

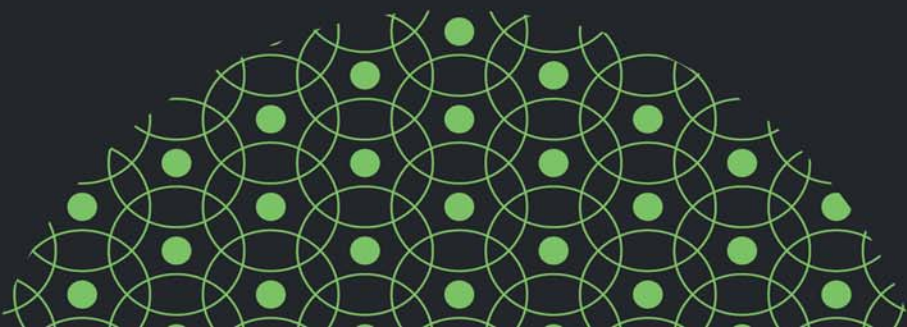


EMERALD POINTS

MENTORING WITHIN AND BEYOND ACADEMIA

Achieving the SDGs

Edited by LIA BLAJ-WARD



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To mentors – Past, present and future.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AI	Artificial Intelligence
APA	Academic Professional Apprenticeship
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CLT-ECOS	Carbon Literacy Training for Educators, Communities, Organizations and Students
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EDI	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
EDU	Education Development Unit
HE	Higher Education
KE	Knowledge Exchange
KEF	Knowledge Exchange Framework
MDG	Millenium Development Goal
NEF	New Economics Foundation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PSRB	Professional, Regulatory and Statutory Body
QAA	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, UK
R&D	Research and Development
SaP	Students as Partners
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSAUF	Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework
TSF	The Saville Foundation
UCT	University of Cape Town
WHO	World Health Organisation
XJTLU	Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

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This volume is an extended thank-you note to all the mentors who have supported the editor's and chapter authors' professional development and growth. They are too many to mention here individually, so instead we are expressing our gratitude by paying forward the valuable learning we have gained from conversations with them.

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VOLUME ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS

ABSTRACT

Mentoring, a mainstay of university work lives for many years, has acquired renewed relevance in a pandemic-transformed world. The volume centres on five mentoring conversations about SDG-linked topics, showcasing professional academic development with impact within and beyond campus walls.

Keywords: Mentoring; academic development; triple mission; societal impact; academic work

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INTRODUCTION: THE CONTINUED RELEVANCE OF MENTORING IN ACADEMIA

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ABSTRACT

The introductory chapter in the volume offers a rationale for bringing together, in an edited collection, contributions from authors who emphasize the continued relevance of mentoring in academia. The focus of mentoring in the volume is on enabling academics to orient their practice towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the introduction highlights the selection of SDGs discussed, as well as critically reflective responses to these in existing literature. The structure of the volume and of individual chapters is mapped for the benefit of readers. The volume is a hybrid text, combining academic scholarly reflection with narrative vignettes and with dialogue excerpts, to illustrate more fully SDG-oriented mentoring practices and experiences. The principles underpinning the writing methodology and the sources which have helped shape these principles are discussed here. As well as unpacking the writing methodology, the introductory chapter spotlights three core texts on mentoring which informed the volume at proposal stage and throughout the writing process. A personal note on mentoring from the volume editor is followed by a 'pause and reflect' section, which offers questions for the reader to consider when engaging with some or all the chapters in the volume.

Keywords: Mentoring; sustainability; SDGs; cross-disciplinarity; societal engagement

WHY A VOLUME ON MENTORING IN ACADEMIA?

As the global 2019 pandemic slowly dissipates, its legacy is taking clearer shape. The pandemic has caused unnecessary and unfair losses, and it would be remiss not to acknowledge these. At the same time, however, among the

destruction it has left in its wake, there are new possibilities to reconfigure older ways of learning and working. This is nowhere more apparent than in universities. Universities are places of learning – for their students, their staff, and their stakeholders in neighbouring communities as well as in more globally dispersed ones. In the pandemic-transformed third decade of the 21st century, what and how students learn at university are being redesigned. Both the what and the how are becoming more overtly attuned to the needs of society.

Mentoring academics to transform and realign learning experiences for students is a form of professional development that has resiliently withstood the passage of time. This volume illustrates the continued value of mentoring through five learning encounters, in a real or fictional university, with an academic playing a mentee role. Each of these conversations centres on a different aspect of academic practice, with relevance for students and society. Each chapter develops its own definition of mentoring and highlights a distinct facet of mentoring experiences and relationships.

A substantial body of literature on mentoring is available. Research which looks specifically at mentoring for academic staff development in higher education highlights that it is unevenly offered or taken up as a learning opportunity; the successful mentoring outcomes depend on a range of factors connected to the mentors' profiles and skillsets, the mentees' readiness to learn, the way mentoring relationships are set up and maintained formally or informally and the broader context in which mentoring unfolds. Most mentoring conversations take place behind closed doors, and there is little discussion of how mentors themselves develop. The volume contributes to making the mentoring process more transparent through the inclusion of mentoring dialogues which spotlight salient factors identified in the literature. The volume shares experiences of learning through mentoring and offers suggestions on how to support a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable organizational learning culture in universities, in line with universities' ambition to facilitate learning for students and staff in ways that are more responsive to society.

Given its focus on mentoring conversations which connect universities and society, the volume speaks to audiences within and outside academia. The mentoring dialogues in each chapter, fictional or actual, are informed both by insights from published academic research and by actual real-life conversations, offering readers a more authentic and direct way to understand how learning conversations unfold. The vast majority of mentoring literature in academia focuses on mentoring academics with regard to teaching and research; direct connections to societal engagement are rarely made. Explicit

reference to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in each chapter helps articulate the university–society connection more strongly and ensure the volume's relevance as a source of insight for academic practice and university learning in the third decade of the 21st century.

UNIVERSITIES AND THE SDGs: SUSTAINABLE LEARNING, SYSTEMIC APPROACHES AND CROSS-DISCIPLINARITY

In some countries, 17 is a meaningful mark of societal contribution: it is the official voting age or the age at which blood donors no longer need parental consent. Equally meaningfully, and on a global scale, 17 is the number of SDGs which the [United Nations \(2015\)](#) designated as priorities for countries to work collaboratively and achieve for the benefit of all. These superseded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were critiqued for being viewed as discrete goals, rather than interdependent components in a system. SDGs and the role universities play in relation to them are the focus of the mentoring conversations and scholarly analysis in this volume, building on [Advance HE and QAA \(2021\)](#) guidance on 'education for and about sustainable futures' (p. 7) and taking discussion closer to action towards the desired outcomes for 2030. The term 'university' is used as shorthand throughout the volume instead of higher education, but with awareness that the higher education landscape is substantially more nuanced, and that different labels may be preferred in different national contexts.

It would be overly ambitious to discuss the full complement of SDGs in one short volume. A selection of SDGs is highlighted throughout, in chapters written collaboratively about – and as the outcome of – mentoring relationships which involve academics and a range of other stakeholders. SDG4 ('Quality education') runs throughout the volume, as does SDG5 ('Gender equality'). In line with the stated ambition of SDG5 to 'empower all women and girls', invitations to contribute to the volume were made to colleagues who identify as women. Symbolically, the choice of five substantive chapters for the volume echoes the number of the gender equality SDG.

SDG17 ('Partnership for the goals') is also a foundational goal for the volume. The goal encourages global partnerships and working across the global North and global South to enhance capacity to achieve the SDGs. In response to this, the first of the five substantive chapters in the volume is a purposefully invited contribution from South Africa. The remaining four are led by colleagues at the volume editor's university. The authors of the first

chapter have rich experience of a complex higher education system and valuable expertise in facilitating transitions into and beyond learning and working in a university. Their contribution sets the tone for the volume: genuine partnership can only be achieved if built on a thorough understanding of and commitment to equity and inclusion and if fully resourced to engage with ‘the pain of structural exclusions in shaping people’s identities, experiences and achievements’ (Walker, 2018, p. 562). Discussion in the second chapter makes explicit reference to equity, diversity and inclusion, SDG4 and SDG17 but is purposefully kept at a general level so that it can relate to any individual goal or combination of SDGs. The second chapter focuses on micro-credentials, a newer form of learning with lifelong relevance.

SDG3 (‘Good health and wellbeing’), while explicitly highlighted in Chapter 3 in this volume, is again an undercurrent in all chapters. Well-being and inclusion lead to more effective learning and more impactful action. The volume writing process offered opportunities to authors to make meaningful connections, enhance their own well-being and reflect on ways to facilitate this in others. SDG11 (‘Sustainable cities and communities’) is highlighted alongside SDG3 in Chapter 3, through a discussion of the connection between tangible and intangible heritage and achieving well-being through inclusive communities. Chapter 4 continues the heritage thread and centres on meaningful interpretation and action to preserve an ancient forest (SDG15, ‘Life on land’). The final word belongs to climate. SDG13 (‘Climate action’) is addressed in the fifth chapter, in recognition that ‘there is no Planet B’ (Berners-Lee, 2021) and that more urgent, sustained and concerted action needs to be taken with regard to climate across the world.

Education for sustainable development at university requires learning environments which transgress disciplinary boundaries; are fully inclusive of learners with all characteristics whether legally protected or not; encompass holistic assessment of academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular experiences; and utilize the physical and virtual place of learning without depleting it of resource and energy (Advance HE and QAA, 2021). Targets and indicators, events, publications and actions linked to SDGs are displayed on the United Nations’ website. These – and the language of SDGs – may appear to some to be quite impenetrable and out of reach. The authors in this volume offer their own interpretation of the goals. They provide personally relevant definitions and share their own personal points of entry into conversations about SDGs and about sustainability more generally. The volume overall appreciates the perspective that each subject discipline can bring, and how academic perspectives intersect with a broader range of life experiences (authors’ professional homes count three different universities on three continents, four

different academic schools within the university where the volume editor is based, and five different external organizations). The volume includes diverse voices and recognizes the value of diverse life and professional experiences to enrich the experience of all.

In a lecture which explored ‘the coherence, possibilities and limitations of tertiary education’s affair with sustainable development’ (McCowan, 2023, p. 7), McCowan spotlights three forms in which universities engage with sustainability. The third – what McCowan refers to as the constructive role – focuses not on enacting commitments or creating accounts of contributions towards sustainability but on interrogating and reframing the meaning of sustainability. Questioning and reframing ensure that the SDGs are achieved in ways that recognize the interplay between them and mitigate the risk that action in response to one goal may be to the detriment of achieving others if the broader ecosystem is not taken into account. McCowan notes that in addition to journal articles about sustainability ‘there are also a variety of other more subtle ways in which ideas [i.e., understandings of sustainability] are constantly shaped, through the interactions in the classroom, discussions in cafés, deliberations amongst research project teams and strategizing in professional staff meetings’ (p. 14). The mentoring conversations in the present volume are examples of these alternative, ‘subtle ways’, with transformative potential for conversation partners and their immediate and extended stakeholder circles.

The volume is titled ‘Mentoring within and beyond higher education’, in acknowledgement that professional development for academics benefits stakeholders outside a university and involves learning from these. There is however, also a temporal dimension to ‘beyond’. As McCowan (2019) notes,

we need to think of higher education for but also beyond the SDGs: for the SDGs because, despite their limitations, they represent our best chance as human community at the current moment of halting or at least slowing the cataclysmic slide into environmental destruction and conflict; beyond the SDGs because they do not provide the final answer, and a more profound transformation in our conception of knowledge, development and university is ultimately needed. (p. 24)

VOLUME AND CHAPTER STRUCTURE

The lead authors of the five substantive chapters chose a significant aspect of academic practice to spotlight in relation to achieving the SDGs and identified

co-authors, within and/or beyond a university, who had helped shape their understanding of that aspect. Each substantive chapter opens with a brief scenario which sets the scene for a learning encounter linked to one or a combination of SDGs. The scenario reassembles fragments of experience and of reading in ways that are hoped will resonate with readers. The scenario leads to a mentoring dialogue, which unpacks the aspect of academic practice discussed and segues into or alternates with a synthesis of scholarly literature on the academic practice focus of the conversation as well as on a relevant aspect of mentoring (see [Table 1.1](#)).

In some chapters, a more extended piece of dialogue precedes the synthesis of scholarly literature; in others, the scholarly reflection is woven around dialogue excerpts. The mentoring dialogues give the reader the opportunity to ‘eavesdrop’ into conversations. They offer useful insights to spark learning and reflection, as well as action, in mentees, mentors and in the readers of the volume. The syntheses add scholarly depth and suggest areas for further exploration. Contributors to the volume and vignette protagonists are at different stages in their career, emphasizing the benefits of mentoring for all.

The first chapter is an external contribution, from authors with a wealth of experience in mentoring to support transitions in a global South university, and an in-depth understanding of challenges around inclusion and equity. The remaining four centre on aspects of academic practice currently explored by academics in the volume editor’s university. Chapter 2 addresses the possibility of introducing micro-credentials into the education portfolio. Chapter 3 looks at creating inclusive, resilient communities through participatory action research and engaging students as partners in projects. Chapter 4 shares insights from a knowledge exchange partnership. Chapter 5 discusses ways to assess climate learning in a way that generates more immediate beneficial impact for a range of stakeholders.

In line with the volume’s commitment to empowering women and girls (SDG5), the closing chapter includes contributions from two Nottingham Girls’ Academy students, who undertook a week of work experience with the volume editor at her university in their last but one year of high school. Elizabeth Clarke and Jessica Eduardo carried out a week-long research project about how university staff learn and develop in their job role, with a specific focus on mentoring. They used insights from the week-long project to reflect on their own understanding and experience of quality education and on the place of mentoring in this. Amrita Narang, a contributor to the volume, has kindly offered a response to Elizabeth’s and Jessica’s aspirations for the future, building on her own experience of learning and working on different continents. The strengths that Elizabeth and Jessica identified at the end of the

Table 1.1. A Map of Chapter Content.

Chapter Number and Title and SDG	Vignette and/or Dialogue Protagonists	Substantive Academic Practice Focus	Aspect of Mentoring Discussed
1. Adaptive mentoring for inclusive quality education: Meeting individuals in transition at their point of need (SDG4)	A dual professional new to academia is enabled to claim the value of her expertise more confidently and integrate this into her student-facing practice	Supporting transitions into and within academia	Adaptive mentoring
2. Cultivating sustainable mentoring relationships: Micro-credentials and the SDGs (relevant to all SDGs)	A fictional early career academic seeks guidance on how to develop a micro-credential	Micro-credentials	Mentoring relationships and meeting settings
3. Co-designing for inclusive heritage to explore well-being and resilient and inclusive communities. Choosing mentors and building relationships (SDG3 and SDG11)	The chapter authors, three mid-career academics, reflect on their initial encounter and subsequent collaborations	Using participatory action research and students as partners approaches to create well-being and inclusive communities	Authentic mentoring, finding a mentor; mentor role and characteristics
4. Mentoring in Sherwood Forest: Seeing the wood for the trees in a knowledge exchange project (SDG15)	The chapter authors, an early career academic with a knowledge exchange role and a university external project partner reflect on the project and their collaborative learning relationship	Knowledge exchange with external stakeholders; creating learning opportunities for students	Co-mentoring
5. Climate mentoring and coaching to create impactful assessment of climate learning at university (SDG13)	A fictional professor of digital marketing on the US East Coast plans to design an authentic piece of assessment which leads to behaviour change and has positive impact on society	Assessment of climate-focused solutions	Complementarity of mentoring and coaching, with particular reference to using climate coaching (a new direction in the coaching field) alongside mentoring

week-long project as having and taking forward into their university journey and beyond resonate with entrepreneurial education. The closing chapter co-author, Stuart Perrin, complements Amrita's response through highlights from his experience of introducing mentoring in the context of a Sino-UK joint venture entrepreneurial education initiative. Literature on entrepreneurial education notes 'a common tendency in society to perceive entrepreneurs as predominantly male heroic individuals possessing special innate traits and preferring to work under adverse conditions in solitude' (Lackeus, 2015, p. 10). The inclusion of Stuart's initiative in this chapter is another step towards dispelling that myth, through showcasing a complex and nuanced view of education to develop entrepreneurial strengths of relevance in a variety of contexts. The core focus of the volume is on mentoring academics to take full ownership of their role and act on their own and their universities' ambition to make a difference in society. As students are at the core of universities, however, the closing chapter includes discussion of student mentoring, to spark reflection on the persistent value of mentoring and on the importance of making this transparent to all categories of stakeholders, in support of collaboration and mutual growth.

The opening and closing chapters in the volume have 'pause and reflect' sections at the end, with questions to facilitate readers' fuller engagement with the ideas shared. The 'pause and reflect' questions in the introductory chapter are intended to guide the readers' journey through the whole volume, whether they choose to read this in full or engage with individual chapters. The 'pause and reflect' section in the closing chapter highlights three sources the volume editor serendipitously came across while putting the finishing touches on the volume. These are offered to readers as valuable lifelong learning prompts. In the substantive chapters, readers are invited to explore their own answers to the questions in the mentoring dialogues and to read and reflect on the literature referenced.

CHAPTER WRITING METHODOLOGY

Writing occupies a central place in academia. Published outputs disseminate insights and are an established measure of worth. The 2019 pandemic has exposed the unsustainability of academic writing and evaluation practices. The 'publish or perish' mentality, well established in academia, has impacted some categories of academic staff more than others. Explicit attention, in recent years however, on the need to 'publish and flourish' (Heron et al., 2021) is helping reverse this trend.