
PEER MENTORING IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

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A mentor is a kind of guide who, despite having been far enough to know something of what is down the path, comes back to walk with you, and thus leads without leaving you to follow.

Boyd (1988)

Abstract

Peer mentoring offers an approach whereby Peer Tutors (Mentors) help Mentees discover the new world of college life through the formation of safe and supportive peer relationships in the ESL Classroom. Peer mentors are considerably more advanced in their studies than peer mentees. By using their own experiences and insights, peer mentors help newer students (Mentees) settle into, and succeed at, and accustomed to the English language levels in the first year. This article provides evidence that peers mentoring works; reciprocal peer support and learning new domains in the English language skills namely the productive skills; writing and speaking skills. Eventually the receptive skills; listening and reading skills. This article reflects the hands-on approach of the Peer mentoring program conducted in the ESL Classroom by the ELT Centre at Gudlavalleru Engineering College. Initially, the program was introduced to first-year engineering students titled as Group Peer Mentoring at Transition. As a part of this program Mentors and Mentees were provided a platform of Peer discussion regarding the learning outcomes from the prescribed syllabus in the English. After the discussion, the responses will be shared in the social media i.e. Facebook by both the mentees and mentors. The program findings provide empirical evidence that peers mentoring works! In particular, the article provides an executive summary outlining the main project findings. Evidence that peers mentoring works by providing the means by which new students can access peer support in both social and academic

spheres throughout their first year. Identification of the main challenges of peer mentoring and the details about the Transition.

Keywords: peer, mentoring, classroom, ESL etc

Introduction

A mentor is a person who provides considerable guidance, support, and practical advice to a mentee who is close in age and shares common characteristics or experiences (Beltman & Schaeben, 2012; Kram, 1983). Moreover, a peer-mentoring program is an intervention strategy that pairs one or more students (i.e., mentees) with a more experienced student (i.e., peer mentor ;) who provides both practical guidance and social support to the mentee(s). Peer-mentoring programs are designed to foster positive outcomes including higher academic achievement and social acclimation. The emphasis on a personal, emotionally supportive relationship is what qualitatively separates mentoring from other forms of training or tutoring. Peer Mentoring is, therefore, a powerful mechanism that can aid student transition and promote student success. It creates a win-win situation because, while it provides the mentees with the much-needed support system that can facilitate the transition and enhance the student experience, it creates an excellent opportunity for the mentors to develop a range of skills such as communication skills, organizational skills, and leadership skills and contribute significantly to their personality development.

According to Tinto's social integration theory, when students feel more integrated into their classes and college, they are more likely to persist and graduate (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Studies have shown that college -based peer-mentoring programs, especially during the first year, can help students feel more connected and integrated to the college which increases student retention and their likelihood of graduating. Also, studies comparing college students with and without peer mentors found that students with peer mentors had significantly better grades lower failure rates and better retention. In addition, Salinitri (2005) investigated that peer-mentoring programs have been successful in improving the academic achievement of low achieving, first-year students.

The Survey – Context and Participants

As a part of the peer mentoring programme, the ELT Centre in the department of English, Gudlavalleru Engineering College conducted a screening test on Basic English grammar and writing tasks to all the first year engineering students. In this programme, initially 952 first-year engineering students (I Semester) from different branches registered for the screening test. After the screening test, the papers were valued by the concerned faculty members in the department. Based on the result, those who got more than 80 percent aggregate were declared as mentors in all the branches.

In this screening test, 254 students were declared as Mentors (i.e. 138 boy students and 116 girl students) remaining 698 students were declared as Mentees. Later, as a follow-up programme, all the mentors were instructed to attend one day workshop on *Transition + Peer Mentoring*. This workshop provided considerable details about an effective role of a Mentor, Code of Ethics (i.e. what a mentor expected to do and not expected to do) and an effective strategy for peer mentoring.

Effective role of a Mentor

- In the beginning, some of the mentees may appear hesitant and uncertain about this new mentor-mentee relationship. This guarded attitude is simply a manifestation of a feeling of insecurity about the new relationship and perhaps the college itself. As a matter of fact, with a friendly approach and motivation of Mentor, the mentees feeling of insecurity will gradually transform into a positive one. It was an admirable part on the side of a Mentor.
- The relationship of mentor with the mentees has an initial phase. In this phase, the mentees are more interested in finding out how much they can trust in Mentor. The mentees Establish trust and also be sincere. This will build the mentees trust in mentors.
- Here the mentor may not be a teacher or disciplinarian or therapist, or advisor. His/her role is just to be a dependable, consistent friend and role model. He/she may not criticize or preach. Never say "should have" or, "I told you so" to the mentees.
- Here the mentor will maintain dignity and attempt to influence the mentees through constructive feedback. The mentor empowers the mentees to make the right decisions without actually deciding for the mentee. The mentor will identify the interests of mentees and take them seriously. The mentor will be alert for opportunities and mentoring moments. Always help his/her mentees explore both positive and negative consequences.
- The most commonly cited benefits of the peer mentors are that they can provide general advice, as well as some form of emotional support, encouragement, motivation, or help with personal issues.
- As a friend, the mentor can share information, but he has to know his limitations. The mentees may share the problems with the mentor regarding abuses of any kind are best handled by professionals. If the mentor has any concerns, that he can contact the Mentor Coordinator immediately.

The expected code for Peer Mentors

- Mentor has to assist the mentees and motivate them.
- Mentor has to provide help with difficult material by putting it in a new context and helping mentees create connections between topics.

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- Giving mentees practical guidelines (e.g. reading an English newspaper every day, watching TV news) to help them improve their communication skills in English and motivate them to follow the guidelines.
 - To help them learn how to study, take notes, and prepare for an examination. Give them information about study methods and additional resources.
 - To encourage the mentees to speak up during discussion sessions in the classroom and not to encourage passive listening.
 - Mentor has to be punctual for appointments. If he makes the mentees wait, they may feel frustrated.
 - If the mentor witnesses or suspect a case of student misconduct, he must report it to the Mentor Coordinator immediately.
 - To maintain records of peer mentoring sessions.
 - To keep in mind the health, safety, and well-being of the mentees. The mentor can seek advice from the Mentor Coordinator whenever in doubt about the appropriateness of an event or activity.
 - To abide by the rules and regulations of the college given in the College Handbook

As a Peer Mentor, what is not expected to do

- Canceling PM sessions or arriving late for any session
- Doing the mentees' academic work (e.g. writing assignments)
- Being bossy and dictatorial
- Getting irritated and shouting at mentees who are slow on the uptake.
- Discussing any particular mentee's test scores or personal information with another student. (Student grades are private and confidential between students and instructors.)
- Commenting negatively to mentees about any teacher's teaching methods or personality.
- Mediating complicated or serious disputes between mentees and others or providing intensive counseling services to distressed students. As a matter of fact, such students should be referred to the Mentor Coordinator.
- Acting as a substitute for some other peer mentor.
- Accepting gifts from the mentees.

Effective Strategies for Peer Mentoring

- Positive Attitude: To encourage the mentee to approach life and goals with enthusiasm and to be accepting of self and others.
- Valuing: To encourage the mentee to examine beliefs and ideals in an effort to establish personal goals and values.
- Open-Mindedness: To encourage the mentee to keep an open mind to ideas.

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- Interrelations: The interrelations between the mentor and the mentee should be situations of sharing, caring, and empathizing.
 - Creative Problem Solving: To encourage the mentee to use a creative problem-solving process.
 - Effective Communication: To encourage the mentee to be an attentive listener and an assertive questioner.
 - Confidence: To assist the mentee in developing self-confidence.
 - Discovery: To encourage the mentee to be an independent thinker.
 - Strengths and Uniqueness: To encourage mentee to recognize individual strength and uniqueness and to build on them.
 - Awareness: Stress that the mentee is aware of the environment, be intuitive, be problem-sensitive, and be ready to make the most of opportunities.
 - Risk-Taking: To encourage the mentee to be a risk-taker and to be an active participant, not a spectator.
 - Flexibility: Share with the mentee the importance of being flexible and adaptable in attitudes and actions, looking for alternatives, seeing situations/persons from different perspectives.

Peer - Mentoring program - Methodology

In the Peer- Mentoring program, the ELT Centre added one additional hour to the first year students in a week. Along with an hour, each faculty member of English in the concerned branch is appointed as a Coordinator to the program. The Coordinator has to look after the discussion session between the mentor and mentees in the PM hour during the class time meticulously. The participants in this program are a total of 952 students. Among these, 254 students are appointed to act as mentors and 698 students to act as mentees. Later, each mentor is allocated 4 to 5 mentees. This program is designed with a schedule of 12 to 13 weeks (Odd & Even Semester) with a single hour (i.e. in a week) in the classroom. The coordinators of the program instruct all the mentors and mentees to register in the GEC Peer mentoring Facebook page and bloggers. During the discussion session mentors and mentees discuss the prescribed textbooks in the semester. The prescribed textbooks are *Innovate with English*, *Vocabulary builder* (for students of engineering and technology) and the two retold classics (*Pride and Prejudice*, *Gulliver's Travels*). Along with prescribed textbooks they discuss semester model paper.

In the next week, both the mentors and mentees post their comments in the GEC Peer Mentoring page. Here the mentees share their experiences and reflections regarding their learning skills in the ESL classroom.

Peer Mentoring Outcomes

In the GEC Peer Mentoring Facebook, the mentors and mentees post their comments and reflections that went on during the session. Peer mentoring is a useful session to develop

effective writing skills, presentation skills, teamwork, and interpersonal skills. Moreover, some of the mentees designed blog spots titled as *How Mentoring shaped into a better person?* In these blogs, they presented their initial hiccups and learning experiences. For instance, one of the Mentors responded in the GEC Peer mentoring Facebook like this:

"I have never been a part of group activities which made me hesitant to accept the role to be a mentor, but I took it as a challenge and started my journey as a peer mentor with a lot of expectations to learn new things."

"PM Sessions have helped us adapt to the new environment and new academic curriculum faster and has also helped us to find new friends."

Few mentees also responded confidently how they were benefitted by participating in the Peer Mentoring. Their experiences are posted like this;

"I had a difficulty when I had to start a discussion with my team but eventually I surpassed it and learned how to take an initiative while conversing."

"We discussed some of the academic topics like transition words, communication strategies, reading comprehension, and some of the components of vocabulary builder which made the subject more palatable to my peers and helped me to build confidence in the subject."

"All these sessions helped me to develop a new perspective and to look at things in a new way I am being more attentive, considerate, and patient and also am constantly trying to reflect on myself and making sure that I am approachable and friendly but not aloof and domineering."

Conclusion

An important aspect of the Transition+ approach to Peer mentoring in the ESL Classroom to first-year engineering students develops good learning outcomes. This article highlights how the Peer Mentoring Project made mentors in the absence of the teachers and mentees feel confident in the LSRW Skills.

In this project, Mentors felt responsible to impart their knowledge and skills that they have acquired to their mentees. Students accustomed to friendly environment among themselves to make these sessions lively and dynamic. Intensive Learning has been taken place among the mentors and mentees in the absence of the teachers' role.

Yet, many students struggle academically once they actually begin studying at the engineering level. Transition+ Peer mentoring works because it engenders peer relationships that, without breaking any academic boundaries, grow to include the 'tacit' study related knowledge students need to succeed at the College level.

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