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## Self-Talk: Mentoring and Empowering Faculty to Contribute to Organizational Change

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Self-Talk: Mentoring and Empowering Faculty to Contribute to  
Organizational Change

## Abstract

1  
2 Hersman (2018) espouses that we can effectively mentor if in possession  
3 of qualities to empower mentees which include: effective communication  
4 skills, knowledge of the professional realm, enthusiasm, passion and the  
5 ability to create an equitable and supportive organizational environment  
6 with the mentee. The authors of this article propose that self-talk (ST) or  
7 inner speech, is a helpful means of inspiring mentors, colleagues, teachers,  
8 and friends in navigating communication challenges with themselves and  
9 others. Cutton, Killion, & Burt (2015) have suggested a three-step approach  
10 to implementing ST for the purpose of mentoring: that involves (1)  
11 awareness of the ST they are currently using (2) follow-up with the  
12 mentee's active reflection of and recording of the ST, and finally, (3) actions  
13 that changes their use of ST. While conversations in social speech serve  
14 as the primary method for communicating with others, this article implores  
15 that ST has a variety of functions that are situation specific and  
16 transformational.

## 1 Self-Talk: Mentoring and Empowering Faculty to Contribute to 2 Organizational Change

3 Irrespective of discipline, faculty at universities are faced with  
4 stressors that can negatively impact job performance. University faculty  
5 perform functions that are comprehensive in scope, which include teaching  
6 and mentoring students, garnering funding for research, preparing papers,  
7 presenting at conferences and attending to the service needs of one's  
8 college, department, school or organization (Tan, 2017). In these roles, it is  
9 not uncommon for faculty to express self-evaluative statements that cause  
10 them to doubt their ability to do their job effectively. This "self-talk" (ST)  
11 provides a means by which one can practice communication skills that will  
12 assist them in responding to every day struggles and life-changing events  
13 (Barber, 2013). As a growing area of interest, it is plausible that a focus on  
14 ST could be of benefit to professionals in higher education kinesiology as  
15 they navigate through their careers.

### 16 **Self-Talk: An Overview**

17 The study of ST in relation to faculty development and performance  
18 enhancement in higher education has not been widely researched. What is  
19 known comes from studies conducted in the areas of developmental,  
20 clinical, and sports psychology. In analyzing the work of Vygotsky (1987), it

1 was assumed that ST, or “interior dialogue”, diminished after early  
2 childhood. However, several recent studies demonstrate that ST regularly  
3 occurs across the life-span, irrespective of group affiliation, gender or  
4 cultural, and ethnic differences.

5 Calvete and Cardeñoso (2002) along with Hardy (2006), and  
6 Theodorakis, Hatzigeorgiadis, and Zourbanos (2012) broadly define ST as  
7 a cognitive, communicative process that represents an individual’s thoughts  
8 about themselves, others, and the world around them. It is verbal in nature,  
9 multidimensional, and dynamic. ST can be spoken aloud or privately in  
10 one’s mind as a means of: (a) interpreting one’s feelings and perceptions,  
11 (b) self-evaluation and regulation, and (c) self-reinforcement/critique or  
12 instruction (Fernyhough, 2016).

13 To the latter point, ST conveys information in the form of words that  
14 can be reframed and applied as a self-regulatory strategy (Kross, et. al.,  
15 2014). Reyes (2016) extols the idea of ST as consequential, as it not only  
16 “informs us of emotions, thoughts and ideas that we already may have”, but  
17 also is an important cognitive ability that affects attention and appraisal  
18 processes to meet cognitive and emotional demands (p.10).

19 Reyes also notes that previous research categorizes ST into two  
20 overlapping dimensions: valence (positive or negative) and function

1 (instructional or motivational). Positive forms of ST are typically associated  
2 with increased self-efficacy, emotional regulation ability, and the experience  
3 of positive emotion states regardless of situational experience. Self-efficacy  
4 may be enhanced because of the motivational comments to the self from  
5 the self because of less worry and more positive thinking, even in adverse  
6 conditions (Latinjak, Hatzigeorgiadis, & Zourbanos, 2017; Zourbanos, et al.,  
7 2016). Negative forms of ST are most commonly associated with threat  
8 appraisals, less perceived social support, increased anxiety, and less  
9 resilience. Perception and the resulting actions from spontaneous ST have  
10 revealed a strong negative effect on performance because of persuasive  
11 negative emotions (Latinjak, Hatzigeorgiadis, & Zourbanos, 2017).  
12 Furthermore, ST research has found that it both functions as and enhances  
13 motivation. It also provides instruction and direction for a focus of attention  
14 and allows for the processing of information during reflection and  
15 preparation (Cutton, Killion, & Burt, 2015; Hardy, 2006; Theodorakis, et al.).  
16 Performers are better able to focus on and process effectively what is most  
17 important at a critical point in time, even in stressful and hectic situations.

### 18 **Mentoring in Higher Education Kinesiology**

19 Our purpose in this article is to inspire mentors, colleagues, teachers,  
20 or friends to serve as agents of change in organizations for the betterment

1 of others and thereby, urge them to effectively socialize and communicate  
2 with themselves and others through the effective use of ST. Through the  
3 effective use of ST (themselves and helping others with their ST) mentors  
4 can: (a) encourage collaboration, (b) serve as agents of change, and (c)  
5 help foster interpersonal relationships so critical especially to  
6 underrepresented faculty. Thinking about our ST, “gives us a clearer sense  
7 of how our consciousness is peopled by social agents...internal self-talk  
8 has its origins in interactions with people, and that it represents the different  
9 perspectives of the social agents that constitute it” (FERNYHOUGH, 2016, p.  
10 222). An ideal mentor is described as someone who serves as an  
11 exemplar and guide to an individual as they move from a place of  
12 dependency and inexperience towards independence and proficiency  
13 (Nakamura, Shernoff, and Hooker 2009). Mentoring done correctly is  
14 empowering as it opens avenues for collaboration, goal attainment and  
15 problem solving. As kinesiology faces unique challenges for women and  
16 diverse faculty in these times, mentoring is an essential means of raising  
17 consensus within the discipline with a significant role in preparing  
18 kinesiology scholars (McClain, Bridges and Bridges, 2014).

19 Corbett (2016), in her insightful article *Mentoring the Next Generation*  
20 *of Higher Education Professionals*, has a perspective similar to what can be

1 found in the AACTE paper “21st Century Knowledge And Skills In Educator  
2 Preparation” (2010) that described key principles and skills that are  
3 required for educators. She notes that today’s faculty are expected to be  
4 technologically literate, with the ability to be prolific researchers, and  
5 civically engaged. These expectations are to be met, while negotiating  
6 through various forms of marginalization, discrimination, power shifts and  
7 systemic dysfunctions (Corbett, 2016; Menges & Exum, 1983; Smith,  
8 2015). Corbett concludes her remarks by imploring the academy to be  
9 intentional in creating *transformative* and inclusive mentoring opportunities,  
10 a sentiment endorsed by Hodge and Wiggins (2010) who “offer  
11 recommendations to increase the presence and improve the experiences of  
12 African Americans in KPE programs” (p. 35). Burden, Harrison, & Hodge  
13 (2005) also expounded on the lack of representation for faculty, with  
14 particular emphasis on power relations and work climate:

15 “The African American faculty ...were disadvantaged from (a) their  
16 White peers’ holding dominant power; ... (c) *lack of mentoring* by  
17 White colleagues; (d) social isolation and marginalization in a chilly  
18 climate (non-supportive colleagues, which resulted in them  
19 disengaging from these peers).” (p. 45)



1           Muschallik and Pull (2016) in their research on mentoring in higher  
2 education and productivity recommended that irrespective of discipline,  
3 mentors perform three different roles: that of a teacher, a sponsor, and/or a  
4 collaborator. In the role of a collaborator, the mentor fosters *interactions*  
5 and collaborative opportunities, (formal or informal) for the mentee.

6           Hersman (2018) supported Corbett's suggestion for transformative  
7 opportunities, by providing guidelines for how mentoring in an organization  
8 can be *transformative* to persons seeking to embark on this endeavor.  
9 Hersman cites that colleagues can effectively mentor if they possess  
10 effective communication skills, knowledge of the professional realm,  
11 enthusiasm, passion, and the ability to create an inclusive and supportive  
12 environment with mentees. Additionally, it is understood that in order to  
13 achieve optimal growth multiple mentors may be necessary, as they likely  
14 do not excel in in all of these areas.

15           Certainly, the aforementioned characteristics of a mentor are  
16 important; however narrowing down to one as the most essential is an  
17 ambitious undertaking. When a distinguished panel of professionals in  
18 kinesiology at the NAKHE organization Annual Conference in 2018 were  
19 asked the question of: "What did they consider the most important

1 characteristic for a mentor to have? An emphasis on *communication* was  
2 the panel's overwhelming response.

3         Cutton, Killion, and Burt (2015) recommend a three-step approach  
4 towards helping someone implement their use of effective ST for  
5 communicating in a variety of environments. Environments include many  
6 types of organizations, including educational institutions and professional  
7 societies. These steps involve first, the mentor helping their mentee to  
8 become *aware* of the ST that they currently use in a variety of situations.  
9 For example, *awareness* of the ST while teaching, and at professional  
10 service or research meetings is needed. Second, ensure that the mentee  
11 follow-up with active *reflection* of previous experiences and chronicling of  
12 the ST used on numerous occasions. Encourage reflection upon what was  
13 "said", and how it was "said", by memory or even by making a note of  
14 previous ST—including a digital or written record. Third and finally, the  
15 experienced mentor can provide and encourage the active, intentional  
16 *strategies* to change the use of ST, depending upon the different  
17 environments encountered. Strategies may include rehearsing the ST they  
18 plan to use, such as preparing via ST what they will say in response to a  
19 particular question or reaction from a student or colleague. As these  
20 guidelines are followed, it is key that all parties involved make note of how

1 and what type of ST is being used and routinely reflect upon its level of  
2 effectiveness and subsequent outcomes.

### 3 **The Promise of Self-Talk Awareness**

4 ST has been suggested as a method for creating space, or the ability  
5 to withdraw from a situation temporarily and allow the mentee to be aware,  
6 realize, eventually address what is happening-- including how to handle  
7 certain situations (Morin, 2005). Individuals in the role of mentor and  
8 mentee participate in an engaged and potentially transformational  
9 experience, using the principles of ST. Established professionals, those  
10 that are leaders in research, teaching, and service, are typically considered  
11 experts in their field (Arreola, Theall, & Aleamoni, 2003). However, many  
12 inexperienced, or diverse faculty may feel inadequate, facing pressure to fit  
13 into the cultural and professional expectations deemed important by  
14 leaders in the field, locally and nationally. The dialogue with themselves  
15 and others (ST and speaking)--especially between established and young  
16 professionals are critical actions that provide a benefit to their collective  
17 development.

### 18 **Self-Talk Reflection after the Episode**

19 Van Raalte (2016) notes that how we perceive others and how they  
20 perceive us, affects our reflection of the ST we may have used. This is

1 particularly of issue if faculty are in environments that are very harmful to  
2 their careers. Along with other environmental factors, these perceptions  
3 hold influence over our sense of internal self, reflection, and interaction with  
4 others. Moreover, irrespective of how others feel about us, our thoughts  
5 regarding their intentions (i.e., positive or negative) could create feelings of  
6 self-doubt. ST develops and becomes more effective the more that we  
7 participate in dialogue with others, so in this sense, ST is social in nature  
8 and works in parallel with our thinking and reflection (Ferryhough, 2016).  
9 With this understanding, the question of “How does one manage the  
10 process of eventually using ST effectively in diverse environments,  
11 situations, or settings?” is a fair one.

### 12 **Self-Talk Used as a Strategy for Empowering Faculty**

13 In the practical sense, ST serves as a method by which to enhance  
14 one’s ability to communicate with themselves and the world around them. It  
15 also provides instruction and direction for a focus of attention and allows for  
16 the eventual processing of information during reflection of what has just  
17 occurred to the learner, and the what to “say” in response (Cutton, Killion, &  
18 Burt, 2015; Hardy, 2006; Theodorakis, et al.). In a typical scenario, ST can  
19 be used to help the assistant professor to be aware of what they were  
20 going to say or “do”, in the hopes of also preventing errors in speaking too

1 soon or harshly, or communicating incorrectly with administrators,  
2 colleagues, students, or staff. For example, an assistant professor may  
3 initially say to themselves, “I am not sure what [insert name of chairperson]  
4 will think of my comments.” A comment later may be phrased to inspire  
5 deeper reflection and clarify intention, “My reason for wanting to take on  
6 this project is twofold...” After the conversation, reflecting on how the  
7 interaction went and altering what could be said later is in order. As a  
8 motivating force, ST is eventually useful as a strategy to help us be  
9 intentional and precise as professionals when needed.

10       Using ST as a strategy for improvement has promise for faculty  
11 irrespective of their role or career stage. Junior faculty need guidance to  
12 meet the challenges of the institution and profession. The numerous  
13 aspects of research, teaching, service, and professional development are  
14 areas that many faculty need time to adjust to as they begin their career in  
15 higher education. Use of ST to prepare and improve: lectures, research  
16 presentations, and implementation of a service project with students can all  
17 be useful examples. Therefore, the effective use of ST may help empower  
18 them to be: (a) more effective teachers, (b) productive writers and  
19 researchers, and (c) better able to recognize their service role within their  
20 profession.

1           Diverse and underrepresented faculty also could benefit from the  
2 application of ST as a strategy. Research by Russell (2008) suggested that  
3 one's ethnic background affects ST implementation, based upon the variety  
4 of circumstances, settings, or environments. Furthermore, the previous  
5 research discussed by Burden, Harrison & Hodge that revealed a lack of  
6 support to disadvantaged African-American faculty, needing access to  
7 effective mentors and support for frequent interactions with other faculty  
8 members. Effective mentors could then encourage diverse faculty to  
9 incorporate ST into their repertoire as a strategy aimed at developing  
10 effective communication skills with themselves and others. Communication,  
11 as mentioned earlier, is a very important characteristic for mentors to  
12 possess, and ST can foster voiced communication--as its effective use has  
13 been shown even early in life to improve self-regulation and development  
14 (Berk, 2001; Weintraub, 2015).

15           Encouraging all faculty members and empowering them in a way that  
16 they will feel comfortable infusing their gifts across campus, the  
17 surrounding community, and in professional organizations could initially be  
18 a difficult task. Many underrepresented professionals that work in a variety  
19 of educational institutions, especially early in their careers may need help  
20 with perseverance and empowerment at times to enhance their chances for

1 success (Whittaker, Montgomery, & Martinez Acosta, 2015). This is  
2 particularly of issue if faculty are in environments that are caustic, negative,  
3 demeaning or even dangerous to their careers and personal life. Like junior  
4 faculty, diverse and underrepresented faculty can also benefit from  
5 effective use of ST, but may need additional and ongoing encouragement  
6 and advocacy by mentors to help them navigate difficult or inequitable  
7 situations.

## 8 **Conclusion**

9 ST is the manner with which we dialogue with ourselves and prepare  
10 for, or reflect upon, our conversations with others (Fernyhough, 2016). As  
11 previously mentioned, ST, or inner speech has a variety of functions that  
12 can be used in numerous settings. Through the examination of ST, we can  
13 also begin to understand “the personal, cultural, and psychological  
14 significance” of the roles we have in the profession (p. 235).

15 More work is needed to uncover how ST can affect socialization and  
16 similar functions that provide a “guide or mapping device through life”  
17 (Wiley, 2006, p. 321). Wagstaff (2019) in discussing research on sport  
18 organizational change and mental skills training, notes that individual  
19 interactions can be enhanced by those who are able to be social agents of  
20 change in the organization. Whether we serve as the guide for someone

1 else, or choose to be the navigator for ourselves, ST as a strategy for  
2 mentoring may help to enhance the profession and improve faculty  
3 members' personal growth. If it is assumed that individuals have  
4 considerable influence on one another, perhaps we can serve as influential  
5 agents of change for others we may encounter.



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