Appreciating Episodic Mentoring: 
Reconsiderations of and Interventions for a 
Comprehensive Mentoring Process for 
Engineering Faculty

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Appreciating Episodic Mentoring: Reconsiderations of and Interventions for a Comprehensive Mentoring Process for Engineering Faculty.

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Overview

- Background
- Episodic Mentoring
- Research Questions
- Methods
- Results
  - Initiating Episodic Mentoring
  - Mentoring for Inclusion and Growth
Background

Whereas research has delved into faculty-student mentoring and its consequences, there are few investigations about faculty mentoring in STEM.

This paper is part of a larger project with goals to understand faculty’s mentoring experience and assessing the revised formal mentoring programs designed and offered by the College of Engineering at a large Midwestern (U.S.) university.
Episodic Mentoring

- Mentoring episodes: short-term developmental interactions that occur at specific points in time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>happening in everyday processes (Buzzanell, 2009).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>short-term interactions (Fletcher &amp; Ragins, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>focus on the relational aspects of the mentoring experiences (Kalbfleisch, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction</td>
<td>multiple inputs (Parse, 2002).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Mentor</td>
<td>offer a diligent, loving presence, a link with a community of scholars, and celebratory recognition (Parse, 2002).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Episodic Mentoring

- These mentoring moments or episodes probably occur more often than people realize, in large part because they may not be labeled as mentoring by the relationship participants and may occur spontaneously.

- Mentoring moments or episodes also may be vital to mentees’ feelings of inclusion into professions and work-related contexts because they offer insight into behind-the-scenes reasoning and activities, as well as opportunities to ask questions in less threatening venues given their seemingly impromptu nature.
Research Questions

- How do faculty members describe and evaluate their episodic mentoring?
- What role does episodic mentoring play in faculty members’ lives?
Methods and Analysis

Participants
- Thirteen tenure-track faculty from the College of Engineering at one Midwestern university agreed to participate in our study.
  - 6 men and 7 women
  - 11 participants (85%) were tenured
  - 4 interviewees were self identified as under-represented minorities

Data collection
- In-depth Interview: 50 minutes each on average (range=25-80 minutes).
- Recorded and transcribed for analysis: 325 pages of double-spaced transcription.
Methods and Analysis

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Data analysis

- Inductive-deductive process through which we looked for overarching themes and subthemes that depicted patterns of mentoring interactions indicating when, why, how, and with what perceived consequences episodic mentoring occurred.
- Refined our category development and tested our ideas against our data and findings from other empirical studies (Charmaz, 2006).
- Coded for instances of episodic mentoring.
- Case study of one participant.
Results

The three primary ways in which mentees either initiated or perceived opportunities for mentoring were:

(a) direct advice or information seeking
(b) observation focused on learning
(c) engagement in serendipitous interactions.
Direct Advice or Information Seeking

The perception that one party wanted to obtain some advice from another party and thus created an occasion for mentoring.

- Stems from a perplexing issue, a felt need or problem, or a question that had emerged during work.
  - E.g., a classroom concern

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Observation focused on learning

- Occurred when two parties (mentor and mentee) were engaged in activities together.
  - e.g., working on the same research projects, serving on the same committee, co-teaching a course.

- This form of episodic mentoring could be characterized as learning through observation or example, or mentoring through role modeling.
Engagement in Serendipitous Interactions

- Refers to the unexpected instances of mentoring.
  - E.g., hallways, airports, and in bars

- Factors that could lead to or be used to cultivate spontaneous mentoring: proximity, collegiality, workplace culture, people who are willing to share and help others.
Mentoring for Inclusion and Growth

A mentoring story from Brian.

- “Navigating one’s way as other”
- “An advance scout, or an explorer”
- Traditional mentoring was rare, so people looked for other means of advice.
- However, Brian noted that individuals fail to recognize the networks of mentoring and engagement in which they participate.
- Trust, understanding, and a relational culture as prerequisites for episodic mentoring.
Discussion

- episodic mentoring is proposed not only as a means of career development but also as faculty engagement and empowerment.
- the role of the episodic mentoring has been underestimated in its positive impact on faculty advancement.
- without recognizing the value of episodic mentoring, one cannot assess the full extent of a comprehensive mentoring process.

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Questions?

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References


