches are common in graduate programs, each offers benefits and drawbacks. As established in the mentoring literature, formal mentoring involves official faculty–student mentoring matches, and informal mentoring involves a different process whereby students seek out mentors as they get to know faculty and their new environment. Alternatives to traditional mentoring within one-on-one relationships highlight team mentoring and peer mentoring. The author describes mentoring groups, mentoring cohorts, and research teams as viable resources for coaching students within teams. Peer mentoring is another way for graduate students to obtain information, gain emotional support, network, and more—such systems can be formal or informal.

The second-career student, who is older and more mature than the traditional student, is another feature of chapter 10—insight is provided into this individual's possible state of mind (e.g., "fear of having 'rusty' skills") and the array of concerns that often burden them (e.g., major life events). This particular section should prove helpful to faculty who work in practitioner-oriented programs like educational leadership and administration and adult education, where students are generally either moving out of the classroom into leadership positions or being promoted to senior leadership roles and where significant life-altering experiences (e.g., the death of loved ones, responsibility for elderly parents, and personal health problems) typify their existence.

Factoring in Biological Sex

"Mentoring Across Sex" is an informative chapter (12) that revolves around the message, "Remain sensitive to issues of biological sex, gender socialization, and sexual orientation but avoid assuming that these factors alone will predict salient mentoring needs, relational styles, or professional concerns" (p. 153). Johnson, explaining that he prefers the term *sex* over *gender* (because the former focuses attention on women and men's distinct experiences unlike the latter, which is associated with complex issues involving values, attitudes, and behaviors), presents empirical evidence concerning gender differences in mentoring. He clarifies that the sex of the individual does not in itself determine who will get mentored and that women are just as likely as men to have mentors. Also clarified is the matter of sex with respect to mentoring outcomes—once the mentorship is initiated, the mentor's sex is apparently irrelevant to outcome. Studies indicate mixed results with respect to sex preferences of faculty mentors on the part of students and junior professors. Regarding the behaviors of mentors, research suggests that while both male and female

mentors offer career and psychosocial support, they also tend to offer the females they mentor greater relational support than the males.

Obstacles to mixed mentoring relationships include stereotypes that either sex may hold of the other, as well as "fear of public scrutiny," leading some individuals to avoid cross-sex mentorships (p. 154). Listed are the stereotypes of women and men that shape the mentoring behavior and decisions of some faculty. While men and women alike gravitate toward same-sex mentorships, cross-sex relations have always been present in academe, historically a function of male domination in tenure-track faculty positions. The author cautions that concerns raised about cross-sex relationships mostly relate to male mentor– female mentee configurations, a caveat that has been supported empirically by research. Mentoring approaches that are supportive of female learners' needs are discussed in some detail, with emphasis on interpersonal caring, collaborative mentoring approaches, and mentoring networks.

Another focus that is pursued, one that is still relatively untapped in the literature, is the mentoring of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons. Johnson focuses on the stresses experienced by homosexual students with respect to such issues as discrimination and hostility, and on the identity stages that many sexual minority students experience. However, because of the backlash that many of these students experience, they typically remain silent about their sexual orientation. In order to feel safe and understood, many of these students seek out faculty with whom they can relate. As a reader, it strikes me that faculty mentors who are heterosexual may find it beneficial in their support of sexual minority students to consult faculty or campus groups that are gay, lesbian, and bisexual.

Factoring in Race

"Mentoring Across Race" (chapter 13), another key discussion in the book, tackles the mentoring experiences and behaviors of racial minority students. Research-based findings indicate that both White and African American students are oriented toward faculty of their own race. Same-race matches for minority students are not widely available, with the result that many enter into cross-race mentorships. Importantly, it has been found that "cross-race relationships are generally as helpful and satisfying as same-race mentorships" and that "racial minority students are mentored at rates equivalent to White students" (pp. 166, 176). Johnson believes it is imperative that faculty intentionally and actively mentor across race and that they make the mentoring of minority students and faculty a main concern. Additional obstacles that compound establishing positive mentoring experiences with faculty for minority students include "stress and isolation, mistrust, stereotype threat, and the model minority stereotype" (p. 167). Recognizing personal stereotypes and other strategies are offered for assisting faculty in bridging the racial gap.

Mentoring Dysfunction

The last part of the book, "Managing Mentorships," is divided into "Diagnosis and Treatment of Mentorship Dysfunction" (chapter 14), "Assessing Mentoring Outcomes" (chapter 15), and "Recommendations for Department Chairs and Deans" (chapter 16).

With respect to mentoring dysfunction, sources the author discusses include unethical behavior and mentor unavailability. Attention is given to "the dark side of mentoring" (p. 181) and its problems, which range from inherent risks in the mentoring commitment for students and even rising faculty (e.g., mentors can suddenly leave the university without securing a new mentoring relationship for the learner) and the same for mentors (e.g., unsuccessful partners may reflect poorly on their faculty mentors). Additional issues center on the fact that "protégés are sometimes hard to mentor" (p. 183) and that mentors sometimes fall prey to irrational beliefs about the role of the mentor (e.g., that excellence in mentoring means success with all of one's learning partners). Causes of mentorship dysfunction are entertained not only conceptually but also through storytelling (vignettes) and analyses. In one such instance, the basic personality make-up of mentor and learner is very different, which leads to the latter's misunderstanding and withdrawal. Mismatches in personality are common, as are differences in communication style, values, relationship expectations, and more. The author discusses each of these dimensions and explores issues of incompetence, neglect, relational conflict, and exploitation. Johnson's background and expertise in clinical psychology is most evident in this chapter, and the underpinnings of negative mentoring relationships are disclosed in a way that can help any faculty member or student seeking help to objectify situations and find solutions.

Assessing Mentoring

Faculty are encouraged to monitor the success of their mentoring relationships, as well as outcomes, by routinely assessing them. Johnson incorporates several types of existing mentor functions scales, evaluation surveys, and narrative forms that mentors can use to collect information from their learning partners. Mentors who wish to create their own evaluation forms are given a research-based list of behavioral descriptions of mentoring from which to select. Faculty are encouraged to use multiple methods for assessing their mentoring relationships and to include the performance data (e.g., student satisfaction ratings) in their promotional dossiers.

Outcome data can also be collected by administrators who want to obtain information from alumni or current students. Annual surveys are recommended for this purpose, and tips are provided.

Systemic Thinking for Leaders

As chapter 16, "Recommendations for Department Chairs and Deans," makes convincing, this book is also valuable for higher education administrators—their role is critical to the success of mentoring in their domains. The focus on issues of structure and culture for which department chairs and deans are responsible is critically important to the micro level of relationships. The deliberate mentoring of students and faculty has many benefits, including retention, increased satisfaction, and stronger commitment. Institutional obstacles to mentoring, such as promotion and tenure systems that bypass faculty mentoring of students and junior faculty, are also explicated. Johnson sees the role of administrators as central to the success of faculty mentorships: "I suggest that waiting for a culture of mentoring to take hold naturally in your department, school, or institution is a mistake" (p. 223). A second strong message reads, "The effect of this guide on the mentoring behavior of your faculty will be multiplied many times over when coupled with active administrative support" (p. 223). Administrators are advised of the differences between formal and informal mentoring structures and programs, and examples are provided of those that have been formalized. Goals to be reached, such as the mentoring of racial minority groups, are also addressed. A cautionary note about the drawbacks of formal mentoring processes is included, which gives individuals the room to think about which type of mentoring process(es) might work best for their own situations.

Administrators are also encouraged to tailor mentoring systems that fit their own context, hire thoughtfully, track mentoring connections, evaluate outcomes, and reward faculty performance: "When administrators are serious about mentoring, faculty are serious about mentoring" (p. 234).

Strengths and Omissions

The scholarship cited throughout is impressive—not only ample but current, salient, and credible—with findings reported by educators across academic disciplines. Debates that are unresolved are presented as such, not collapsed for expediency's sake, and yet outcomes from the literature that clearly show patterns are distilled and neatly presented.

Clarification of what is meant by "protégé" throughout is sometimes needed in this text, perhaps most conspicuously in Chapter 12, Mentoring Across Sex. Johnson says at the outset of the book that he has opted to use the term *protégé* (instead of *mentee*, *apprentice*, or *junior*) in order "to indicate the junior member (student or junior faculty member) in a mentoring dyad" (pp. 3-4). However, it is not always possible to know whether he is referring exclusively to doctoral students, new faculty, or tenure-earning faculty, or even to several of these academic populations simultaneously. Take, for example, such statements as "Two early studies of male and female protégés in academe suggested that men were more likely than women to perceive significant support form faculty …" (p. 152) and "Are men more likely to be mentored than women?" (p. 153). In these and other such instances, one

cannot automatically assume that the understood population is that of faculty and student—the dual focus of this book. As a further point of confusion, the author also alludes to workplace employees as protégés in discussion of the organizational literature on mentoring-based dynamics.

Furthering this hermeneutical critique, the very use of *protégé* also deserves some attention. The author's preferred use of this term for its connotation "to protect" would probably signal just the opposite to some readers, particularly feminist and postmodern critics for whom *protégé* signals institutionally embedded, hierarchically situated, and, importantly, potentially oppressive, relations. In light of this criticism and Johnson's own reflection on mentoring terminology as less-than-ideal (I would judge it problematic, even stymied), I have opted to use a different host of terms altogether to refer to the "protégé" in the mentoring dyad, typically *learning partner*, *learner*, and *individual*, in addition to specific descriptors (e.g., student, new faculty, newcomer) for designating particular populations.

Notably, the chapters on sex and race constitute significant draws in this book as well as pivotal contributions to the field. Vignettes illustrating cross-sex and cross-race problems are available but in a different part of the book (chapter 14). Storied accounts, complete with analyses, can potentially provide faculty and other readers new to minority issues in mentoring practices with the opportunity to identify and work through problems, alone or with others. The single case provided on racial conflict (chapter 14, case 14.9) serves as an excellent tool for faculty mentors and doctoral groups. In this instance, the faculty mentor pushes the student to explore the minority status and racial differences he shares his mentor, a challenge that he finds unwelcoming to the point of withdrawing. It would have been helpful to learn the source of the conflict from the student's perspective. Other such cases dealing with cross-sex and cross-race problems would have been useful, if not invaluable (especially in chapters 12 and 13.) It is not clear what decision-making process the author used to determine which salient mentoring ideas would be illustrated through vignettes and which would be treated strictly theoretically and descriptively. The origins of the vignettes (real life? fictionalized?) are also not revealed. Transparency in the selection of criteria would have helped establish the scientific decision making behind this work.

Another point is that critical and feminist writing draws attention to the goal of "a more equitable, just, and caring society" and the particularly important notion that "power and powerlessness are more relevant and meaningful categories than race, ethnicity, gender, and culture" (Milligan, 2001, p. 39). Given this conception, it would have been useful for the author to have pursued an in-depth discussion of power and to have analyzed traditional, as well as alternative, mentoring relationships from this perspective. Although the issue of reciprocity and mutuality is articulated, as are top-down authority and violations of ethical behavior, an argument involving power and the inequitable distribution of social power—in addition to what McLaren (2001) refers to as "white supremacist ideology and practice" (p. xiv)—in the lives of novice academics would have added conceptual weight.

Discussion of mentoring as a force that can be used to either protect or challenge the status quo would have been a natural extension. Because mentoring is not exempt from the process of socializing another or being socialized in our roles as teachers and learners, the prospect of indoctrination is a very real concern (Mullen, 2005). In fact, indoctrination as the "underbelly" of socialization needs vigilant monitoring within our places of work *and* within ourselves. From this perspective, critical thinking concentrates on the power dimension involved in all educational processes, and it also requires that we work constantly at discerning "racism, sexism, class bias, cultural oppression, and homophobia" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 9). Liberal education takes many forms, extending to student-centered curriculum, collegial-led action research, cross-cultural communication, critical pedagogy, grassroots activism, and legislative and policy participation.

As previously mentioned, Johnson provides support for cross-race mentorships that, in effect, give minority students fuller access to faculty mentors. Underlying this social justice issue is the question involving the extent to which White males should be included in mentoring non-White women. Some feminists posit that this widespread type of relational mentoring should remain open to White males. In fact, Dreher and Chargois's (e.g., 1998) studies of historically Black universities have found that women and minorities paired with White male academic mentors can benefit from having access to the covert, long-established power structures that enable success and include compensation advantages (e.g., information access, professional networking, salary, and visibility). Because institutional activists still struggle to sponsor equitable systems of socialization and learning for women and minorities, it is therefore believed that any insider access to the power grid can prove advantageous for the newcomer.

However, some critical pedagogues and feminist critics provide a contradictory viewpoint, which the author has overlooked. They counter that constrictive access for disenfranchised individuals and groups within organizational cultures is the more pressing issue, not whether White males should mentor them. Darwin's (2000) concept of the "cycle of power" is a case in point. She claims that cultural socializing forces operate within the workforce (also the academy) wherein power is recycled between male mentors and their learning partners as part of a closed-life system. In this worldview, career advancement and professional identity development are protected investments, and many qualified women and minorities continue to be denied key leadership roles and decision-making privileges.

Discussion of key mentoring ideas and practices is ample throughout; however, advice on *how* to help faculty, students, and administrators, particularly those operating within stymied cultures, is missing. It is critical to raise consciousness about the role of mentorship in learning and professional development within increasingly convoluted research institutions and academic contexts. Many people confuse mentoring and teaching, for example, which leads to misunderstanding of the doctoral supervision role. Others think of the doctoral journey as the student's sole responsibility from start to finish; but, like the tenure-earning journey, it "takes a village" of strong mentors to support most novice

academics. On the other hand, some faculty seem to naturally make good mentors, infusing the rhetoric of mentoring with a daily commitment to help others, but their efforts are often invisible (Mullen, 2005). Effective mentors need to be studied beyond the functions they fulfill and the behaviors they exhibit, an idea that also has relevance for exceptional learning partners.

Because higher education administrators are constantly confronted with "putting out fires" and thus have little time for scholarly reading, presentation of the mentoring steps in the form of a table or list would have been helpful. Ideas that should be read by all are tucked inside pages of well-written scholarly prose, making it challenging for new administrators, in particular, and even those who are functioning within mentoring-resistant units, to glean the important information and certainly to know where to begin. The following list highlights some of Johnson's recommendations for administrators:

- Change faculty evaluation processes to emphasize mentoring activities and contributions.
- Encourage faculty to integrate their mentoring activities and contributions in materials for review.
- Treat initial advisements as temporary, track mentoring assignments, and publicly support the value of mentoring.
- Spread advising loads equitably among faculty, oversee faculty performance, and communicate policy and results to all involved.
- Explicate the program's approach to mentoring and the facilitation of mentorships and distinguish between advising and mentoring. (Paraphrased from pp. 227–228.)

Another idea that could have enhanced the text involves cultural assessments of academic environments, with proven sequences of departmental and systemic change for empowering administrators who want to bring about change. For example, it seems likely that discussion and planning with faculty are essential for creating a collective consciousness about the importance of mentoring and for devising a well-rounded mentoring program that everyone can endorse, just as it would be important to establish support for any resources requiring funding. An agreed-upon scheme for knowing what data would be collected, analyzed, and reported and to whom in order to assess mentor competence and structural support also seems pertinent. A sequential model could have similarly been provided for faculty mentors and peer mentors.

Paradoxes govern some of the key issues Johnson raises. Notably, as many in the academy probably know, "not all professors are well suited to the mentor role … a well-rounded faculty member must demonstrate competence as a teacher, researcher, professional colleague, and mentor to junior personnel" (p. 226). *Competence* is not a simple construct in Johnson's lexicon—in fact, it may even function as an overarching academic professional category that embodies "moral imperatives for faculty to live by when serving in the mentor role" (i.e., "embrace a moral stance … create a moral context … [and] engage in

a pedagogy of the moral" (p. 106). Given this understanding, how can administrators attempt to change their environments to include all faculty in the business of mentoring students and faculty, while simultaneously making judgments about who is ready to mentor and who is not? What criteria should be used to make this determination, and who should develop it? Another confounded issue, dynamics relevant to critical mentorship with respect to power differences, ethics, and accountability within faculty–student mentoring relationships, should be a concern for administrators and faculty groups alike. This would have been a fertile topic for the book. Higher education groups that discuss mentoring issues should be wary of sticking to safe conversations that reinforce the status quo and avoid larger and deeper "ethical issues bearing on the task of mentoring" (p. 107).

Finally, the book lacks a conclusion or epilogue. An overarching message, perhaps in the form of lessons learned and unresolved issues, would have been helpful.

Parting Words

This book has multiple audiences and numerous potential uses. It can be used in graduate courses focused on student and faculty development and with cohorts and other groups where acclimation to the academy and relational learning are critical. The developmental and mentoring theories, practical descriptions of mentoring phenomena, and illustrative vignettes provide an ideal model for adaptation by instructors. Courses in mentoring theory and practice, academic and professional development, diversity and democracy in higher education, and preparation for the professoriate are all potentially ideal contexts for this text. Deans, department chairs, faculty directors, and promotion and tenure committees should consider making this book available to faculty. Seminars constructed around the teachings of this book could serve faculty and administrators at all levels of experience. A final audience is mentoring scholars and researchers for whom this contemporary compendium of ideas and practices can further inform their professions.

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