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The Role of Trusting Relationships in Facilitating Change in Teaching Practices at the University Level

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Introduction

This study explores the impact of an academic development course on participants' most significant teaching relationship at their home institutions and, indirectly through this, their teaching practice. While doing so, we focus on one aspect of interpersonal relations, trust, whose importance has been demonstrated for leading to superior performance, for example, in diplomacy (Wheeler 2018; Forsberg 1999), business (e.g Luo 2002), and higher education (e.g. Dodgson 1993; Asgar and Pilkington 2017; Hauer et al 2014; Carless 2009). The effects of trust in higher education have been investigated, for example, with regard to mentoring/supervision (e.g. Hauer et al 2014; Asghar and Pilkington 2017) and educational leadership (e.g. Kezar 2014; Roxå and Mårtensson 2014).

However, targeted research into the relationship between trust and academic development programs remains scant. A few studies that set out to examine other aspects of academic development programs concluded that trust is an influential social process that successfully countered institutional resistance to academic practice innovations (Neame 2013) and increased conversations among colleagues about teaching in higher education (Roxå and Mårtensson 2015). This suggests that trusting relationships may be critical for the success of academic development programs, as trust may foster and distrust may hinder the ability of program participants to integrate their newly acquired knowledge and skills with their teaching practice. Yet, evidence from previous research is too limited to substantiate this claim.

Therefore, our goal is to explore how an external intervention in the form of an academic development program affected the trust, or lack thereof, between participants and the person they named as being most significant for their teaching within their university. Second, we investigate how trust influences participants' ability (or willingness) to apply knowledge learnt during an academic development program to their teaching.

This article contributes to the scholarship on academic development first by undertaking a systematic study of trust in the discipline. Second, we improve upon the conceptualization of trust and its dimension in academic development scholarship by following insights from cognate disciplines, business studies in particular.

Given the lack of evidence about the nature of the relationship between trust and academic development programs, we proceed inductively to explore this relationship in detail. We used a research design that combined card sort and in-depth interviews (Rugg and McGeorge 2005; Saunders, Dietz, Thornhill 2014) and interviewed the participants of an academic development program offered at a Czech and a Slovak university between 2017 and 2019 both before and after they completed the program. This allowed us to explore changes in trust and how much such change or stability may be linked to participation in the academic development program. When analyzing the data, we used frequencies and cross tabs to identify patterns and common themes in participants' responses. This paper reports on results for 11 individuals who completed the program in the 2017-2018 cohort. We continue data collection with the 2018-2019 cohort and will reanalyze the data at a later time.

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We find that academic development programs appear to influence the relationship of program participants with the person whom they find the most influential for their teaching. This happens by influencing the trustworthiness of program participants when it comes to teaching. The program enables participants to be able to talk about teaching and, in turn, that ability gives participants additional confidence to converse about and be active with regard to teaching-related matters. This way they can demonstrate their increased knowledge and skills and appear to be more trustworthy. At the same time, the level of trust in relationships also influences the extent to which participants' newly acquired knowledge and skills may spread across their institutions. Trust and, to some extent, mistrust fostered while ambivalence and distrust clearly inhibited conversations about teaching. Thus, we conclude that academic development programs influence significant other relationships and that trust in the context of these relationships is an important factor in propagating the knowledge and skills imparted by an academic development program at participants' home institutions.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, we discuss research on trust in academic development literature and appraise the role of trust in overcoming structural obstacles. Second, we describe our research setting. After presenting our findings, we conclude with recommendations for designing and implementing academic development programs.

Trust, Distrust, and Mistrust in Academic Development Studies

Although the effects of trust in higher education have been investigated, for example, with regard to mentoring or supervision (e.g. Hauer et al. 2014; Asghar, Mandy, and Ruth Pilkington. 2017) and educational leadership (e.g. Kezar 2014; Roxå and Mårtensson 2014), research into the relationship between trust and academic development programs is scant. With the exception of Stocks and Trevitt (2016), existing academic development scholarship (Campbell et al 2007; Rienties and Hosein 2015; Roxå and Mårtensson 2015; Willis and Strivens 2015) did not explicitly set out to explore the importance or the causes and consequences of trust but happened on it in the research process. While Roxå and Mårtensson (2015) and Rienties and Hosein (2015) uncovered the importance of trust with regard to informal learning and informal conversations about higher education teaching, Neame (2013); and (Stocks and Trevitt 2016) found trust essential for the propagation of academic development innovations. Further to that Campbell and colleagues (2007) highlight the role of trust as a moral dimension of academic development work and Willis and Strivens (2015) find it a facilitating condition of international cooperation among academic developers.

While the findings of these studies establish the viability of and the need for studying the interaction between trust and academic development programs, they did not study this relationship systematically. As a consequence, existing scholarship lacks conceptual clarity about trust. First, only Stocks and Trevitt (2016) and Willis and Strivens (2015) provide a definition of trust at all. The former define trust as a 'psychological state', and the latter differentiate between cognition-based trust, i.e. trust grounded in the belief about another individual's reliability and dependability, and emotion-based-trust, that is, reciprocated interpersonal care and concern. However, both definitions remain incomplete as Stocks and Trevitt (2016) do not specify what this psychological state consists of, and Willis and Strivens (2015) fail to recognize that all trust has an emotional and cognitive base even if their actual combination may vary (Lewis and Weigert 1985). Second, academic development scholarship does not conceptualize the relationship between trust and non-trust states, i.e. distrust,

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mistrust, and ambivalence, appearing to treat trust as a binary variable where trust stands in opposition to distrust. This contradicts trust scholarship that identifies additional trust-related conditions (e.g. Saunders, Dietz, Thornhill 2014; Guo, Lumineau and Lewicki 2017).

In this paper, we follow the consensual understanding of trust in Business Studies, International Relations and Sociology and define it as a reaction to risk and uncertainty and as one actor's (the trustor's) psychological state that comprises of the willingness to accept vulnerability to another individual (the trustee) based upon positive expectations regarding both the intentions and the behavior of the trustee (e.g. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman 1995; Rousseau et al 1988). In contrast, a distrustful actor will avoid making themselves vulnerable to another actor, because they expect harmful actions from the other actor (McKnight and Chervany 2001, 884-885).

Trust (and distrust) conceptualized this way are made up of emotional, cognitive and behavioral dimensions. First, the affective dimension of trust refers to the emotional investment people make into a relationship and to the emotional bond they form as a consequence (Lewis and Weigert 1985). All other things being equal, work relationships tend to be less emotional than personal relationships (Lewicki and Bunker 1996, 118). Second, trust operates as a cognitive bias that simplifies complexity for the trustor, allowing him to suspend the risk of betrayal and act as if that risk did not exist (Lewis and Weigert 1985, Brugger et al 2013, Möllering 2006b). As a result, trustors may overlook some inconsistency in behavior before they question their trust in another individual. This is emphatically true for distrust, which is associated with stronger emotions, making it more difficult to overcome distrust than to destroy trust (McKnight and Chervany 2001). Third, while either the emotional or cognitive aspect of trust may dominate trust judgements, trust is only a social process if it manifests in behavior, which then provides feedback to cognitive and emotional appraisals (Lewis and Weigert 1985; Luhmann 1979). As we discuss below, we relied on the emotional and behavioral manifestations of trust as we explored the link between trust and academic development.

Additionally and in line with recent developments in the trust literature (Saunders, Dietz and Thornhill 2014; see also Lewicki, McAllister and Bies 1998), we took into account two additional trust-related conditions—mistrust and ambivalence. Mistrust and ambivalence are states in which actors have made no clear final decision to trust or to distrust (see Guo, Lumineau, and Lewicki 2015, 27-28). 'Mistrust' denotes the absence of both trust and distrust as a result of information shortage to form a trust judgement. Mistrust reflects a relationship that is not very close. Consequently, it has not allowed an actor substantial interaction so as to gather evidence about the trustworthiness of another actor. As opposed to this, 'ambivalence' is characterized by strong emotions stemming from the simultaneous presence of high trust and high distrust (Lewicki et al 1998). It indicates that an actor is being torn between trusting and distrusting because of both positive and negative experiences with regard to trust.

Finally, both trust and related conditions have bandwidth, expanding to certain domains of the relationship and not to others, but with the caveat that distrust is more likely to spill over into other dimensions of the relationship (Guo, Lumineau and Lewicki 2017, 46; Sitkin and Roth 1993). For example, in an academic context, one may trust a colleague to finish a co-authored conference paper on time, but distrust the motivations of the same individual in leadership positions.

Given the domain-specificity of trust and distrust, our interest concerned participants' trust in their most significant teaching relationship at their PhD-granting institution, which was also where our academic development program was located. We define 'significant other' as the person whom a

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participant of our academic development program perceived to be the most relevant for their teaching. We had chosen to focus on significant others in recognition that not all professional relationships are equally important. However, unlike Roxå and Mårtensson (2015), we do not assume that significant others are necessarily trusted.[1] After all, in a work environment it is not always possible to freely choose who one works with, which may be particularly true for PhD students and junior academics who stand at the bottom of the career ladder.

The research context

The course *Learning-centered and reflective teaching. From theory to good practice* has been a joint program for doctoral students from Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic and the University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia funded by an Erasmus+ grant. The purpose of the course was to enhance participants' pedagogic knowledge, skills, and their teaching practice. This was to be achieved through helping participants to become student-centered, reflective about teaching and learning and use pedagogic theory when designing, conducting and evaluating their teaching. The course consisted of an intensive 8-day face-to-face training where participants were introduced to the principles of good teaching in higher education and to the key concepts from university pedagogy. Then, each participant was paired with a professional educational developer who served as the participant's coach in the 9-month online follow-up component of the course. During this later phase, participants were expected to integrate knowledge and skills developed in the first part of the course with their teaching practice. This meant designing and delivering at least three course sessions when participants apply student-centered approach to teaching and using teaching and learning methods that are innovative in the local educational context. After participants taught these innovated sessions, they evaluated the impact of their classes on student learning in from of a reflective paper.

In order to help participants to achieve the course outcomes, a number of elements were introduced into the course with the purpose of mitigating the role of existing barriers, including the tradition of teacher-centered teaching, teachers' workload or peer pressure to maintain a teacher-focused attitude to teaching, that participant faced in their teaching contexts. Past research (e.g. Knight & Trowler 2000; Trowler & Cooper 2002; Hockings 2005; Ginns et al. 2010; Nevgi 2012) documented how these contextual constraints make graduates from academic development programs struggle to integrate newly learnt knowledge and skills into their pedagogic practice. In particular, Pleschová and McAlpine (2016) called attention to how negative or unsupportive reactions from department heads and colleagues prevent participants from changing their teaching in line with development program goals.

Proceeding from this and from findings that academic development programs can improve participants' network to benefit their teaching (e.g. Van Waes et al 2018), we aimed at providing participants with scaffolding they would need to overcome contextual constraints. First of all, we included a special session into the face-to-face training, where participants could identify their institutional obstacles and receive advice from the session leader and peers. Second, we worked to

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[1] Our definition differs from Roxå and Mårtensson's (2009) for the same reason. They see 'significant others' as individuals whom a program participant has sincere (in contrast to casual) conversations with about teaching and learning. However, this limits significant others to trustees, for distrustors tend to avoid sharing information (Komiak and Benbasat 2008).

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encourage participants to create a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991), for example, through arranging group meals and networking activities during the training. For the same purpose, we also organized an informal cake and coffee meeting and invited participants for peer observations of each other's classes during the online element. During these events, we strived to call participants' attention to the importance of interpersonal relationships in the hope that they would recognize how these relationships can help them to conduct their classes in line with their student-centered intentions.

Research Design

Research Question

The general question guiding our research was how an intervention in the form of an academic development program affects the interpersonal relationship between participants and the person they named as being most significant for their teaching within their university. We used trust as a guiding conceptual framework to research these relationships and collected data based on a pre-test/post-test research design, through interviews with participants combined with card sorts method.

Data collection

The point of departure for data collection was the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of trust (Lewis and Weigert 1985). While the cognitive dimension proved difficult to tap into, we used emotional and behavioral indicators identified in the trust literature to understand participants' relationship with the most important person for their teaching.

After having interviewees identify their significant other with regard to their teaching practice and development as teachers, we used a combination of constrained card sorts and in-depth interviews to uncover the complexities of trust in the specified relationships (Rugg and McGeorge 2005). First, interview subjects were asked to sort 57 cards that contained feelings and behaviors. About half of these (30) were related to the trust dimension and another 27 contained additional feelings and behaviors (see table 1). The trust-related feelings and behaviors were identified through canvasing the literature: we started out from Saunders, Dietz and Thornhill (2014) that identified trust-related emotions for card sorting. However, given that trust also has a behavioral dimension, we perused the trust literature for behavioral indicators (e.g. withholding information signals distrust) and added these to the list of cards.

As a first step, interview subjects were asked to sort cards into two groups: (1) emotions they did not feel and behaviors they did not demonstrate towards their significant other and (2) feelings they felt and behaviors they demonstrated to some extent. As a second step, interview subjects were asked to select strongly felt emotions or often demonstrated behaviors from the latter group. Finally, interview subjects were directed to choose their three strongest feelings and/or most common behaviors.

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Table 1. Trust-, distrust-, mistrust-related feelings and behaviors included in the card sorts.

Card-sort categories*	Card-sort words/phases
Trust and distrust	trustful, distrustful
Expressions and manifestations of trust	confident, faithful, hopeful, safe, supported, encouraged, comfortable, active, take the initiative, feeling to have a choice, frequent interaction
Expressions and manifestations of distrust	afraid, anxious, skeptical, cynical, watchful for harm, withholding information, passive, avoid interaction, powerless
Expressions and manifestations of ambivalence	hesitant, suspicious, confused, uncertain, surprised, monitoring, insecure, ambivalent
Other	angry, calm, cheerful, concerned, demoralized, depressed, determined, disinterested, eager, enthusiastic, excited, frustrated, grateful, indifferent, involved, keen, on edge, optimistic, overwhelmed, panicky, positive, relieved, resentful, resigned, stressed, under pressure, worried

emotions can be felt and behaviors enacted to various degree, the card sorting informs us about the strength of these feelings & behaviors
Based on: Lewicki et al. 1998; McKnight and Chervany 2001; Abrahms et al., 2003; Koeszegi, 2004; Saunders, Dietz, Thornhill 2014

The card sorts method made it possible to establish program participants' level of trust towards their significant others systematically and with reasonable reliability (Rugg and McGeorge 2005). It also helped to avoid priming or sensitizing research subjects to trust. In accordance with the latter, interview subjects were only informed about the overall purpose ('to understand their feelings and behavior with regard to their teaching'), but not the explicit focus on trust. The multi-stage nature of the sorting made it possible to establish the nature of the relationships with regard to trust, but also to make conclusions about the strength of these feelings. The follow-on in-depth interview questions relied on the sorting as cues and were used to clarify meanings, explore the reasons behind the sorting, and understand the link between trust, mistrust, distrust or ambivalence on the one hand and teaching practice on the other.

The pre-test and post-test interviews were identical except in one respect. A few additional questions were added to the end of the post-test interview in which we inquired into the nature and degree of change (or stability) of the relationship with the significant other and the reasons behind it. We started to explore the causes of change, or lack thereof, by asking the course participants to explain the reason behind change/stability, compare their relative power, level of comfort, frequency of interaction and the subject of teaching-related discussions in their pre-test and post-test relationship. As we were specifically interested in the effect of the teaching development program on the relationship, we explicitly asked after this in our closing question. This allowed us to get more information about the influence of our program on their most significant teaching relationships even when participants did not voluntary mention it in the course of the interview.

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Research was conducted in harmony with established ethical standards. Ethics approval was obtained through the project partner, Central European University. Interview subjects were granted anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process, they were informed in writing about the purpose of the research, data handling policies and their rights to withdraw from the study any time. Written consent was obtained from each research subject for making audio records of the interviews and for the use of the interviews for research purposes.

All interviews but two, which were done over Skype at the request of the interview subjects, were conducted in person. All the interviews were recorded, and then transcribed verbatim. In one case when a technical issues made it impossible to rely on the recording, we used the interviewers' notes in place of the interview transcript. The interviews took between 20 minutes and 46 minutes, with an average duration of 25 minutes for pre-test and 31 minutes for post-test interviews. Given the small size of our target population, we aimed at interviewing each participant who had teaching experience prior to entering our program. Altogether, we made interviews with 15 participants (2 participants declined to be interviewed) before the start of the teacher development program and conducted post-test interviews with all the participants (N=12) who successfully completed the program. Unfortunately, one participant did not answer the post-trust interview questions about their significant other in the context of their PhD granting institutions, and, thus, their answers were not possible to interpret with regard to our research question. Therefore, the analysis below contains the results for the 11 post-test and pre-test interviews, which represent the first cohort of our program. We also analyze the profile of the three dropouts to see if their decision to exit the program may be linked to trust.

Data Analysis

Each interview was coded by two coders and the differences were then resolved in the course of several meetings. We identified trust, distrust, mistrust, and ambivalence in the pre-program and post-program relationships by a combined analysis of the card sort tables and the interviews. We identified the nature of the relationship by looking at the strong feelings/most often exhibited behavior, including the top three choices of participants. At least three had to be chosen of the corresponding emotions to assess the relationship as trust or distrust. The selection of more than 5 trust- or distrust-related cards indicated strong trust and strong distrust respectively. Otherwise, trust and distrust were deemed as weak. Ambivalence was identified either by the presence of three corresponding cards and/or the simultaneous presence of trust and distrust. Not meeting the minimum definition for these categories resulted in the labelling of the relationship as mistrust. The interviews were analyzed with the help of the definitions of trust and related conditions provided above, the feelings and actions relating to these conditions, and two pre-conditions to trust states— trustworthiness and likability. The former was measured by identifying statements along the ABI (ability, benevolence, and integrity) indicator and likability, which was measured on the basis of expressions of likes and dislikes and whether the other was judged to be good to work with (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman 1995; Nikolova, Möllering and Reihlen 2015). An effort was made to differentiate between generalized trust and generalized distrust, which refers to an individual's overall trust in society, and the presence of trust and distrust in the relations examined. An overall judgement was made about the nature of the relationship on the basis of the card sort tables and the interviews.

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We combined the analysis of pre-program and post-program interviews pertaining to trust conditions as well as participants' perceptions expressed in the course of post-test interviews to understand if and how significant other relationships has changed. While we did not openly ask participants to compare the nature of trust conditions in the relationship, we asked them to appraise whether and how the relationship changed in general and more specifically with regard to their role, relative power and feeling of comfort in the relationship. We used frequencies and cross tabulations to recognize patterns in our data.

Findings

Significant others and trust

The doctoral dissertation supervisor was named most frequently both before and after the program as the greatest influence on one's teaching while course leaders were the second most popular in the pre-program phase and other faculty members in the post-program phase. This change in significant others was explained by the significant other leaving the PhD granting institutions and the graduation of our program participants from their doctoral programs and becoming faculty members, which made proximity (e.g. sharing office space) an important factor in selecting someone as a significant other (see table 1). Supervisors proved to be the most lasting relationships over the course of the program in an environment where participants reported a different significant other in 6 out of 11 cases.

At the same time, as participants noted (#10, #17) the choice set appeared to be small especially as participants tended to look for their significant others in the confines of their own departments. Indeed, four participants had a difficulty in naming a significant other, two of them facing this problem in both the pre-program and the post-program phase. On the one hand, the limited number of possible choices explain why the type of people chosen as significant others remained relatively stable. On the other hand, it may be necessary to expand the possible significant others and academic developers would be the obvious choice for this role. Indeed, one participant expressed the view that she only received teaching-related support from her coach and the academic program leader of the Erasmus+ training program (#12). Another suggested that "persons who are teaching us in a program... would work much better as a significant other in the context of my teaching than people that work at my department" (#17). Unfortunately, the coaches involved in our program could not qualify as significant others for our research, given their temporary association with the university that last only the duration of the Erasmus+ grant (N=2) or because they worked for project partners other than the participants' PhD-granting institutions (N=3).

Table 1. The identity of the significant other

Pre-program				Post-program	
Significant other	**Frequency**			**Significant other**	**Frequency**
PhD supervisor	5			PhD supervisor	5
course leader	3			course leader	2
MA dissertation supervisor	1			MA dissertation supervisor	0
colleague (other faculty member)	1			colleague (other faculty member)	4
colleague (PhD student)	1			colleague (PhD student)	0

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TOTAL	11		TOTAL	11

Trust was by far the most common type of significant other relationships both at the beginning and at the end of the program (see table 2). At the same time, PhD supervisors as significant others show the most variation across trust conditions with 2 cases of both trust mistrust and 1 case of ambivalence at the beginning of the program and with 3 cases of trust, 1 case of ambivalence and 1 case of distrust at the end of the program. A change in the identity of the significant other resulted in a more positive relationship in terms of trust (from distrust to mistrust and mistrust to trust) for three participants, remained unchanged in two cases and resulted in a worse relationship (trust to distrust). However, we can denote a similar trend when the identity of the significant other remained unchanged: in three cases the trust condition remained unchanged and got worse and better for 1 participant each.

Table 2. The distribution of significant other relationships across trust-related conditions.

Pre-program		Post-program	
Trust condition	**Frequency**	Trust condition	**Frequency**
trust	6	trust	7
mistrust	3	mistrust	2
distrust	1	distrust	1
ambivalence	1	ambivalence	1

In line with our definition, participants described their trust as not expecting harm. "I'm quite sure," expressed one participant, "when I'm around him, he's not going to do anything to sabotage me" (#6). Another said that he can trust his significant other, because the person would help in good face (#3). When explaining why they trusted, the benevolence dimension of trustworthiness was prioritized over other dimensions and were expressed in terms of support/reliance, freedom of choice and respect from their significant others. Respect was mentioned 10 times by 9 different participants, saying, for example, that "I'm sure to have his support" (#19) or that "I feel supported in all activities" (#3). Participants who have been the junior partner in these relationships, also found respect from their significant other as a source of trust. In part, they trusted because they have been "taken seriously whatever nonsense I have been thinking" (#7) and "he was talking to me like I was equal to him" (#12).

Distrustors reported harm or the expectation of it. "I couldn't trust her and I was … I had to be alert of what her plans are and regarding teaching I was also afraid that she will find it a problem that I'm teaching […] "I couldn't trust her and I couldn't share my progress…I could not discuss my progress with her. I could not trust her that she will not use that information I share against me" (#12). Although sometimes harm was unintentional and mediated through the perception of students, the unpredictability of the course leader negatively affected the reputation of a program participant as well. "When evaluations came … we [seminar tutors] were judged […] I was not happy with that evaluation, because students evaluated our performance … somehow it was … somehow mediated by the evaluation of the main teacher" (#17).

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Relationships characterized by mistrust demonstrated some of the features of trusting relationship. The significant other was seen as able, doing their best for the participant, giving a free hand to participants, being reliable and supportive. However, these sentiments were expressed in conjunction with perceived disinterest, lack of time, and a general disillusionment with academic relationships.

Both distrust and ambivalence gave rise to strong negative emotions. Describing their relationship as one of "love and hate," the only participant in an ambivalent relationship also expressed that she felt that "I want to strangle her sometimes" (#5). To get relief from such feelings, participants reacted with going their own way, not asking permission to do things, ignoring some advice, or avoiding interaction with the significant other. In one distrusting relationship, avoidance manifested in the termination of the relationship as the participant quit her PhD program. Emotionally, two participants reported resignation and going along with things because they saw no chance for escaping the relationship and for the significant other to change their behavior. In the words of one participant, "I [felt] resigned in the sense that I knew that my performance won't bring any change" (#17).

However, trusting relationship were not without problems in the pre-program stage. Four participants were conscious of the reciprocal trust of their significant other. "He had that trust in me," one participant said. The same participant also saw independent teaching duties as a sign of trust: "He had the confidence […] to allow me to try without having necessarily to sit at the back of the class" (#6). Another participant linked trust to encouragement: "I felt that, uh, he trusts me, uhhh, so, I had little problem with teaching of that course. So always when I, when I was feeling like I can't do it, I'm not competent to this topic, he always told me that I can do it, it's not a problem." (#12). However, two participants talked of the trusting relationship with their significant other as a burden rather than as a source of encouragement, feeling that such trust was undeserved. As one of them said, "I had this great support and I'm being trusted […] I don't want to lose this trust and I do not want to disappoint her" (#5). She added that "sometimes she sees me as she does herself, which might be [a] compliment for me […] but I'm not [like her]."

Program impact

Eight of the eleven participants—3 voluntarily 5 when directly asked—opined that the academic development program they participated in influenced their significant other relationships positively. No one has reported a negative impact, suggesting that the diminishing of trust in relationships was not due to participation in our program. Indeed, a participant whose relationship changed for the worse (from trust to mistrust), still reported a positive impact on the relationship. Although the number of cases are too small to report anything definite, it appears that positive program impact was—and is—possible in the context of trust, mistrust and even ambivalence, but not in distrusting relationships.

Table 3: program impact in the context of significant other relationships.

Changes in trust conditions		Positive program impact	No impact
No change (trust, ambivalence)		5	0
Positive change	mistrust to trust (change for the better)	1	1

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Negative change	trust to mistrust (change for the worse	1	0
	trust to distrust	0	1

While the academic development program did not change the nature of the relationship in terms of trust, it made possible more subtle changes. In trusting relationships, the program and assignments improved interaction regarding teaching and were also conversations starters. Participants believed that the knowledge and skills they acquired would put them into a better bargaining position or improved their confidence regarding teaching-related issues. In relationships of mistrust and ambivalence, participants reported gaining more independence either by having the space to develop their own—different—teaching styles or because increased confidence and knowledge about teaching allowed them to judiciously ignore some of the demands of their significant other by deciding that "enough was enough" (#13, #5).

As we tapped more deeply into the relationships, asking participants to compare their role, relative power, and level of comfort in the pre-program and post-program relationships, it appears that, as one participant expressed it, our program influenced the participants' side of the relationship (#8), thereby brining new dynamics into interactions with the significant other. Seven out of eleven participants reported at the end of the program that they felt that their role had changed vis-à-vis their significant other. Seven participants reported a positive change in their relative power and five noted that they felt more comfortable in the relationship as before (see table 4).

Table 4. Self-reported change in participants' role, relative power, and feeling of comfort in significant other relationships.

		Role	Relative power	Comfort
Changed	decreased	7	1	1
	increased		7	5
Did not change		2	2	4
missing/unclear		2	1	1

The most common theme regarding the nature of the changes could be attributed to more control in the relationship because of improved knowledge and skills. The latter suggests that participation in the academic development program in particular influenced the ability dimension of trustworthiness by improving participants' knowledge and skills about teaching and by increasing their self-confidence about teaching-related issues. One of the common shifts reported was developing a more collegial relationship. As one participant said, "I acquired certain skills and experience let's say during the past year and the relationship is not completely teacher-student-like but it's more like [one between] colleagues" (#13). Another expressed the opinion that the significant other's knowledge about the participant's involvement in the course led to "my suggestions were like taken into account and I was able to change the literature a bit" (#7). Yet another participant felt more comfortable in the relationship, because "I know better what I am doing." (#8). This empowerment also manifested itself in how trust from the supervisor was no longer a problem that preoccupied participants. Only one of these participants mentioned it in the post-program interviews and did so without seeing it as a burden. Finally, a combination of improved knowledge and confidence did not only seem to have an empowering effect, but also allowed some participants to demonstrate their teaching competence to

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their significant other, and, as a result, this improved or at least could improve the trust of the significant other in them (#8).

Discussions

Discussions have changed in line with program goals, that is, towards student-centeredness (see table 5). Before the program the most often discussed topic was class content. While discussions regarding content remained important, students—in particular their progress, their feelings, and problems with them—has become the most important dimension of conversations with the significant other. Moreover, teaching methods, which were not discussed in the pre-program phase at all, became the third most frequent conversational topic. A tentative shift away from feedback toward self-reflection on feelings and performance is also noticeable although this is more about the disappearance of feedback as a theme and not so much about a substantial increase in the frequency of self-reflection as one would expect given the program goals. Finally, teaching has become a slightly more frequent topic of discussion. Three out of 11 participants indicated that they discuss teaching more often than before, 7 reported no change in the frequency of discussions and 1 participant indicated less frequent discussions about teaching.

Table 5. Most frequent discussion topics before and after the program

Pre-program		Post-program	
Topic	**Frequency**	**Topic**	**Frequency**
Content	7	Content	5
Feedback	3	Feedback	0
Assessment	2	Assessment	3
Students	2	Students	8
Administrative issues	2	Administrative issues	2
Own feelings & performance	1	Own feelings & performance	2
Syllabus	1	Syllabus	2
Methods	0	Methods	4
TOTAL	18	TOTAL	26

While it is important to keep in mind that other factors—e.g. the availability of the significant other, the need, or lack thereof, of the participant to talk about teaching, or the compulsoriness of interaction about teaching—may determine whether teaching-related discussions took place, trust seems to have an impact on the frequency and subject of discussions regarding teaching. Improving relationships saw no change in the frequency of discussions (N=2) or increased interactions over teaching (N=2). Meanwhile, worsening relationships resulted in no change (N=1) or less frequent discussions about teaching (N=1). In 4 cases (4 trusting relationships, 1 ambivalent relationship) where there was no change in the degree of trust, the frequency of discussions also remained unchanged with the exception of one of the trusting relationships, where teaching-related discussions have become more frequent.

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Only trust and, to a lesser extent, mistrust seem to make discussions about most topics possible (see table 6). The only topics discussed in ambivalent and distrustful relationships as well were teaching content and assessment—topics that are difficult to avoid in any teaching contexts. However, discussions about topics that required participants to make themselves vulnerable voluntarily, such as receiving feedback and evaluating their own feelings and performance only happened in trusting relationships. Moreover, trusting relationship also seemed to allow participants to talk about and, thus, potentially spread new knowledge and skills. While acknowledging that the final decision was their significant other's, one participant appreciated that the significant other was open to his suggestions. Another participant who had a trusting relationship with her significant other recounted how the openness and security of the relationship did not just made it possible for the participant to suggest a new teaching technique—the minute paper—but also helped spread knowledge and use as her significant other responded by acknowledging that "it was time to do something new. I like to try new things, but I don't have so much time to read the literature and so on, so it's nice you told me about that and if you have also something else, you can tell me and I will try" (#10). Finally, we find that trust seems to be important for discussions regarding the syllabus. This finding and results above regarding improvement in the participants' ability and its effect on trust suggests that a likely explanation for the relationship between syllabus design and trust is that this topic only becomes a talking point between the participant and their significant other when the latter trusts the ability of the former to contribute and/or when the participant is trusting their own skills and the significant other to initiated conversations about the syllabus.

Table 6. Types of content listed according to the types of relationship they are discussed in

	Pre-program	Post-program
Content	trust (N=5) ambivalence (1) mistrust (1)	trust (3) ambivalence (1) distrust (1)
Methods	n/a	trust (3) mistrust (1)
Assessment	trust (1) mistrust (1)	ambivalence (1) trust (1) mistrust (1)
Students	trust (2)	trust (7) mistrust (1)
Feedback	trust (3)	n/a
Own feelings & performance	trust (1)	trust (2)
Syllabus	trust (1)	trust (2)
Administrative issues	trust (1) mistrust (1)	trust (2)

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Trust and Dropping out of the program

Three participants dropped out in course of the academic development program. Based on the information available to us, this does not seem to be related to the identity of the significant others or trust. Only one of the three had a difficulty in naming a significant other. They were involved in significant other relationships that generally seemed to be beneficial for gaining confidence in knowledge and skills and allowed space for teaching-related conversations. One of them named their dissertation supervisor as their significant other and had a relationship based on mistrust. The other two named the course leader and enjoyed trusting relationships with them. In line with this, dropouts conversed about teaching with their supervisors often or very often. The reasons given by these participants also confirm a lack of relationship to trust. They explained their withdrawal from the program with lack of time and a need to focus on the doctoral dissertation, lack of belief in the benefits of student-centered education, and a problem with teaching the classes that were part of assignments of the academic development program. This appears to confirm the priority given to research over teaching in most academic institutions and, consequently, the sacrificing the former for progress with the latter.

Conclusion and recommendations

Findings

This article set out to explore of an academic development course on participants' most significant teaching relationship at their home institutions and, indirectly through this, their teaching practice. Using a pre-test/post-test research design and looking for patterns in the data, we find that unless the relationship was based on distrust, our development program impacted their significant other relationships albeit in subtle ways by improving the ability and confidence of our participants and, thus, their trustworthiness. In the context of ambivalence and mistrust, this allowed participants to gain independence and be less dependent on these relationships. In case of trust, the increased knowledge and trustworthiness gained through the academic development program could foster additional trust in the participant by enabling participants to take the initiative and start conversations regarding teaching, and, thus, influence the perception of their ability and trustworthiness.

In line with the assertion of trust researchers that trust fosters and distrust inhibits the sharing of (sensitive) information (Komiak and Bebasat 2008) and in accordance with the strong link Carless 2009) found between assessment and trust, we find that conversations about sensitive topics such as feedback and self-assessment only happens in trusting relationships. However, it appears that content and assessment are still discussed in any kind of relationship, and the driver here seems to be a need for coordination rather than trust. Overall, this suggests two things. First, that participants of an academic development program are only likely to practice self-reflection openly with people they trust. Second, that an academic development program may only create impact beyond the individual at the participant's home institution in the absence of ambivalence and distrust that is in an environment characterized by trust-based interactions.

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*Recommendation*s

The findings of this article lead us to make four recommendations for academic developers. First, we do not find it desirable to select trainees on the basis of their significant other relationships. However, academic developers should explore the nature of the teaching relationship of their trainees. Second, such input should be used to encourage trainees' interactions with their trusted significant others. In addition, academic developers may aim at involving such significant others more closely in the program as natural allies. Such involvement may take many forms, including forging relationships where the significant other would act as an advocate for the program or inviting them to participate in the program in some capacity. Third, additional relationship support should be provided to trainees involved in more complex teaching relationships so as to allow them to practice their new skills by helping them to see when they could strike out on their own and when they need to give precedence to maintaining the relationship.

Given the small choice set and the tendency of trainees to see their dissertation supervisor or the course leader as their significant others, a termination of the significant other relationship, however complex, maybe unwise. Yet, trainees could also be encouraged to develop additional relationships regarding teaching that in the long run could replace their complex non-trusting relationships in significance. Finally, the lack of time on the part of some significant others to engage in discussions with program participants, some participants' complaints that the choice set for significant others was small, and one participant's suggestions that his coach would be a much better option for a significant other lead to the recommendation that permanent teaching units should be established at universities. Employees of such units could take or share some of the responsibilities for teaching-related issues with researchers who are already pressed for time. This way a more permanent long-term support network could be created for program participants, and help foster program impact in the long term. Thus, we suggest that grant programs aiming at improving teaching at higher education institutions should aim at creating and/or financing such units and that additional funding opportunities should be made available to sustain these units once the original grant runs out.

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