

Reframing the Zone of Proximal Development Lens: Adaptive Approaches in Mentor-Mentee Relationships

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ABSTRACT

This study re-examined the mentor-mentee relationship through Vygotsky's socially constructed learning theory, specifically reframing the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as a reciprocal two-way dynamic process. The ZPD has traditionally been understood in mentor-mentee contexts as a one-way model, where mentors, as experts, guide mentees to realise their potential. This innovative study proposed that learning and language development are a two-way process, with both the mentor and mentee contributing to each other's professional growth. In this context, a mentor from content-driven health disciplines and a mentee focused on pedagogical knowledge engaged in reciprocal observations and feedback. These distinctions in expertise, content knowledge versus pedagogical knowledge resulted in a very successful experiential learning focused on quality teaching. Mentors shared their specialised content knowledge, while mentees, with their focus on teaching strategies, contributed more learner-centred pedagogical perspectives. Through these interactions, both mentor and mentee developed a deeper understanding of how content knowledge and teaching strategies align, enhancing both their teaching practices and their ability to deliver more effective classes, whether driven by content expertise or pedagogical approaches.

The study emphasises the importance of micro-connections for creating an equitable learning environment in the classroom and in the mentor-mentee relationship. These small yet meaningful interactions allowed both mentor and mentee to reflect on their practices and improve how they delivered gladden and pedagogy in their own classes. Meaningful collaboration expanded their professional communication and growth, enhancing their ability to teach and deliver knowledge effectively in diverse learning contexts. By working together in a collaborative, reflective environment, the two participants demonstrated how such partnerships can enhance and strengthen the broader educational experience for them and for their students.

Keywords: co-constructed learning; micro-connections; pedagogical practices; reciprocal feedback; reflection-in-action