



Students as Partners: The Evolution of the Deakin Student Mentor Community of Practice.

Key Words:

Leadership capabilities, co-development, co-creation, collaboration, social learning theory, interconnectedness, relationship building

Abstract:

During 2016-2017, the REACT program (Realising Engagement through Active Culture Transformation) has investigated student engagement across fifteen universities in the UK. A core focus has been on collaboration, co-creation and co-development as pillars of the student voice and of students as change agents. Within this context the Deakin Student Mentor Community of Practice was established during 2017. In the same way that Austen et al. (2017) have sought to better understand the ways in which co-design and peer learning are effective means for building confidence and a sense of belonging the Deakin Student Mentor Community of Practice seeks to provide an avenue for student mentors to build their social learning skills, sense of belonging and confidence. The Deakin Student Mentor Community of Practice also aims to enhance leadership capabilities and provide a space for the mentoring community to learn together and exchange local expertise. This paper will explore the evolution of the community of practice for student mentors across the university and its relationship with and contribution to the Students Helping Students Community of Practice for peer support co-ordinators. Some defining stories from the deepening relationship between the two communities will be shared, to illustrate a compelling tale of an emerging landscape of practice (Wenger-Trayner et al 2014) for peer mentoring and the student voice at Deakin. Informed by the work of Etienne Wenger-Trayner and Beverly Wenger-Trayner the paper will illustrate how the community of practice approach is an ideal vehicle to support not just student engagement but also the application of Wenger's (1998) social learning theory (and its subsequent reshaping). Student leadership will be explored as a learning concept, an unfolding and an awakening as opposed to the adoption of a set of prescribed rules and behaviours. The notion of expertise will be challenged. With the Myths about Communities of Practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner 2015) in mind, the need for training and monitoring of mentors will be discussed, as will approaches for appropriate reward and recognition of mentors' work. The role of the facilitator, rights and responsibilities, and the level of autonomy of the mentors will also be considered as steps on the path to the integration of peer learning into the mainstream university culture.

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