

**RULE-GOVERNED AND EXPERIMENTAL LEARNING:
LEVELS OF COMPLEXITY**

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ABSTRACT

Different forms of learning occur at different levels of complexity, in the sense that the problems of one level are more complex than those of lower levels of complexity, and require more complex values and thinking systems. Nevertheless, the higher levels presuppose the mastery of their predecessors, and in this sense transcend and include them. An instance typical of many areas of human activity is the relation between rule-governed and experimental learning. Games and professional practices provide numerous examples. One needs to have mastered the rules of chess in order to experiment with creative strategies; and so one for any game or sport. The same goes for academic disciplines such as mathematics and the physical sciences. The situation is more complex with professional practices, because human interests are at stake. The rules of practice exist to protect the interests as well as benefit the welfare of the client (patient, student, etc.) and the interests of the practitioner. Experimentation, precisely, means testing these rules. Prima facie, there is a conflict between rules and experimentation. The resolution depends in part on creating a new set of rules, capable of both protection of interests and support for experiment, and partly on *emergence* of new practices. Complexity (cum chaos) theory sheds some light on the perennial tension between order and novelty, and as such is a potential source of stimulation for thought and action in practices such as therapy and education. This paper explores that potential.