

TITLE: A Personal Account of the Bounds of Mentorship

SCHOLARLY AREA: Professional development

FORMAT: Oral presentation

PROPOSAL:

The concept of mentorship is an established legacy in academic development work (Bergen & Connelly, 1988; Gardiner, 1999; Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Dhunpath et al, 2018; Hanover, 2014). In South African Higher Education, mentorship features prominently in programmes initiated by statutory bodies such as the Staffing South African Universities Framework as well as in a variety of research opportunities offered by the National Research Foundation, where the focus is on improving the recruitment, retention, and progression of academic staff. Sectorial initiatives are designed to have a wide reach and therefore it is reasonable to expect that a significant proportion of the academic community that has not yet reached professorial status will have been exposed to mentorship initiatives.

We draw on our lived experience of mentorship in the academy to examine the apparent forgone conclusion that as a strategy, mentorship advances one's career. This paper is an autoethnographic (drawing on Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2012) examination of the impact of mentorship in our careers. The narration of our careers is offered with the intention to expand understandings of the realities of mid-career academics, thus providing plausible accounts for those, who like ourselves find themselves stuck. We employ our personal stories as a vehicle to critique (Chang, 2013) the blanket use of mentoring as the panacea for the limited success in career advancement for academics.

This oral paper presentation suggests that, for the practice of mentoring to make a real difference, marked attention needs to be paid to the constraints of this concept or we run the risk of disillusionment with mentoring itself.