

Efficacy and Collegial Relationships

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Editorial

We all have had and continue to have important people in our lives. These people may help us to grow personally as well as professionally. They may help us solve problems in our daily lives. They may be with us at times of great stress, as well as great joy. Our relationships with these people are crucial to our being able to improve what we do; to resolve daily issues in our lives.

Our current research deals with those relationships which may be formed on a professional level, with the purpose of self-improvement. They are collegial in their foundation. They are based on mutually held values, mainly shared goals. Those goals often deal with professional growth. In this sense, they involve efficacy.

We feel there are three main types of collegial relationships, existing on a continuum. These relationships tend to differ in terms of overall purpose, techniques used during the relationship, and the length of time the relationship endures. With each type of collegial relationship comes a whole set of culturally-determined response sets. We develop these over the course of many encounters, refining them along the way.

On one end of the continuum might be supervision. The reason for this relationship may be contractual. You may only see your supervisor once a year, at the time of your review. You know how to act, how to respond, and what to say when you are with your supervisor.

Towards the middle of this continuum are relationships you develop with a coach, a teacher, professor, or a professional development trainer. Each of these people has a particular role in the educational setting. For example, you may attend a professional development meeting. The trainer at that meeting may remind you of a teacher or professor. Your relationship with that person is often short-lived, and has a specific purpose, passing on knowledge. Coaches have a particular skill to teach. Again you know how to act and respond.

At the other end of the continuum is the mentor. There is some confusion in the literature between the terms mentor and coach. A mentor is typically a colleague, someone "down the hall," who may have the same job as you do. The relationship is often longer than others, and does tend to change over the course of time, often becoming more personal. Mentors may have more experience in certain areas, but that feeling is mutual, between colleagues. Each person in the relationship has something to offer. The mentor/mentee relationship changes often, unlike the relationships discussed above. The mentor in one situation may be the mentee in another. Responding may often be more casual, may not always be about business.

What do collegial relationships have to do with the development of efficacy? Efficacy is a concept which originated in the thinking and writing of Albert Bandura, a social psychologist. Bandura felt that we acquire knowledge through the use of reasoning, by constructing meaning from the information presented. This learning was done in the context of what was already learned [1]. Does the term "life-long learner" ring a bell? People gather more knowledge during their lifetime. The goal of this gathering seems to be a sifting process. We use what seems to us to be worthwhile, and lose the rest. This saving and discarding process goes on for as long as we engage in professional endeavors. This is basically what we do when we read a journal article, or discuss an issue with a colleague, or attend a professional conference.

What we tend to keep seems to be what fits our needs at the time, and what is like information we already have. Is there anything new? Or do we just add to already acquired knowledge, refining that for new purposes? Collegial relationships help us to answer these questions. It is through collegial relationships that we can develop self-efficacy. We can determine what may work for us, what will not. Yet these relationships can change over time. Can our supervisor become a coach or mentor? If that is the case, if there are changes in the relationship over a period of time, can those changes be measured?

Our current research involves elementary school personnel; classroom teachers, speech-language pathologists, reading teachers, instructional coaches, and others. Specifically we are interested in improving the efficacy of use of a gestural system, which can be used in an adjunctive way to improve literacy instruction.

We have been recruiting subjects from people attending professional development meetings who would like to engage in a collegial relationship with the meeting trainer. The purpose would be to improve the efficacy of use of the gestural system. We have been measuring the verbal and nonverbal aspects of the communication interaction between these two people, in both a face-to-face and video conference format. We hope to see a change in these behaviors which may indicate a change in the collegial relationship.

References

1. Bandura A (1997) Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control. Freeman WH, New York.