The role of peer learning in ALL practice

OR A role FOR peer learning in ALL practice

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Overview

• ALL & the changing landscape
• Rise of peer learning models
• Tensions/roles and boundaries
• La Trobe PLA program
• Learning with PLAs
• Training
• The contemporary AALL unit
Navigating the current tertiary environment

“supercomplexity” constant change & uncertainty

Barnett (1998) fundamental frameworks of knowing, being and acting are challenged – nothing is certain “constellation of fragility”

- “Surrender” from the “grand narrative” of knowledge, emancipation and justice to performativity, productivity & consumption (p.43)
- Universities as organisations; entrepreneurialism, global and local markets
- Government and business influence on teaching outcomes; work-based learning, “employability”
- “Knowledge” is built within and outside the university. Major impact on teaching and relationships
- Living with contradictions

“teaching is the interpersonal production of supercomplexity” (p.47)

“Helping students to navigate uncertainty”
Eroding boundaries

- organisational units
- academic disciplines
- university and world
  and maybe...
  - learning (students?)
  and teaching (staff?)
The players – who does what?
Contradictions: specialist/generic (teams?)
So what do AALL units look like now?

Boundaried 1:1s

Targeted f-f workshops

Student success projects?

Research activities

Licensed software?

Maths/stats support?

College liaison

Embedded curriculum renewal work strategic projects (teams)

PG/HDR support

Online resources/ new technologies

Peer learning activities and co-ordination

Hats: https://mommystylistdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/hats-
Expansion of Peer assisted learning

About 75% of unis have some “academic” peer assisted learning model – probably PASS is most common

About 50% of AALL units seem to have direct relationship with a peer assisted learning program

• Broad nomenclature: mentor, tutor, facilitator, assistant, guide, near-peer, PASS, PAL

• Many models: groups/ individuals

• Centralised/discipline

• Paid/unpaid

• Most appear to be soft-funded e.g. HEPPP
Tensions – “contested space”

- Cheap labour – saving money
- “Taking our jobs”
- Cop-out – just another form of 1-1s
- De-academicisation of ALL
- Need additional resources e.g. co-ordination /admin
- Unclear boundaries (from both sides)
- Central/discipline condundrum
- Giving “wrong” information
- Space wars – where/who’s responsible? Part of the team??
La Trobe PLAs in Bundoora library

Collaboration - work directly in conjunction with Student Learning, Careers, (Library)

Handover to Student Learning and Careers drop-in or referral for “deeper level”, specialist work

About 6000 “academic” enquiries over all campuses & 1000s of “other”

About 50 paid students across five campuses – likely to increase
If not experts, what do PLAs bring?

Broad literature on benefits of peer learning; e.g. Bruffee (1999); Colvin & Asman, (2010); Duglass, Smith & Smith (2013); Falchikov (2001); Topping (2005)

complex picture - many others varied contexts

• Interface and outreach
• “Value add” “win-win” – 18 students, 6 disciplines; UG, PG, HDR; technical skills (Melbourne) flexible to suit needs
• Retain individualised f2f contact – first level writing/business maths/stats
• Deeper discipline experience in some cases
• Affective component – “front line”; “soft-entry” for students
• Diversity – multiple language backgrounds and approaches
• Understand student strategic approach
• Technology savvy e.g. EndNote, Nvivo, Pebbelpad Excel, Social Media
Learning from and developing each other “student-staff partnerships”

M.C. Esher *Swans*  http://www.mcescher.com/gallery/wood-engraving/swans
### Defining boundaries ... a very rough guide during drop-in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLAs</th>
<th>Student Learning/ Careers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment alignment; confidence building; basic planning</td>
<td>More complex reading- writing issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Front line writing support/maths/stats – basic structural level, closer advice few paragraphs</td>
<td>Deep level textual/ maths development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic referencing/Al issues/ paraphrasing</td>
<td>Integration of sources; building academic voice</td>
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<td>Point to EL resources; referral</td>
<td>Strategies for EL development</td>
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<td>Deeper discipline knowledge – cross referral</td>
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<td>Basic resume checking</td>
<td>Deeper level careers advice</td>
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<td>Basic technology applications e.g. EndNote, Excel, Pebblepad</td>
<td>Referral as necessary</td>
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<td>Security safety boundaries</td>
<td>Support to PLAs</td>
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Training – is (not) a dirty word

Working towards... (team project with Careers and Student Engagement)

Two “generic” online modules delivered through One Note for all students as staff.

Module 1: Working at LTU

Module 2: Effective communication

Module 3: Tailored for academic Peer Learning Advisers.

- Basic learning pedagogy; Practice texts and activities
- Referencing, basic library search
- Quizzes/ Case studies/ scenarios. Referral and resources
- Resume checklist – boundaries
- Reflection - ongoing

One day intensive “forum” of role-plays, small groups, case studies, face-face engagement and brainstorming. Cascaded leadership model – “senior” & experienced Mid-semester top-up/catch up
So... in an environment of change ALL units need to be flexible and responsive

peer learning provides a useful layer of support and feedback the rich “suite” of ALL support.

and could be part of a (developmental) & collaborative Learning Centre
References


Brown, K., Nairn, K., van der Meer, J., & Scott, C., (2014) “We Were Told We’re Not Teachers ... It Gets Difficult to Draw the Line”: Negotiating Roles in Peer-Assisted Study Sessions (PASS), *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 22(2), 146-161


Thanks and questions?

I am still learning--Michelangelo Image: Learning by Anne Davis 773 via Flickr Creative Commons

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