

Developing an Academic Identity Using the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model: A Kaleidoscopic Metaphor

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, we describe how the cognitive apprenticeship model serves as a framework for mentoring early-career women faculty into the professoriate. We illuminate our ideas using the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to inspire and support women faculty as they grow as academic writers and build their academic identities.

Keywords: academic identity, academic writing, cognitive apprenticeship, early-career faculty, kaleidoscope, mentoring

Completing a doctoral degree and launching into one's first academic job is both exciting and intimidating, all at the same time. New faculty quickly learn that juggling the demands of a teaching load, sustaining a research agenda, and participating in service activities is tricky to manage. One approach to manage the demands of teaching, research, and service is to build a multifaceted and integrated academic career. In this essay, we illustrate that choosing to hold a complex perspective of academic life can provide a truer representation of the work. According to Berger (2015), "Complexity is about getting our heads around what is possible (because anything could happen) rather than what is probably going to happen (which is determined by what has happened before (p. 11). Approaching the

professoriate with intentionality allows for a more fluid approach and manageable way of meeting academic demands.

Women professors often have heavy teaching loads, unrealistic committee work, and lower pay than their male counterparts (Pettit, 2020); yet, they must also balance the demands for scholarly productivity and personal commitments. Therefore, our focus is on mentoring women faculty. We look at academic identity through a kaleidoscopic metaphor. Kanter's (2001) often-cited quote anchors our essay: "Creativity is a lot like looking at the world through a kaleidoscope. You look at a set of elements, the same ones everyone else sees, but then reassemble those floating bits and pieces into an enticing new possibility" (p. 261).

We use a kaleidoscope as a metaphor because it contrasts a categorical approach to academic demands with the complexity of an integrated academic identity. The multiple bits and pieces of glass that tumble in our metaphor include the transition from doctoral student to faculty scholar through engagement with academic writing. We believe the outcome of an academic writing practice is beautiful, evolving, and full of possibilities. Interestingly, the word kaleidoscope comes from the Greek words *kalos* (beautiful) and *eidos* (shape), and an English word *-scope* (an instrument for seeing) that means the "observation of beautiful forms" (Kaleidoscope USA, 2020). We see the process of developing a writing practice and academic identity as having multiple bits of glass that spin and swirl in real time.

We acknowledge our own positionality and privilege (i.e., White women in higher education and former directors of doctoral programs) influences our ideas about mentoring new faculty; we sense that other women may find purpose and beauty in our kaleidoscope metaphor. Through mentoring, we encourage ourselves and new faculty to recognize that the view from inside (academic identity) the kaleidoscope is more beautiful than the outside (institutional job requirements). The beautiful design created in a kaleidoscope is a mandala, an ever-changing image that starts and stops, and can be dull or vibrant. It all depends on the continuous motion of the kaleidoscope. Our goal in mentoring new faculty is to encourage a habit of turning the capsule to experience the many possibilities of an amalgamated academic identity.

The mentoring process that we employ is the cognitive apprenticeship model (Collins, 2006) because its design makes explicit the implicit workings of academic writing. According to Collins and Kapur (2014), cognitive apprenticeship includes two parts: (a) the apprentice portion is the building of knowledge that interconnects expert processing and contextualized learning, and (b) cognitive training that moves the responsibility of learning gradually from the expert to the novice as skills are developed through iterative experiences. Much like a kaleidoscope, the outside does not represent the beauty of what is happening on the inside. In

Figure 1, we represent the connections between cognitive apprenticeship, mentoring, and developing an academic identity.

Figure 1

Building an Academic Identity through the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model



Cognitive apprenticeship for mentoring new women faculty in academic writing

We believe the cognitive apprenticeship model (Collins, 2006) offers a framework for mentoring women as they navigate the uneven pathway to productive scholarship. Given the effective use of the model with doctoral students (Austin, 2009; Caskey & Stevens, 2019; Gabrys & Beltechi, 2012; Swanson et al., 2019), we think the cognitive apprenticeship model holds tremendous potential for mentoring early-career academics, specifically women faculty.

In the broadest sense, the cognitive apprenticeship model focuses on learning—apprenticing—complex cognitive tasks. To support the learning of complex cognitive skills and processes, the teachers in the learning environment need to make visible their internal thought processes (Collins et al., 1991)). Apprenticeship parallels the research on writing transfer (Yancey et al., 2018) and transformational experiences (Tarabochia & Heddy, 2019), in which instructors prompt writers’ development through behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement in writing. In the case of cognitive apprenticeship,, the mentors reveal and model their own thinking processes to new faculty and arrange conditions for engaging in academic writing.

According to Collins (2006), the cognitive apprenticeship model attends to multiple dimensions of learning environments. Drawing on Collins’ work, we apply three of these dimensions—content, method, and sociology—to the mentorship of new women faculty to become successful academic writers and build an academic identity.

First, we acknowledge that early-career faculty bring disciplinary knowledge to the academy; nevertheless, they may need more experience

with the transition from writing a dissertation to writing for publication. How can universities help faculty make this transition from student to scholar? Starting with *content*, we suggest women use their disciplinary knowledge to anchor their academic writing by using a kaleidoscopic view.

Second, we recognize these novice scholars possess the expertise and abilities to complete their doctoral programs. Yet, what methods are well-suited for supporting the academic writing demands of the academy? *Methods* begin with the mentor modeling, coaching, and scaffolding, and then, transition to the writer taking the lead by articulating, reflecting, and exploring. We encourage mentors to prompt women faculty to focus on articulation, reflection, and exploration. *Articulation* entails encouraging new faculty to verbalize their thinking. When grasping a kaleidoscope, women faculty can see and articulate the beauty, possibility, and power of their thinking. *Reflection* involves empowering the new faculty to ponder their own work and compare it to experts' work. In the process of turning a kaleidoscope, faculty reflect on the tumbling draped glass and find themselves drawn to certain mandalas. *Exploration* calls on the new faculty to pursue their ideas, identify problems, and resolve those problems. Continuing the turning of a kaleidoscope, faculty explore arrays of mandalas until they find a beautiful, possible, and compelling solution. Using a kaleidoscope inspires women to move through the processes of articulation, reflection, and exploration in a more fluid, yet individualized way.

Third, we embrace the *sociology* of interactions within the learning environment, specifically *situated learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and a *community of practice* (Wenger, 1998). In our case, situated learning refers to the new faculty completing tasks such as academic writing in an authentic context (e.g., workspace). Whereas, in a community of practice, new faculty with mutual interests learn by engaging actively and regularly with one another. When interacting with others, women faculty may revel in beautiful possibilities of their kaleidoscopic thinking.

When tapping into the dimensions of the cognitive apprenticeship model (Collins, 2006)—*content*, *method*, and *sociology*—mentors must foster the conditions for faculty to apply the model to their practice. Thus, using this model also requires a shift in power from the mentor to the new faculty member. Mentors must be mindful of their role is to support new women faculty, who in turn, use the model to guide their own development as academic writers and build their own unique academic identities.

Implications for the academy

Certainly, universities need to address the numerous inequalities women face as they transition into their higher education careers (Pettit, 2020). Issues such as teaching loads, committee work, and compensation deserve and require action; however, we suggest an immediate investment in women is possible through mentorship—an extension and elaboration of the type of

support received in their doctoral program. To this end, we advance the idea of using the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to inspire and support women as they grow as academic writers and build their academic identities. A kaleidoscope encourages women to not only articulate and reflect on their ideas, but it also emboldens them to explore their individual scholarly passions.

To gain a fuller experience in the academy, mentors and early-career faculty can use the cognitive apprenticeship model (Collins, 2006). Not only can they convey confidence in their *content*, but they can also use strategies or *methods* (i.e., articulation, reflection, exploration). They can also draw on the *sociology* of interactions (e.g., communities of practice) to make their academic position stronger. We suggest that this model offers practical application across women's academic trajectory. Like a kaleidoscope, the model can be adapted to fit the often-transitory demands of an academic life.

We recognize that the power of a kaleidoscope lies in the hands of the user (both the mentor and writer), in this case women faculty. With this optical instrument in hand, women faculty can explore the nuanced and evolving nature of being an academic. As they engage with a kaleidoscope, we believe that mentors can promote the enduring value of using a kaleidoscope to *reflect* throughout their careers—to *articulate* and *explore* the beautiful mandalas they want to pursue through their scholarship. In doing so, mentors can enhance the transformative experiences (Tarabochia & Heddy, 2019) of women as scholarly writers.

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