Five ways to get a grip by incorporating trust into the design and implementation of peer coaching programs

Cinq façons de prendre le contrôle en intégrant la confiance dans la conception et la mise en œuvre des programmes d'encadrement par les pairs

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Abstract

Peer coaching is a form of faculty development in which faculty improve their teaching skills through collaborative work or peer observation of teaching. As a tool grounded in experiential learning, peer coaching promotes targeted feedback, reflection on action, and collegial exchange to improve teacher self-efficacy and trainee learning outcomes. Nevertheless, faculty developers face challenges in creating sustainable, effective peer coaching programs as faculty fear scrutiny of their teaching practices. Additionally, to promote collegial exchange, faculty (the person observed and peer coach) must trust one another and accept vulnerability. Without attending to trust, faculty developers may find themselves on black ice, designing and implementing ineffective peer coaching programs. In this Black Ice article, we underscore the role of trust in peer coaching and present five ways to help faculty developers get a grip by incorporating trust into the design and implementation of peer coaching programs, optimizing its efficacy.

Résumé

L'encadrement par les pairs est une forme de développement professionnel dans laquelle les enseignants améliorent leurs compétences pédagogiques grâce à un travail collaboratif ou à l'observation de leurs pairs. En tant qu'outil fondé sur l'apprentissage par l'expérience, l'encadrement par les pairs favorise les commentaires ciblés, la réflexion sur l'action et les échanges entre collègues afin d'améliorer l'efficacité personnelle des enseignants et les résultats d'apprentissage des stagiaires. Néanmoins, les responsables du développement du corps professoral sont confrontés à des défis pour créer des programmes d'encadrement par les pairs durables et efficaces, car les enseignants craignent que leurs pratiques pédagogiques soient examinées de près. De plus, pour promouvoir les échanges entre collègues, les enseignants (la personne observée et le pair mentor) doivent se faire confiance et accepter leur vulnérabilité. Sans tenir compte de la confiance, les responsables du développement du corps professoral peuvent se retrouver sur une pente glissante, en concevant et en mettant en œuvre des programmes d'encadrement par les pairs inefficaces. Dans cet article Black Ice, nous soulignons le rôle de la confiance dans l'encadrement par les pairs et présentons cinq façons d'aider les responsables du développement du corps professoral à prendre le contrôle en intégrant la confiance dans la conception et la mise en œuvre des programmes d'encadrement par les pairs, afin d'optimiser leur efficacité.

Introduction

Peer coaching is "a collegial process where faculty voluntarily work together to improve and expand their teaching."[1] In health professions education (HPE), faculty may observe one another's teaching and provide feedback in settings such as small group teaching, clinical teaching, or lecturing. Trust is foundational to peer coaching. It enables faculty to co-create knowledge, experiment with teaching practices, and develop teaching self-efficacy.[2]

Scholars commonly define trust as a willingness to be vulnerable with another person based on positive expectations of their intentions or behaviours, despite an inability to control them.[3,4] Nevertheless, trust may be hindered if faculty fear having their teaching assessed.[5] Additionally, faculty must put forth deliberate efforts to cultivate trust, and trust is easily broken.[6] When faculty developers fail to consider the importance of trust in peer coaching, they may find themselves on black ice,

developing peer coaching programs that damage faculty relationships and fail to achieve expected learning outcomes. We propose five strategies to integrate trust into the design and implementation of peer coaching programs. These strategies help faculty developers get a grip on optimizing peer coaching program efficacy. Our recommendations are derived from evidence and paired with a practical example. See Table 1 for strategies and action steps.

Table 1. Strategies for incorporating trust into peer coaching programs.

Ways of incorporating trust	Recommended strategies
Establish psychological safety[2,3]	Promote a growth-oriented mindset by clearly communicating the purpose for peer coaching in the institution. Allow faculty to choose their peer coach. Provide a provide a list of peer coaches with biographies Consider creating reciprocal coaching pairs. Maintain confidentiality of oral and written feedback.
Build trust through low-risk activities[2,3,8]	Hold a pre-meeting prior to a formal observation to establish rapport and set goals for the observation and feedback. Promote relationship-building outside of work Small programs can consider a faculty retreat weekend or team-building activities. Larger programs may consider setting aside time for faculty to meet over coffee or lunch.
Develop self-trust with peer coach training[9,10]	Assign reflective writing assignments to help coaches internalize their purpose and coaching goals. Roleplay to help coaches practice articulating their role. Review cases to help coaches analyze situations through various theoretical lenses. Provide opportunities for coaches to share insights and challenges with each other.
Teach coaches to establish trustworthiness[2,3,4,5,9]	Base selection criteria for peer coaches on expertise. Train coaches to utilize an observation rubric of effective teaching behaviors. Review video scenarios to teach coaches how to identify behaviors that promote trustworthiness. Roleplay to teach coaches how to establish trustworthiness. Pair peer coaches with a more experienced coach who can observe and provide feedback on coaching sessions.
Promote a culture of collegial exchange[3,8,10]	Develop a coaching contract that reinforces the growth-oriented purpose of coaching, shares some personal information to enhance trustworthiness, and provides assurances of confidentiality. Use a formal structure for teaching observations. Provide coaching at recurring intervals to build trust through shared vulnerability.

How to get a grip on trust in peer coaching

1. Establish a Climate of Psychological Safety

Psychological safety describes an environment where faculty feel comfortable giving and receiving constructive feedback, collaborating, and experimenting in the workplace.[7] Trust and psychological safety are mutually reinforcing concepts. By creating psychologically safe programs, faculty developers create an environment for trust to develop. Trust allows faculty to be open and vulnerable as they collaborate toward common emotional and intellectual understandings.[6]

To foster psychological safety, faculty developers should establish a shared purpose for peer coaching that emphasizes a collaborative, growth-oriented mindset. They should emphasize that coaching serves a formative purpose, and feedback is not intended for summative evaluation, promotion, or tenure.[5] Programs with voluntary participation and those who allow faculty to select their peer coach further promote trust. Finally, faculty developers should emphasize to coaches how confidentiality is maintained. These strategies promote effective learning by fostering trust, reducing vulnerability, encouraging risk-taking, and promoting experimentation in teaching practices.[2]

2. Start with low-risk activities

Peer coaching may involve observation of teaching with feedback, which requires a high level of trust between faculty due to the observed faculty's vulnerable position. Thus, faculty developers should create opportunities for coaching pairs to build trust in low-risk situations.[2] Events, such as faculty retreats and getting coffee together, provide a low-risk platform for developing rapport, discovering common interests, and building trust. By participating in low-risk activities, peer coaching pairs develop trust based on values-based attachment rather than solely on one's reputation or expertise.[3] Additionally, faculty developers should recommend a pre-observation meeting before formal observation. During this meeting, coaches affirm the purpose for coaching, build connection, and assist the observed faculty in choosing a focus area for the observation and feedback.[8]

3. Develop self-trust with peer coach training

Peer coaches develop self-trust through self-awareness, a clear vision and purpose for coaching, as well as understanding of their communication skills, biases, integrity, and intentions.[9,10] Coaches strengthen self-trust

through training, experiential learning, and reflective practice. During training, faculty developers can guide coaches to write a purpose and vision statement for coaching. They can use role play to help coaches articulate their coaching role to others. Finally, by utilizing case studies, coaches can analyze situations through different theoretical lenses to identify areas of miscommunication based on verbal, nonverbal, and behavioral cues.[9]

4. Teach coaches how to establish trustworthiness

Faculty tend to trust peer coaches who demonstrate credibility, benevolence, integrity, and interpersonal communication skills.[3,4] Coached faculty initially judge a peer coach's credibility on perceived content knowledge and skill. However, as the coaching relationship progresses, credibility is influenced by the coached faculty's perception of their coach's effectiveness.[8] Coaches display benevolence by asking for permission to coach, posing questions to establish a relational connection, avoiding comparisons with others' teaching practices, and validating faculty teaching experiences.[2,3,4,9] They demonstrate integrity by keeping commitments and maintaining confidentiality throughout the coaching process. Furthermore, coaches build trust with faculty by demonstrating interpersonal communication skills like active listening without judgment and engaging in reciprocal self-disclosure.[2,3,9]

To establish program credibility, faculty developers may select coaches who are experienced educators and train them on effective feedback strategies. Additionally, developers may recommend coaches share validated teaching strategies and observation rubrics with coached faculty.[1,5] They may ask coaches to watch standardized videos of coaching sessions to identify behaviors that promote trustworthiness. Likewise, developers, may use role-play to help coaches practice the behaviors during a simulated coaching session. Finally, faculty developers may pair new peer coaches with experienced ones who observe coaching sessions and provide feedback on behaviors that strengthen trustworthiness.

5. Promote a culture of collegial exchange

When peer coaching fosters a culture of collegial exchange, it becomes self-reinforcing and sustainable.[10] Collegial exchange is a collaborative interaction where faculty share teaching observations and experiences to improve one another's teaching for the learners' benefit. When coaching partners trust one another, they display shared vulnerability which enhances collegial exchange.[3]

To promote collegial exchange, faculty developers should train coaches on how to deliver effective feedback, and they may suggest coaches create a contract to establish ground rules for the coaching relationship. If coaching involves peer observation of teaching, the peer coaching program should provide a formal structure that includes a pre-observation meeting, the observation, and a post-observation debrief with feedback. The pre-observation meeting helps the coach and faculty elucidate goals for the teaching session. It also allows the coach to clarify the purpose of coaching, define their role, and explain that they will observe without judgment or interference with trainee learning.[8] The post-observation debrief allows the coach to provide specific, measurable, and actionable feedback that facilitates collaborative discussion.[8] Finally, faculty developers should emphasize that peer coaches who participate in recurring coaching sessions with the same faculty partner create opportunities to form a relationships grounded in mutual respect, shared values, and met expectations.[3]

Conclusion

Faculty developers may encounter challenges when implementing peer coaching programs. Some faculty fear coaches will scrutinize their teaching and misuse feedback in decisions about promotion and tenure.[8] Additionally, faculty developers must design peer coaching programs that fit within their institutional context. For example, small programs may rely on reciprocal coaching because they lack resources to create robust peer coach training opportunities. Furthermore, faculty may struggle to attend coaching sessions due to time constraints and competing demands.

To overcome these challenges, faculty developers can utilize these five strategies to emphasize trust in the design and implementation of peer coaching programs. By establishing trust early, they reduce resistance, remove barriers to participation, and promote effective, sustainable programs.

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