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Peer Coaching as Professional Development for Remote, Online Faculty
Kimberly Ford, DM/IST; Lyda Downs, PhD; Melissa McDowell, MEd; Laurie Bedford, PhD

**Problem**
To date, much of the coaching literature focuses on work with elementary teachers in the area of literacy (for example, Stover, Kissel, Haag, & Schoniker, 2011). Very little research regarding faculty coaching at the university level has been conducted. Anecdotal evidence suggests that coaching is beneficial to higher education faculty and that those who engage in coaching are more confident in their teaching (McDowell, Bedford & DiTommasso Downs, 2014). However, no empirical evidence exists to support this, nor is there data to indicate the extent to which pedagogical struggles learned in coaching are transferred to the classroom.

**Purpose**
The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine how the coaching process assists faculty members in their ability to provide high quality instruction to students through increased confidence and their ability to apply pedagogical strategies discussed in the coaching session.

**Research Question**

- How does the Walden coaching process assist faculty members in their ability to provide high quality instruction to students?
- How do Walden faculty describe their confidence and ability to apply pedagogical strategies post-coaching?

**Theoretical Framework**
The original stage for coaching had roots set by our psychology forefathers and has evolved and grown into its own separate branch in recent decades. The theoretical framework for the current study is situated cognition (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Situated cognition proposes that learning is embedded within the context of the situation and is dependent upon interaction. Learning occurs through a cognitive apprenticeship model in which the participants discuss, share knowledge, and collaboratively problem solve.

**Relevant Scholarship**
Coaching can provide internal and psychological motivation of individual faculty members, which results in higher quality outcomes (Cox, 2012).

Faculty require access to professional development opportunities that provide timely and relevant support for instructional concerns (Bonura, Bissell, & Liljegren, 2012).

Investing in professional development such as coaching, which is specifically designed to address the learning challenges of the remote faculty member, facilitates building both individual and collective capacities. It also provides opportunities to cultivate relationships and share knowledge regardless of distance and how employees are dispersed (Lewis & Ewing, 2016).

Self-reflection and peer feedback strategies are effective techniques for continuous instructional improvement (Garcia, James, Bischof, & Baroffio, 2017).

Satisfaction with faculty development programs across higher education is high, particularly in voluntary programs. Faculty report positive changes in attitudes, increased knowledge/skills, and improved behavior following participation in a faculty development opportunity (Steinert, 2017).

Coaching facilitates the development of collaborative partnership and relationships. This provides for more positive learning environments and higher satisfaction with outcomes on the part of participants (Passmore & Rehman, 2012).

Coaching allows the faculty member to address individual goals and have a voice in their own learning through reflection and feedback—practices which are all critical to change (Stover, Kissel, Haag, & Schoniker, 2011).

**Participants**
Active Walden faculty members who participated in at least one coaching session with a faculty specialist from May, 2011 to December 2016 were invited to participate. Sixteen faculty members agreed to a 50-minute focus group session. Two faculty specialists who deliver coaching services were also interviewed and an analysis of the coaching database was conducted.

**Procedures**
Data were collected through focus groups with faculty coaching participants and were triangulated with propositional data that included questionnaires completed by the coaches and coaching registration data. Virtual focus groups were conducted using collaboration software that allowed for video sharing, written chat, and recorded/transcribed audio. Four focus groups were conducted over a one-month period of time. Each focus group lasted between forty and sixty minutes and included one to six participants for a total of sixteen participants. The two faculty specialists completed questionnaires and the coaching database was examined to triangulate the data from the focus groups.

**Analysis**
Initial coding was conducted by one of the members of the research team through a process of inductive analysis of the raw data that included the interviews and questionnaires. Once the initial coding was complete, the researcher categorized the individual comments and concepts into units. Finally, another researcher reviewed and confirmed findings to ensure that the diverse perspectives of the group were represented. She also compared findings of the focus groups to the faculty specialist questionnaire data to identify both consistent and divergent themes. The coaching database data were also used to triangulate themes that included number of coaching sessions with participants, assigned coach, and coaching topic.

**Significance & Social Change Implications**
Much of the coaching research has been conducted in K-12 educational and face-to-face environments. Results are positive and those who have participated in coaching report increased morale, high-quality collaborations, and an emphasis on proven pedagogical practices (Huston & Weaver, 2008).

Coaching research with faculty in higher education, online environments, could provide insight into the transferability of these findings to professional outcomes in this environment and situate coaching as an innovative alternative to a one-size-fits-all approach to professional development (Stover, Kissel, Haag, & Schoniker, 2011).

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