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Module 6 - Co-design learning through Mentoring, Critical Friends and Shadowing

Unit 6.1 - Introduction

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The Co.De for Learning Philosophy

Core Insight

Effective learning design is a collaborative, iterative, and reflective process.

Key Idea

Moving beyond individual planning to a shared, co-created educational experience.

Focus

Integrating three powerful professional development practices into a unified co-design methodology that transforms how we create learning.

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The Three Core Components

In this module, co-design learning refers to the collaborative design, implementation and improvement of learning scenarios by teachers, supported by three complementary professional learning approaches:

Mentoring, critical friends and shadowing.

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Core principles of the methodology

- Psychological safety and trust as a prerequisite for honest feedback
- Structured protocols combined with contextual flexibility
- Reflection based on evidence, not personal opinion
- Iterative improvement cycles: design → test → observe → reflect → redesign

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Mentoring

Definition

- A supportive, developmental relationship between an experienced professional and a less experienced one.

Purpose

- Provides guidance, facilitates knowledge transfer, and supports professional growth.

Role in Co-Design

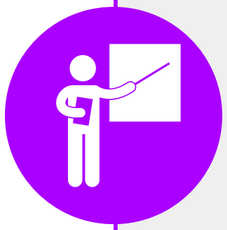
- Ensures foundational knowledge and best practices are integrated into the design.

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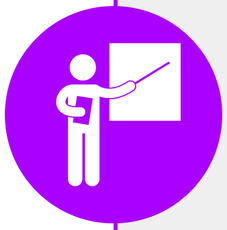
Critical Friends

Definition



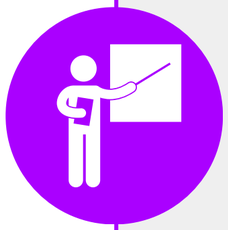
- A **structured, non-judgmental** process where peers offer constructive feedback.

Purpose



- Fosters deep reflection, identifies blind spots, and ensures rigor.

Role in Co-Design



- Acts as a **quality assurance** mechanism through honest dialogue.

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Shadowing

Definition

- Observational learning, where one professional closely follows another.

Purpose

- Builds contextual understanding and promotes empathy.

Role in Co-Design

- Provides real-world data and context for practical design.

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How They Work Together

Mentoring Provides

- The scaffolding and foundational knowledge, ensuring best practices and pedagogical soundness are built into the design from the start.

Critical Friends Provide

- The challenge and rigor, offering constructive feedback that identifies blind spots and ensures coherence and quality.

Shadowing Provides

- The context and real-world data, grounding the design in authentic practice and student needs.

The Unified Outcome

- A robust, validated, and context-aware learning design that is co-owned by all participants in the process.

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Building Better Learning Together

The co-design methodology transforms professional development into a mechanism for creating high-quality, validated, and context-aware learning scenarios that are co-owned by all participants.

1. Shared responsibility and collective ownership of the design process.
2. Deep thinking and continuous improvement through feedback cycles.
3. Rigorous peer review and real-world testing ensure quality and effectiveness.

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Ready to implement the methodology in your educational context?

Self-learning reflection activity

- Identify a current teaching challenge.
- Decide which approach (mentoring, critical friend, shadowing) would best support you.
- Explain why.

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References

Key references – Unit 6.1 Frontiers in Education (2022); Costa & Kallick – Critical Friends; OPM Mentoring Workbook; MENTOR Toolkit; Emerald Insight; SAGE Journals.

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You have completed Unit 6.1

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