

60-Second SoTL

Episode 57 – The Role of Trust in Peer Support Programs

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Jessie L. Moore:

What's the role of trust in peer support programs? That's the focus of this week's 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. I'm Jessie Moore.

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In "What is the Role of Trust in Peer Support Schemes for Underrepresented Students," Claire Hamshire, Mimi Benjamin, and Alan Soong Swee Kit explore how peer support initiatives can facilitate meaningful relationships and sense of belonging, and the authors offer a conceptual model for understanding how social connection, shared experience and culture, and interpersonal trust all contribute to belonging. Their article appears in the open access journal, *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*.

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The researchers were part of an international research seminar on meaningful learning experiences, hosted by the Center for Engaged Learning from 2020 to 2023, and their multi-institutional team studied students' perceptions of their peer leadership roles and the impact of peer support programs that were facilitated by underrepresented students. The researchers represented institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Singapore.

The scholars used narrative inquiry to invite students from underrepresented identity groups to share their experiences working as peer support leads. During one-to-one interviews or group focus groups, both conducted online, the researchers offered students the following prompt: "I would like you to tell me the story of your peer mentoring experience, beginning wherever and however you want and including whatever is important to you." Open-ended follow-up questions enabled the researchers to learn more about students' experiences.

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Hamshire, Benjamin, and Soong used framework analysis to analyze transcripts of the interviews and focus groups and identified three overarching themes. First, their student participants emphasized the importance of social connections in peer support or peer mentoring programs, including making space to form initial connections and opportunities to introduce peers to wider universities communities. Second, students highlighted the value of shared experiences and cultures for building trust and connections with their peers. Third, students spoke to the importance of interpersonal trust within the peer support programs.

I encourage listeners to read the full article to learn about nuanced differences across the institutional sites of study.

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As they put these findings in conversation with prior scholarship, the authors suggest that these three factors – social connection, shared experience and culture, and interpersonal trust – collectively contribute to belonging. Therefore, peer support programs that have sense of belonging as a program goal should attend to all three factors.

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To learn more about this study, visit our show notes for a link to the open access article and related resources.

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Jessie Moore:

Join us next week for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning on **60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning**. Learn more about the Center at www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org.

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