

# Student-facilitated transition: fostering empowered collectives

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While developing peer networks is one predictor of student engagement and retention, peer networks are also potential sites for cultivating critical pedagogies.

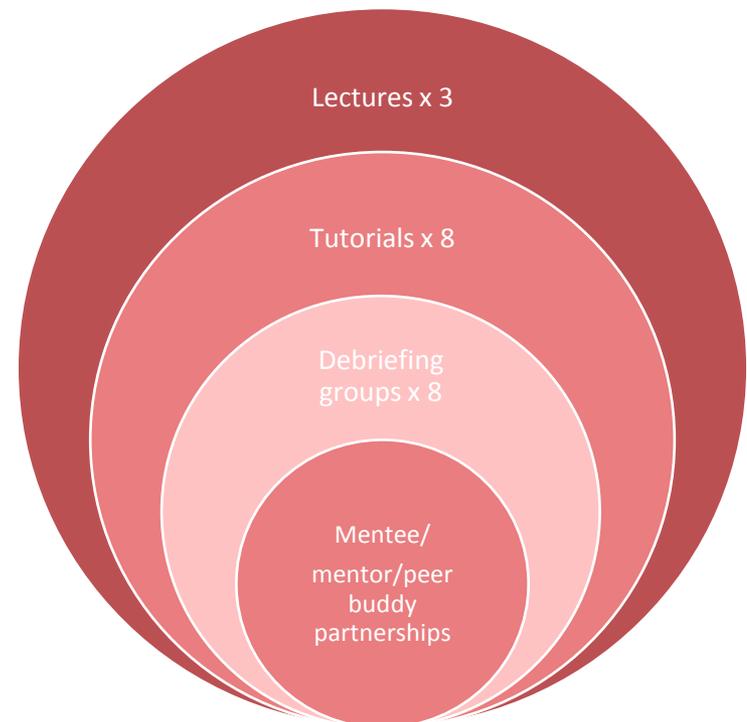


# Experiential Learning in Communities

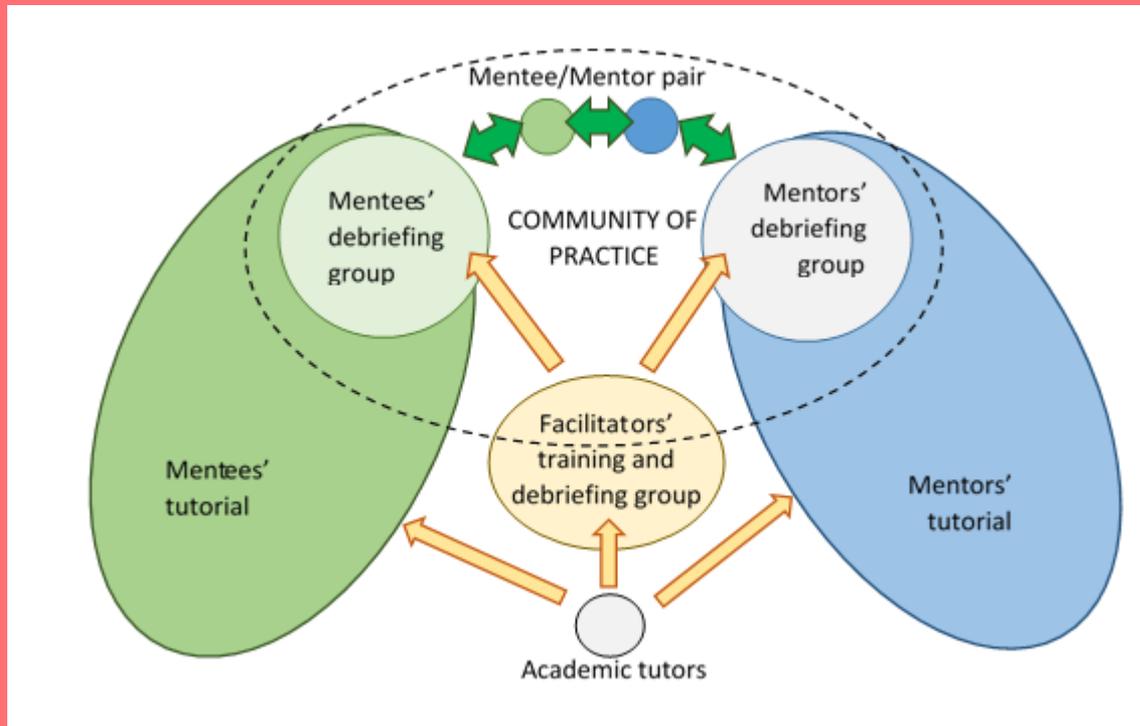
**Elective, on campus unit for undergraduate Education students**

## Key themes in the unit

- Experiential learning
- Reflective learning
- Mentoring partnerships
- Communities of Practice
- Interpersonal and intercultural skills
- Mentoring and facilitation skills
- Reflective writing and essay writing
- Academic literacy



# LOCUS OF COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE



Universities as sites of “multiple, complex and diverse social relations, identities, communities, knowledges and practices” and First-year experience in terms of “multiple and dynamic processes of dialogue and exchange amongst all participants” (Brook et al., 2014, p. 3).

ELC fosters such interactions through facilitating student-led exploration of the diverse experiences of being a student.

As the academics in this subject, we position ourselves as providers of resources and interpreters of academic culture, while enabling students to determine their own training processes within their communities of practice.



## Underpinning concepts

Critical pedagogy whereby education is viewed as a transformative and empowering project that challenges existing inequalities and privileges and refuses a deficit model of learning (Kress, Degennaro, & Paugh, 2013).

Mentoring as “dialogic exploration toward knowing and understanding” (Freire et al., 1997, p.xvi).

“Community cultural wealth” – interlinked and multiple forms of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational (Yosso, 2005).

Transition as “becoming” whereby collaborative, inclusive, student centred learning experiences facilitate students’ iterative processes of acculturation to the academic environment (Gale & Parker, 2014a).

The experience of dominance and privilege which is often invisible to White people is interrogated and exposed in Whiteness studies. Moreton-Robinson (1999) argues that Whiteness in its contemporary form in Australia is culturally based. It controls institutions, which are extensions of White Australian culture and is governed by the values, beliefs, and assumptions of that culture and its history. Australian culture is less White than it used to be, but Whiteness forms the centre and is commonly referred to in public discourse as the ‘mainstream’ or ‘middle ground’ (p. 28).

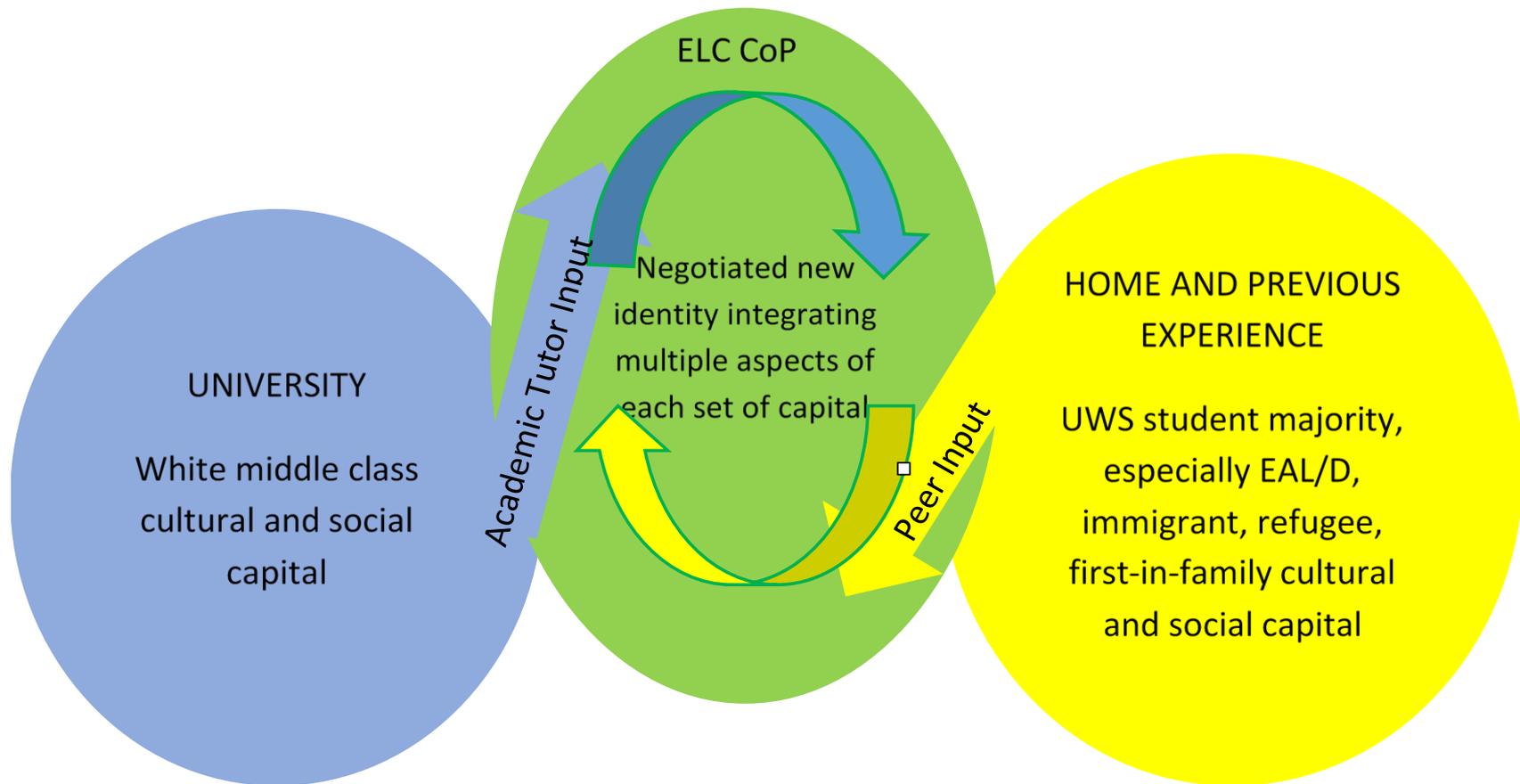
As such, Whiteness is socially constructed, fluid and contextual (Meredith et al., 2007) as well as “pervasive and constitutive” (Allen, 2005, p. 63).

# Empowered collectives



- We suggest that the student-led communities of practice, although located in the constraints of a subject, nevertheless are “humanising and empowering” experiences for students that can be conceived of as “empowered collectives” (Scorza et al., 2013, p. 29).
- This is because the debriefing groups are more than just a support network in that they mobilise students’ existing social capital to develop strategies to prosper and succeed at university.
- They enable students to create their own unique identity as university students and to discover a sense of belonging, ideally as they determine it, not as is determined in the university environment.
- We would locate this in the paradigm of Transition as becoming.

The ELC CoP provides a generative space for the creation of a new integrative melding of multiple sources of cultural and social capital.



# Challenges

Organisationally complex – high administrative load for unit coordinator

Attracting/maintaining sufficient mentees

Sustainable funding

Finding the best balance with assessment tasks

Mentor training

# Students' voices

- *This gave me a completely different idea about what the university experience can be.*
- *It (ELC) has allowed me to make new friends with students whom I would not have normally spoken to, largely due to different cultural beliefs and backgrounds.*
- *I looked forward to going to my debriefing group each week, it was the highlight of university for me.*
- *My experience in this unit has expanded my understanding of learning but has also deeply satisfied my expectations of university, by motivating me to continue with a network in the community to assist me. Through the challenges and the overcoming of worry in my abilities, I have finished this unit with new confidence, appreciation for learning and a network of new friends, which makes the overall process of university much more enjoyable.*
- *WOW! What an unbelievable journey this semester has been. I never thought I would get to experience a program like this at university, or grow as a person as much as I have in such a small amount of time. As a mentor, I have been able to 'offer confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendship' (Terrion, 2012), to a fellow student in a way I never thought possible.*