

# From Rational to Relational

## REFLECTIONS ON EMBRACING A PSYCHODRAMATIC APPROACH IN ACADEMIC MENTORING

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### ABSTRACT

Many practitioners working in organisations will find themselves facing the challenge of heavily conserved systems and cultures. What might be the effect of embracing a psychodramatic approach in such contexts? Through the lens of a long running mentoring programme in two Australian universities, this article identifies the experience for the participating academics as novel and impactful, providing them with a springboard to develop and integrate a new relational capacity into their rational world. The positive effect is felt and seen within individual mentoring relationships and beyond, sparking spontaneity capable of shifting the wider university paradigm.

### KEYWORDS

academic mentoring, conserved cultures, mentoring, psychodrama, relational, spontaneity, university mentoring, vulnerability

### Introduction

My 2008 introduction to working with academics was delightfully serendipitous – an out of the blue call from a social acquaintance at the local university, scrambling to find a replacement speaker for a session the following day with school and faculty academic leaders. The topic was organisational culture, one I was particularly warmed up to at the time, so it was an easy ‘yes’. From that fortuitous beginning, I have gone on to work with university academics in a variety of contexts – team coaching, one-on-one coaching, development workshops, working with discipline groups struggling with conflict, soft skills training programmes and more.

Over the years I have observed and learnt a lot about the general culture of academia and its unusual organisational context. Many times, I have been informed by academics that they do not work FOR their university, but rather AT their university. This independence of mindset and identity exists within an environment where status and power are often a narrow function of intellect and knowledge; where the quality of

an idea is judged according to whether it can sustain peer critique; where a professorial demeanour of strength and certainty is a valued element of the cultural conserve<sup>1</sup>.

Within that cultural context, a particular source of enjoyment and satisfaction for me has been an academic mentoring programme that I have facilitated for many years, first at the University of Newcastle (2009-2012) and later at Deakin University (2013-present). The programme calls on participants, both mentors and mentees, to step beyond their conserved role relationships; to move from a predominantly rational focus to a more relational one where the value that both parties gain is a function of the quality of the relationship they build, rather than simply a transfer of knowledge or experience from one to the other.

As it happens, since commencing the mentoring programme in 2009, I have been on a developmental journey of my own. I discovered psychodrama in late 2010 and set out as a trainee the following year, gaining accreditation as a sociodramatist in 2016. That journey has expanded my own valuing of relationship and capacity for intimacy, rebalancing my inner equation of thinking and feeling. I have come to more fully appreciate 'being' over 'doing' and to treasure psychodrama founder J.L. Moreno's recognition of the moment as a place of being, living and creating<sup>2</sup>, the temporal stage on which his Canon of Creativity plays out. My personal evolution has had a tangible flow-on effect to my being and approach as a coach and group worker in organisations.

The continuous delivery of the mentoring programme over 11 years provides a singular mirror to consider how integrating a psychodramatic mindset and approach into the mentoring programme workshops has, in turn, affected the experience of participants and the programme outcomes. Although focused on a specific organisational context – working with academics in universities – this mirror may also spark the interest and spontaneity of organisational practitioners across a diversity of other work contexts.

To aid and collaborate with me in exploring the evolution of the programme, I engaged two companions, Professor Trevor Day and Professor Malcolm Campbell, in conversation about our experiences and perspectives of the programme. Trevor was the initiating sponsor of the programme at both Newcastle and Deakin, its guiding star. He has been a regular participant in programme workshops and the mentor/mentee pairing exercise. In the early years he was also a mentor in the programme. Malcolm has been a

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1 For readers not familiar with the term "conserve" in a psychodramatic context, it refers to preserved norms and cultural heritage that accumulate over time. Elements of the conserve (in this case the model of professorial demeanour) are each a product of an initial act of creativity, but have subsequently become fixed in nature, lacking in spontaneity.

2 J.L. Moreno. *Psychodrama, First Volume* 4th Edition, 1985, Beacon House Inc. p.104.

stalwart of the programme at Deakin since its inception and a mentor for the first six years. In the latest round he has shifted role, joining the group who work out the mentor/mentee pairings. This has provided him with a different perspective in the workshops, focusing on the broader group of participants. Trevor's and Malcolm's reflections as sponsors and participants in the programme are woven through this essay, providing perspective into the culture and experience of academic life, and the challenges and joys of being called on to step from that largely rational world into the intimacy of relational mentoring.

Beginning with a brief overview of the programme structure, I move on to identify, from my practitioner's perspective, the key ways in which the facilitation of programme workshops has been impacted by the adoption of a psychodramatic mindset. Then, in conversation with Trevor and Malcolm, I consider the ways in which this approach has affected participants' experiences and programme outcomes.

### Programme Overview

At Deakin, the programme is sponsored and runs within the boundaries of the Faculty of Science, Engineering and the Built Environment. Staff from the faculty office co-ordinate the programme and lead the task of pairing the mentors and mentees. Subject to capacity, the programme is available to all academics regardless of their organisational role or professional seniority. Participation is voluntary, and individuals may nominate to be a mentor, or mentee, or both. The only limitation placed on joining the programme is that all participants must attend an initial half-day induction workshop. The programme typically runs over a 12-month window, anchored by three rounds of workshops that I facilitate:

1. At the commencement of the programme an induction workshop, run separately for mentees and mentors, covers aspects such as understanding the mentoring relationship, mentoring roles and responsibilities, stages of the mentoring journey and key mentoring conversation skills. Participants are provided with a workbook which covers the key content. The pairing of mentors and mentees is completed after the induction workshops.
2. Midway through the programme, a joint workshop brings mentors and mentees together following their initial mentoring sessions, allowing them to share experiences, reflect, and build and cement new skills.
3. At the conclusion of the programme, a further joint workshop brings mentors and mentees together to share experiences and celebrate success.

## How have things changed from my practitioner's perspective?

In 11 years, the programme structure is unchanged and the programme content, as concretised in the workbooks provided to participants, has seen only minor revisions. Over time though, my focus, the form of my interventions, and what unfolds in the workshops as a result, has shifted markedly. For Moreno, "psychodrama was a way to train people to be more spontaneous in their lives in a safe and controlled environment, then go out and try their new roles"<sup>3</sup>.

*Early On: My mindset was more one of enabling participants to develop specific relevant skills. I enacted more of a didactic or teaching role.*

*And Now: Spontaneity training has replaced skills training and knowledge transfer as my anchoring purpose. My mindset is one of expanding each participant's capacity to more readily warm up to spontaneity and to move beyond their conserved culture of role relationships. In practice this means I am inviting and encouraging them to move beyond their habitual thinking-dominated roles, to warm up and bring attention to their and their mentoring partner's emotional world, as a means of developing new roles and a better integration of thinking, feeling and action in each of them.*

*For example, in one workshop exercise one person shares a personal story with the group – something simple such as what happened for them last weekend. I ask the other group members to listen, not only to the content of the story but also for the emotions that are expressed, and to then crisply state their understanding of the essence of the communication. We play with describing this essence until we observe that the storyteller feels well seen. The group members are thus required to listen deeply, and also to look more consciously in order to see how the storyteller is impacted by what they, the listeners, offer. This rudimentary form of doubling of a work colleague is a new and impactful experience for most participants, calling on both the storyteller and the listeners to move to the edge of their professional reserve and take a risk in relationship with others in the workshop.*

*Another exercise involves fostering the skill of open questioning in the participants' mentoring conversations. In the early years, I would talk with the mentor group about the importance of open questions, then they would practice with one another. Now I have upped the challenge, directing them to ask their practice partner 10 open questions in a row, each following on directly from the response they have just heard. Although not a natural conversational experience, the exercise enables participants to become viscerally aware of the way in which thinking dominates their conversation. They consciously experience themselves ceasing to listen and withdrawing into their heads while they think through their next question. It is a shock to most to realise how much they struggle to stay in relationship with, and listen to, their partner.*

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Moreno. Bellevue Literary Press Conversations Series: Jonathan D. Moreno & John Pankow, 2014. <<https://blpress.org/news/blp-conversations-jonathan-d-moreno/#more-2450>>.

*During this and other workshop activities, I often coach participants in the moment to bring themselves forward in the group and in their expression to one another, drawing out a fuller and more integrated expression of thinking AND feeling. In contrast to the teaching-centred role I initially enacted, I am now standing beside rather than in front of participants.*

Separate to the workshop content itself, the *experiences* which participants have in the workshops plays a key part in their individual development and the subsequent effectiveness of their mentoring relationship.

*Early On: While participants were actively engaged in learning activities during the workshops, the need to cover all the content tended to limit the time spent on any particular activity. Emerging opportunities to deepen the experience were often lost. And Now: The quality and depth of each participant's experience in the room takes precedence over getting through the content. I allocate and consciously spend more time on group warm up and leverage what happens in the moment as a learning opportunity, rather than relying only on programmed exercises. Slowing down, doubling and mirroring participants, and calling attention to what may or may not be being expressed, means that participants' awareness and role development is enhanced.*

Mentoring is an activity inherently anchored in relationship. The nature and quality of the relationship lies at the heart of its success. If something new is to emerge, both parties must be prepared to be vulnerable in the relationship, to openly express their struggles, to be okay when not in possession of an easy solution or answer. "There's something about ... shared vulnerability and the group exploration of the human condition, in all its emotional complexity, that seems to break down conventional barriers and foster intimacy."<sup>4</sup> Showing vulnerability is a particular challenge in academic culture, as the academic is definitely expected to know what they are on about!

*Early On: My emphasis was on clear communication of the roles and responsibilities of mentors and mentees.*

*And Now: Whilst still covering this content, my focus has shifted to the sociometry alive in the group. As many participants are not known to one another, I produce their fuller expression to strengthen their sociometric links. I encourage them to be curious about one another, to enquire openly. I model and invite a preparedness to be vulnerable in front of the group. I stress the mentoring relationship as a co-creation – not just a 'my job, your job' exercise.*

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4 John Pankow. Bellevue Literary Press Conversations Series: Jonathan D. Moreno & John Pankow. 2014. <<https://blpress.org/news/blp-conversations-jonathan-d-moreno/#more-2450>>.

Beyond the workshops themselves, I am involved in the mentor/mentee pairing exercise.

*Early On: I was little more than a spectator, as the faculty staff considered which mentor was the best fit for each mentee, based on the requests made by the mentee. Not knowing the individuals, nor particularly understanding the technical need implicit in their requests, I had nothing to add to the consideration.*

*And Now: I value tele, "Moreno's term for what might variously be called "rapport" in its broadest sense"<sup>5</sup>, as a key element in the pairing equation. I am a more active contributor to the consideration of potential pairs, based on my sense, observed and intuitive, of the actual and potential tele between participants.*

My perspective as a professional practitioner is well and good, but I am also curious as to how all this change is perceived and received by participants. In the following sections, I present excerpts from conversations with sponsor/participants Trevor and Malcolm, as we reflect together on the changes in, and impacts of, the programme.

### What change have you noticed regarding the nature of what happens in the room?

*Trevor: If somebody said to me, 'so what has psychodrama contributed to the programme?' it would be hard for me to distinguish what are uniquely psychodramatic concepts as opposed to ones that were actually being applied before the psychodrama, which is not to invalidate any of it, but simply to say that you've got an overlapping theoretical frame.*

*Jenny: It's actually an excellent point to illustrate, because the content is basically unchanged over 11 years. It's tweaked, but it's basically unchanged. What has changed is how I facilitate it.*

*Trevor: Right.*

*Jenny: The biggest change has actually been in me rather than the content.*

*Trevor: Yes, and that shows. Again, there's different ways of looking at it. One could say, well, Jenny's been doing this programme for 10, 12 years, so of course she's going to modify and improve, but if I was asked 'what do you see differently in Jenny in terms of how she approaches it now?', it's particularly that ability to just hang there. Those pauses ... and it's not just a pause, it was sort of holding everyone there. And first of all, holding yourself there. That's changed a lot ... you're prepared to hang there despite the degree of discomfort on the part of the participants. And I think that that has an impact when you see other people do that, you know. You could talk about it simply as the power of silence to some extent. There's an element of that in there. You see other people doing it and yet still be very effective. It gives you courage to try that approach yourself.*

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<sup>5</sup> Tele: The Dynamics of Rapport. Adam Blatner. Revision of chapter in Psychodrama Since Moreno, 1994, revised and re-posted February 26, 2006. <<https://www.blatner.com/adam/pdntbk/tele.htm>>.

Trevor's reflection highlights the shift toward valuing the moment as the crucible of spontaneity and creativity, allowing the space for something new to emerge. Early on, my focus in workshop exercises tended to be more task and thinking oriented. For example, participants completed an exercise in their workbook to help them prepare for the first meeting with their mentoring partner. By contrast, in the latest round of the programme I introduced a simplified 'sticky moments' role training exercise where mentee Grace<sup>6</sup>, enacted her first telephone call to her new mentor.

*Jenny: What I loved about that was ultimately Grace did all that work herself. She makes an offer and then it gets mirrored. And even as she's making it, she's saying 'No, that doesn't sound right. I don't like that'. She gets a few mirrors and she hones it and hones it and finally comes out with something that she feels really integrated around. I really enjoyed that the process enabled Grace's own wisdom to shape the decision she made about what she wanted to do.*

*Malcolm: The way you unravelled the activity, I think, was good for that group of mentees .... For me it was hearing the relief in Grace's whole being when she realised that it's not hard, and she only needs to be quite simple, because we often make things far more complex than they need to be.*

*Jenny: She really shifted role from having to somehow prove her worthiness, or illustrate her worthiness to the mentor, towards a light-hearted, 'Oh, I'm meeting a new person' and it was a really visual shift. And, as you said, in her whole being, she just softened and got really comfortable. And when that softening happened, her communication was clear and easy to follow.*

This role training approach provided some non-critical mirroring and an enacted, embodied experience, which enabled Grace to hear herself and make spontaneous adjustments. She was able to reach a point where she felt satisfied, her expression was crisper, and she was physically and emotionally calmer and aligned. With a more experiential approach now evident in the workshops, there are many more action-oriented moments such as this. One or two protagonists are working on behalf of the group, deepening the learning of all participants. Malcolm reflects on his own experience of this as both protagonist and group / audience member.

*Jenny: Are there particular moments that have stayed with you that capture or illustrate the novelty of the learning experience?*

*Malcolm: Well, it's all of those moments where you ask someone, or me, or whoever, to role play .... you're having to shift from 'this is what Malcolm would be' to 'this is what the role that you've given me would be' .... Those moments are the ones that stay with me in terms of the activities, having to be out in the front, sitting in that chair, having to ask somebody 10 questions that don't have a yes or no answer, and*

<sup>6</sup> Name changed to protect confidentiality.

*I find myself listening to myself and not what the other person says. Yeah. That's a real moment, that is a real moment. Other aspects are more subtle, I think. Having you come and stand behind and beside somebody and say, "Look at them, you're hearing the words, but is that what they're saying? Look at their face, look at their expression, look at how they're standing there". They are the moments that are most meaningful to me.*

*Jenny: The heart of what you're saying for me is that it's about the immediacy of your experience when your attention is called to this moment, and what you're noticing externally or what you're getting aware of internally.*

### **How has this evolved approach impacted participant experience?**

The majority of the mentor and mentee participants in the programme are from Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM) disciplines. Trevor provides us with some insight into their professional world.

*Trevor: Academics are a strange breed. They must be able to focus down on an extremely narrow area, work at it for a very long time, to their own detriment and to the detriment of all those around them – obsessively focused. Historically in the STEMM area you very much were encouraged to divorce your IQ from your EQ ... it's actually a way of focusing your energies.*

My hypothesis is that the action oriented, sociometric approach used in the workshops produces a developmental experience that is significantly different from the typical academic environment. Malcolm and Trevor agree, seeing the shift from knowledge transfer to development of self-awareness and emotional/relational capacities as the key point of difference.

*Malcolm: The mentoring programme is about building people's capacity, not teaching them something. I think that is the primary difference between what an academic would experience in other kinds of academic workshops. It's not so much about the content, but about developing me as a mentor and somebody else as a mentee. It's about developing their understanding of themselves.*

*Trevor: If your scientific training is to use one particular approach and suppress your emotional life to that end, you need to actually learn to be able to take off that hyper-rational hat and pick up this other, or in fact to be able to wear both hats together or move between the two seamlessly.*

In an academic culture where identity, success and status are predominantly grounded in intellect and critique, this shift in focus from knowledge and thinking toward relationship and feeling is unfamiliar and confronting for many.



Malcolm: *Quite confronting I think, to the group of academics I've seen in the seven years that I've been involved. STEMM academics, in the main, think in the objective world. They don't think in the relationship world. So, the confrontational part of what their experience is from this programme is about getting in touch with themselves, understanding themselves, which is probably new for many of them. ... I think the workshop is confronting because it's so unlike what they have experienced in the past. And even just little things, when as the facilitator you stop people and say, "Hang on, hang on, hang on. What are you hearing from the other person?" Well, people haven't had that before because they are mostly waiting for their next time to speak. So being pulled up and asked to reflect on feelings or facial expressions or intent or essence and all that kind of stuff, that's confronting for people. And you can see that, because people have to stop and think. Some of them are even unsure of what to answer. Even I'm sometimes uncertain about what's going to happen next, because the facilitation process is not scripted. There's an agenda but it's not scripted, so what happens from moment to moment depends on what happens in the room.*

Malcolm also highlights that their experience in the moment calls on participants to shift mindsets.

Malcolm: *It's the mindset Jenny. It's not just the experience, it's being asked to put your mind in a different space. It's about your being. Who I am, why I am.*

Jenny: *In that context, one of the things that I typically do at some point is produce a continuum about something. I want people to get out of their chairs and take a stand somewhere. For me this is an exercise in two things. One, it's a participatory thing. Rather than, 'I'm sitting in the group and not speaking' or whatever, I'm prompted to consider something. I have to consider the question and then I have to consider where am I going to put myself. Where to take MY stand. That's the first half of it. It's an invitation to participation.*

Malcolm: *Hmm.*

Jenny: *It also then makes visible what's often invisible in the group. Similarities or differences or whatever. What have you noticed about the effect of that on the group?*

Malcolm: *I've noticed as the year progresses, a change in the way the participants respond to that invitation. In the first training meeting, I suspect that there's a lot of group think, so you look around and see who's standing where, and they huddle. Whereas at the end of the programme people are more comfortable to go to the extremes, the positive or negative and there's not so much group think. And you get difference between mentors and mentees at the end of the programme. One is at one end of the line and another one might be at the other end of the line and they're comfortable being there and they're comfortable talking about it. So, I think the process of having to position yourself is a good one.*

The absence of technology in the workshops – no projectors, no screens, no devices, everything is live in the moment, relating to others in the room –

was also noted as significantly different to the usual workplace experience of participants. The new programme sponsor enjoys the 'digital detox' and likens her resulting experience to attending relaxing yoga classes. Apart from the absence of the distracting and isolating effects of technology, my sense is that her relaxation results from the slowing down and holding of moments, which provides her with a fuller experience of group life.

### What value is the programme delivering?

As a result of the mentoring programme, strategic value is accumulating for individuals and for the faculty as a collective. Firstly, an ongoing expansion and flourishing of the sociometric wealth is evident.

*Malcolm: Well, you have opportunities to build the capacity of 32 people every year to be able to engage with others at the personal level. And from a faculty perspective you then have people who are more willing to share ideas, more willing to question others about how they're thinking, or why they're thinking rather than just take the 'yes/no argumentative, factual, that's wrong, clearly it's wrong' attitude. So, building each year a group of people who are more willing to sit and understand others and their perspectives is beneficial.*

*Jenny: And that adds more richness to the discourse?*

*Malcolm: Well, yes, and at the same time the faculty is doing a whole lot of development stuff by building research groups, building teaching teams, and so on. So, you've got people in that mix now who may not hold formal leadership roles in any of those particular activities, but they're sitting around the table with others saying, "What do you want to do?" or "Tell me more about the approach that you're taking. What would be the benefits of moving in that direction for you? Or for the school?" All of those open-ended questions. I see it around meetings, in conversations in the workplace. I think that adds richness to how we think about our work as a faculty.*

Moreno saw sociometry "as a means of ameliorating dissension and redistributing power within a group so that all its members shared sociometric wealth"<sup>7</sup>. Malcolm's reflection illustrates this shift, highlighting a move beyond the conserved academic culture of critique toward engaging the spontaneity of open curiosity and enquiry. In this emerging paradigm, social power is more effectively shared between the 'knowers' and the 'curious enquirers', and the work of the faculty is thus enriched. He continues on, reflecting on the general social impacts.

*Malcolm: The companionship is very successful. I see people who've been through the programme, either as a mentee or mentor, post the year of the programme are much more confident in having conversations with people.*

<sup>7</sup> John Nolte. *The Philosophy, Theory and Methods of J.L. Moreno*, Routledge, 2015, p.28.

Jenny: *Hmm. They have the relational comfort.*

Malcolm: *Yes. Yes. Not an academic conversation, but a relational conversation.*

Trevor also reflected on the spread of sociometric benefit beyond the immediate boundaries of the programme.

Trevor: *Well, right from the start I said I wanted to create a work environment in which there was more mutual support provided from academic to academic. ... But I was aware that it was hard to get through to academics. They were more likely to accept support from other academics than they were from professionals<sup>8</sup>. ... As we often said, there is benefit for the mentees AND for the mentors. I think that some of the mentees actually started to become quite good at supporting their other academic colleagues, consciously or unconsciously, using some of the approaches and some of the mindset.*

Jenny: *Some of them have actually reported that back to the group, haven't they? And a number of them come back and want to be mentors in later years.*

Trevor: *Yes, exactly. Which is a wonderful thing. And there are those instances where we have had people as both a mentor and a mentee at the same time. Like that associate professor, he'd already been a mentor once and then joined the programme again to be simultaneously mentor and mentee. I thought that was a pretty great thing because it actually showed his willingness to give and receive. And sometimes it's much easier to be a giver than it is to be a receiver.*

Jenny: *There is a reciprocity in it for you.*

Trevor: *Yes, because to be a receiver means to admit vulnerability. You can be seen. So yes.*

The value of vulnerability, as both an individual and collective benefit, emerged repeatedly in our conversations. Warming participants up to a preparedness to step out of their comfort zones and into vulnerability is a key factor in the spontaneity training and role development focus of the workshops.

Trevor: *People are encouraged to feel able to express vulnerability. ... They're hearing about the trials and tribulations that they either experience themselves or they see other people experiencing. And I feel that it creates in the room a pretty unique experience with regard to their life in the organisation that is a university. ... They see that they are surrounded or accompanied in the room in that time, by other human beings who have pretty much the same fears and anxieties and hopes and aspirations. And they see their working life, which is such a major part of their life, through an emotional lens that they're not used to seeing, not even aware of the existence of such a lens, if you like. So, an awareness of the emotional side of their work life. And I think it sort of softens them in a way.*

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8 For example, Human Resources professionals from the university's central service area.

Jenny: *Yes. It softens me hearing you say it.*

Trevor: *I think you see them melt a little bit. You know, they're given a degree of permission to let go of that shiny hard facade that people are expected to wear in their "professional" life.*

Trevor recalls a particularly powerful moment of this playing out in the room during a workshop.

Trevor: *I remember Paul<sup>9</sup>, who at the beginning of the induction workshop said he was a highly experienced mentor, doing it for many years. He rated himself an 8 or 9 out of 10. Then at the end of the workshop, when you asked people what were their thoughts reflecting on the morning that we'd spent together, his self-volunteered observation was he now realised he knew nothing about mentoring at all.*

Jenny: *He meant that as a positive comment.*

Trevor: *Oh, absolutely. Incredibly so. He was paying an extremely high compliment and he was opening up, being quite vulnerable in saying that, because he in particular had a traditional professorial demeanour, where it was important to him to always be seen as a source of strength and certainty. And I'd say that was a very big compliment, given that he had to let go of that for that moment. It does go to that whole issue of how transformative it can be to take people into the space, but also how much resistance there can be in the first place. ... I'm sure that for other people in the room on that day to hear Paul say that he learnt stuff he never expected to learn would have had a great deal of impact for a number of people. They would have thought, if he can agree that this brought him something new, then so could I.*

Malcolm's reflection on vulnerability draws on his personal experience as a mentor in the programme over many years, highlighting his appetite for spontaneity training and some of the benefit he has derived from it.

Malcolm: *The issue is that you (Jenny) can take it in any direction and the fear factor is 'am I going to end up sitting in a chair having to do something that I have no idea why you want me to do it?'. It's not that I'm uncomfortable in doing what you say. You know, and this is probably true of most of the academics, they are all perfectionists. They're all successful people. They've never failed anything. Everybody in that room, they've probably never failed at anything before. And then to get asked a question where there's a possibility of failure is huge.*

Jenny: *It's a demand in the moment to step into a space where literally you don't know.*

Malcolm: *Correct. And that's the benefit. That's the huge win, that you're able to overcome it. But it still sits there, time after time after time. So, because I know that, whatever happens is going to be a learning moment. That's the benefit of (attending the induction workshop) time after time after time. It is what keeps me coming back.*

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9 Name changed to protect confidentiality.

*I'm going to learn something new because I will be in a different situation. My improvement, if you like, is being able to recognise and work with people's feelings in a way that I didn't think I could do before the programme. It might be that it was innate in me anyway, but the programme has allowed me to recognise at a conscious level about those kinds of things.*

Jenny: *What's been the benefit of that for you?*

Malcolm: *Oh, it makes my conversations, with one person or a group of people, richer because I'm listening for them or with them, not just listening for my next opportunity to talk. That (old habit), I think, is gone or I have an ability to move past that.*

Malcolm also raises the value of the role development that occurs, for both mentors and mentees, through involvement in the programme.

Malcolm: *I think the other aspect of the programme we haven't really talked about is the acceptance of the responsibility of each of the roles, the mentee and the mentor. I think people leave that first meeting with a deeper understanding of the role that they have. You know, 'What is it as a mentee (or mentor) that I have to do'.*

This comment evokes the value proposition of adding the social roles of mentor and mentee to the university's academic environment, above and beyond the underlying role development which occurs at the individual level.

We also discussed potential limitations regarding the value of the programme. Firstly, Trevor and Malcolm were curious as to whether the workshop experience would be similarly novel for academics from non-STEMM disciplines. There have been few such participants in the programme, so we have limited capacity to empirically consider this question. But my gut feeling, having worked with academics from a range of disciplines, is that it would be similarly novel. Secondly, the frequency of involvement was identified as a key value determinant. Both Trevor and Malcolm saw that individual development and sociometric benefit were significantly greater for return participants, particularly mentors. Ongoing training for mentors makes good sense from a role development perspective, as embryonic or less developed roles need ongoing support to strengthen and become well integrated.

## Conclusion

The value of embracing a psychodramatic approach to the facilitation of a mentoring programme in an academic context is clear. My reflections as a psychodramatist accord closely with those of Trevor and Malcolm from the university world. The experience for the participating academics is novel and impactful, providing them with a springboard to develop and integrate a relational capacity in their rational world, the effect of which is felt and

seen within their mentoring relationships and beyond. My heartfelt appreciation and gratitude go to Trevor and Malcolm for their enthusiasm and generosity of spirit as companions and collaborators in the mentoring programme, and in the exploration, and this sharing of it, with the wider world.

Many practitioners working in organisations – private, public, community, not for profit etc – will find themselves facing the challenge of heavily conserved systems and cultures. The academic mentoring programme discussed in this article illustrates for us that, with a little boldness in application, a psychodramatic mindset can readily spark spontaneity in such contexts.

Professor Trevor Day is Emeritus Professor with the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Built Environment at Deakin University. Previously Executive Dean of the faculty, Trevor has a very keen interest in academic staff development and has established mentoring programmes at the University of Newcastle and Deakin University.

Professor Malcolm Campbell is Deputy Dean in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Built Environment at Deakin University. Until recently Malcolm was also Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning. In these roles, Malcolm has led the faculty in developing teaching and learning outcomes for students and staff and enhancing the curriculum.



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