make most sense when used in conjunction with the book. There is also an associated website, Scribo, which presents a student version of these resources. The result is a book I would happily recommend to staff and students. The focus on a single genre here is really successful and results in a book that makes a valuable and welcome contribution to the field.

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What constitutes 'peer support' within peer supported development?

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Abstract

Purpose: Peer supported schemes are replacing traditional Peer Observation of Teaching (PoT) programmes within some Higher Education Institutions. Peer supported schemes, whilst similar in philosophy to PoT, enable academic and academic related staff to support each other in non-teaching related activities. The purpose of this paper is to explore, therefore, the role of peer support in comparison with that of coaching and mentoring to clearly differentiate the activity.

Design/methodology/approach: In 2010, one UK HEI appointed two Academic Fellows to implement and embed a 'Peer supported Development Scheme' (PSDS) within the institution. Through analysing the implementation process and drawing on activity conducted under such a scheme, this article examines the notion of 'peer support' in comparison to mentoring and coaching. The purpose of this will enable Academic Fellows to be able to better advise 'Supporters' how to work with colleagues and engage in structured dialogue to improve teaching and learning practice.

Findings: The findings highlight that Peer support schemes are tangentially different to mentoring and coaching, however some activity undertaken as part of our peer supported scheme was actually mentoring and coaching. Therefore clearer guidance needs to be given to colleagues in order to steer the process towards 'peer support'.

Originality/value: The PSDS discussed within this paper is only one of a few established within the UK and therefore findings from such schemes and how they are established are still emerging and will benefit other HEIs moving from PoT towards peer supported development.

Key Words: Peer, support, coaching, mentoring, professional development, higher education

Introduction

Many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) within the UK have established Peer Observation of Teaching (PoT) schemes, with varying degrees of success. Indeed such schemes became popular from the mid-1990s (Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond, 2004; Shortland, 2004; Race, 2010). The principle of peer observation is to encourage reflective practice of teaching through collegial discussion in order to enhance professional development (Purnell and Monk, 2012; Shortland 2004). However, PoT schemes are deemed to be hierarchical in approach (Byrne et al, 2010), in which teaching staff participate out of obligation rather than any desire to improve the student experience or to change/improve their teaching practice. Such practice is not effective or productive as collegial dialogue is not prolonged in order to achieve sustained professional learning (Schuck et al 2008). In order to improve this, some institutions are moving away from PoT in order to develop peer supported schemes instead, which also include wider academic-related activities other than just teaching practice. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to explore the notion of 'peer support' within such peer supported schemes, grounding the examination of such a notion in the findings from one scheme implemented within a UK HEI.

Two members of staff obtained Academic Fellowships in 2010 with the specific remit of implementing and embedding the new 'Peer supported Development Scheme' (PSDS). PSDS was, therefore, developed and implemented with the aim that all staff undertaking learning and teaching activities (both academic and academic-related) could participate. The scheme adopted by the HEI is based on a scheme developed and piloted at another UK HEI in 2002-2004. Feedback from their project pilot indicated that the new process was non-threatening and enhanced professional practice (Purvis et al 2009). Thus PSDS endeavours to become an integral part of the continuing professional development of all staff, and enables all colleagues to share and reflect on their professional knowledge and experience. As the Scheme approached its third year of implementation, the Academic Fellows wanted to explore the role that 'peers' undertook within the scheme in order to analyse what constitutes 'peer support'. Such analysis would help to identify the nature and behaviour of participants and how this differs to the mentoring scheme. It also assisted the Academic Fellows in making changes to the scheme, in order to engage more staff and further embed the scheme within academic practice.

Theoretical Framework

Before examining our experiences under the PSDS, it is important to situate the notion of 'peer support' within the current literature, exploring the differences between the traditional 'peer-observation', plus other schemes such as coaching and mentoring. One key difference within any peer supported scheme is that participation is driven by the staff members themselves. Such peer supported schemes (unlike PoT), therefore, are focused on enabling reflective dialogue between colleagues and promoting the professional development of one's peers. Beaty (1997) highlights that peer support enables the professional to learn more than simply reflecting alone on their own practice. Furthermore, she advances this argument to explore the benefits for students, noting 'students rely on many lecturers and other staff for their learning and it is therefore important that we work together with our colleagues to facilitate that learning' (Beaty, 1997 p9). Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) as cited by Schuck et al (2008 p216) note that 'teachers and other

professionals negotiate their understandings of practice through reflection and learning conversations'. Key words to draw on here are 'work together', 'negotiate' and 'learning conversations'. Such words infer a mutual, two-way dialogue between equal partners. The 'peer' relationship within peer supported schemes should be based on equality and mutuality. The partnership between participating colleagues needs to be established so that peers can share their understanding and perceptions within a confidential forum (Purnell and Monk 2012; Cowie and Wallace, 2000). As Schuck et al (2008 p217) noted the characteristics of successful professional learning conversations are based on 'mutual respect; risk taking; a determination to improve; and professional, progressive discourse'.

Much research around 'peer support' explores the use of teachers' collaboration in schools, or promoting peer support programmes for children and young people. Nevertheless, the findings from such research can also be useful for developing peer supported schemes within higher education institutions. Kosnik and Beck (2011 p101) found that teachers often engage with other teachers for support and consider their peers as an important learning resource which contributes to teacher identity. In addition to Kosnik and Beck's observation, Martin (2011 p147) points out that UK-based teachers have only recently begun to have discussions about the teaching practices observed in colleagues' classrooms. She cites Louis and Kruse (1995) who describe this as the 'de-privatisation of practice' (Martin, 2011 p147) by which they are referring to colleagues opening up and sharing professional experiences with a view to generating discussion about teaching and learning practice. Martin (2011 p147) states 'this mutual examination of practice provides the opportunity for structured conversations about learning which help teachers to make sense of the new ideas they are experimenting with by sharing successes and failures'. Similarly, pertinent points to highlight here are the notions of '*structured* conversations' [author's added emphasis] and of sharing 'successes and failures'. A structured dialogue enables the focus of the discussion to be specific to a defined area of practice as selected by the collaborating peers. Through creating a culture of trust, non-judgment and respect, colleagues can be more open to identifying their weaknesses within practice in order to seek advice and guidance in a structured manner from peers in a learning format rather than under inspection or management auspices.

Cowie and Wallace (2000) explore the numerous peer support systems which are being established in schools and other youth settings in order to help overcome a number of social issues facing children and young people. They note that peer support systems need to incorporate a listening capacity, empathy, problem solving skills 'and a willingness to take a supportive role' (Cowie and Wallace 2000 p10). They go further to state that specific qualities required within 'peer' support programmes are an 'ability to work co-operatively; interest in others; inclusiveness; valuing difference; openness and fairness' (ibid p86). All of these skills can be mapped across to schemes being established within HEIs. Supporting peers should be able to ask constructive questions, listen to their peer, and offer solutions to identified problems or issues which relate to teaching and learning practice in order to enable their colleague to improve practice and contribute to their professional development.

In order to assess and evaluate the role of the 'peer', it is important to compare and contrast such a role with that of mentoring or coaching. Megginson (1988) also adds the notion of 'instructing' (ibid p33) into the mix. A significant difference between mentoring/coaching/instructing and peer support is the difference in experience between the cooperating colleagues. Megginson (1988) also identifies time spans for mentoring, coaching and instructing roles. Coaching, instructing and traditional-mentoring schemes involve an experienced practitioner working with a new member of staff. Megginson (1988) cites Boydell and Megginson, (1979) to identify that a key element of coaching is to help a colleague learn to conduct a task more efficiently with direct guidance than with none but with a longer term aim that the colleague can tackle subsequent tasks more independently and with more expertise. McMahon et al (2011) note that coaching, whilst closely linked to mentoring, is more specifically skills-focused. Similarly, the 'instructing' approach conveys clear, immediate instruction in order to see an immediate result in role performance. Megginson (1988) notes that the activity of instructing is very short term (perhaps one or two days, depending on the activity) whereas coaching may take up to twelve months. In contrast, Megginson (1988) claims that the notion of mentoring is more vague and less easy to clearly define. It is argued that mentoring may span one's career-life because it focuses more on the colleague's career development rather than specific tasks (like instructing and coaching) (Megginson, 2000; Kram and Isabella, 1985; Armstrong et al, 2002). In addition, Megginson (2000) also aligns emotional intelligence with the mentoring approach because mentors will draw on their own life experiences to support the mentee. Both Kram and Isabella (1985) and Megginson (1988, 2000) allude to the fact that those in management positions, especially line managers, undertake mentoring of staff thus emphasizing that mentors are often experienced colleagues. Armstrong et al (2002 p1112) cite Hagenow and McCrea (1994) who note that 'mentoring is first and foremost a teacher/student relationship'. Indeed, Effective mentoring enables new colleagues to learn from their experienced counterparts in order to develop skills and knowledge which contribute to holistic professional development (McMahon et al, 2011; Blank and Kershaw, 2009). This, however, may not be an effective or beneficial partnership if, as occurs in some cases, mentors and mentees are brought together systematically and personalities do not match (Armstrong et al 2002).

Peer supported schemes within higher education institutions draw on elements of instruction, coaching and mentoring. In contrast to coaching or instructing, peer support does not require the supporting 'peer' to have more years' experience, just experience in the area of activity which the developing peer needs. There does not need to be a level of seniority between the peers involved in 'peer support'. Byrne et al (2010 p216) state that 'critical reflection enhanced by dialogue with colleagues is at the heart of peer mentoring and coaching'. However one significant difference between 'peer support' and mentoring/coaching programmes is that there is usually an element of assessment involved within the latter (Kosnik and Beck, 2011 p7). Within any of these approaches, however, it must be added that the learning process is a two-way experience (Megginson, 1998; Kram and Isabella, 1985). Mentors, instructors, coaches and peer supporters can all be challenged by the questions posed and learning styles of the colleagues whom they are developing. This in turn can positively develop and enhance the supporter's mode of delivery.

Drawing these findings together, it could be argued that Pro-social behaviour may be an important element of 'peer supported' schemes. Pro-social behaviour is voluntary action which may altruistically benefit another person or community, whether it is also beneficial for oneself or not (Wardle, 2011). Pro-social behaviour is generally linked to children's psychological development, but since the 1980s it has also been used to explain adult behaviours. Empathy is a key component in pro-social behaviour, however, it can also be explained by examining close relationship between those involved in a given activity. Where there is a sense of shared identity, the altruist is likely to assist the fellow member of a given community who requires support. Such support and assistance leads to feelings of inclusivity within a community and feelings of mutual responsibility for welfare which increases levels of pro-social behaviour (Farsides, 2007).

Methodology: Implementing the Peer supported Development Scheme
As already noted above, the PSDS was devised in 2010 by two members of staff who had been awarded an Academic Fellowship to implement and embed the scheme within the HEI. Initially the academic fellows were appointed for one year, but due to the progress made and the clear, forward planning for the following year, the Fellowships were extended and funding was secured for a further twelve months in order to fully embed and allow an evaluation of the scheme to take place, as indicated as essential by other HEIs. Within this HEI, there is a clear distinction between mentoring and peer support. The mentoring scheme was re-developed in 2011 within the context of staff induction in order to support new members of staff through their first twelve months of employment with the institution. Mentors are trained members of staff. After this twelve month mentoring period, colleagues wishing to develop or enhance particular skills could voluntarily become involved with the peer supported development scheme. The PSDS aimed to enable colleagues to come together to share and reflect on their professional knowledge and experience (i.e. engage in a collaborative process). The peer-relationship is based on equality and mutuality. The new scheme incorporated a wider range of activities, and is not limited to teaching practice alone. For instance peers may explore any activity which related to learning and teaching such as e-learning, course design, writing learning outcomes, learning in practice settings, marking student work, giving feedback and assessing students, course evaluation, course structure etc. However the activity must relate to one of the six themes underpinned by the HEI's strategic plan:

- Designing and Planning Learning Activities
- Teaching and/or Supporting Learning
- Assessment and Giving Feedback
- Developing Effective Learning Environments
- Student Support and Guidance, Integrating Scholarship
- Research and Teaching and Learning or Leadership and Course Management.

Within a PSDS collaborative partnership, there are two partners (the 'Developer' – the person initiating the partnership and identifying the focus and the 'Supporter' – the person agreeing to collaborate on this activity), but, when appropriate, more people, from three to a team, may collaborate in an activity. Unlike the institution's mentoring scheme for which staffare fully trained to mentor, there are no barriers in terms of who is able to act as a

Supporter under the PSDS. Inexperienced colleagues can often bring new and valued insights to the development process and all Supporters can expect to learn from their involvement in the process. (Unlike the previous PoT scheme, PSDS does not necessarily have to be a reciprocal arrangement).

To summarise therefore, the important key principles of PSDS are that the process serves the peer-partners' professional development needs; the Developer has the freedom to focus on any aspect of learning, teaching or assessment; the Developer devises the methodology with assistance from the Supporter where appropriate; reporting requirements enable constructive dialogue regarding the Developer's professional development needs; the Developer retains control over the way in which the outcomes of the process are reported; the Developer retains absolute control over whether or not aspects of the activity might be disseminated for the benefit of colleagues.

Analysis of the 'peer support' within the PSDS
To date, 36 members of staff have participated within the PSDS, either as a Developer or as a Supporter. There was significantly more uptake within the School of Education, with several staff taking part more than once. This trend continued in the second year with all staff who took part in the first year taking part in the second year. A variety of teaching and learning activity has been undertaken as part of the scheme including bid writing, marking and assessment, writing conference abstracts and journal articles, engaging and sustaining student participation in class, preparing for audits, using e-learning technology, research support with colleagues etc. Whilst the majority of cases can be viewed as 'peer supported', some activity falls into the category of coaching and mentoring. Such activity might be deemed to be coaching or mentoring because there was an element of teaching being undertaken on the part of the supporter (i.e. Assisting colleagues undertaking Masters-level dissertations), and the developer was benefitting from expertise of the supporter.

The PSDS activity classed as being peer supported activity can be analysed as such for a number of reasons. The participants – both supporters and developers – participated in the scheme because of their own motivation rather than a managerial requirement. For the most part, supporters and developers were of a similar position within the organization, thus avoiding hierarchical tensions between managers and team members. With the exception of two cases in which the supporter and a developer were from the two different schools, for the most part both participants were based in the same school thus emphasizing the altruistic nature of pro-social behaviour identified above.

In line with the pro-social behaviour theory, certain members of staff, particularly in the School of Human Sciences, felt that they did not wish to participate within PSDS as they believed that they assisted colleagues anyway and did not, therefore, need to participate under a defined scheme. As Weller (2009 p26) argues 'by accentuating the role of the peer' restricts professionalism which leads to resistance in changing practice. By this, she means that the practice of peer support and reflection in higher education is often problematised by participants feeling forced to use the 'jargon of pedagogy' (Weller, 2009 p30) which they do not feel is necessarily applicable to the actual teaching experience. However, Cowie and Wallace counter-argue this notion by exploring factors other than jargon. In discussing

establishing peer support groups among young people, they highlighted that 'peer support builds on the resources that friends spontaneously offer one another, and it can happen anywhere, in any organization, in any age-group' (Cowie and Wallace, 2000 p9). Although as Schuck et al (2008 p218) state 'critical friendship is not unproblematic. Issues of trust, power, status, shared (or separate) understandings can all arise'. Cowie and Wallace (2000), go further, however, to state that peer supporters need 'to differentiate between a helping relationship and a friendship' and 'at the very least peer supporters need to understand that when they are in their peer support role, the other person's needs are the focus of the interaction' (ibid, p126). This can be difficult to differentiate in a pro-social environment in which colleagues collaborate on a regular basis. This is an area for clarification within the PSDS. Clearer guidelines need to be established for the role of the Developer and that of the Supporter and these guidelines need to be shared with staff. The point needs to be clarified that, as Cowie and Wallace (2000 p69) allude to, the developer should carefully select the peer supporter from the qualities, characteristics and experience in relation to chosen activity and helping them successfully develop an area of practice, rather than simply choosing a 'friend'.

A distinguishing factor of peer support (rather than the role of a critical friend), is that of generating a structured dialogue. Similarly, within the context of mentoring Megginson (2000 p258) cites Dixon (1998) who talks about 'training people in the art of dialogue' and Argyris's (1997) argument about 'using productive reasoning'. This is also key within peer support schemes. A key aspect of participating within PSDS is that the discussions between the Developer and Supporter remain confidential. However, a key to a successful peer support is the notion of structured dialogue. Reflecting on our experience, devising some criteria or guidelines to enable effective structured dialogue might create more effective and sustained collegial dialogue. When we add to this point the notion that PSDS activity needs to relate to the themes highlighted in the institution's strategic plan, this may make structured dialogue more complicated. As Weller (2009 p25) stated 'the relationship between the individual and his or her peers then becomes a critical factor in achieving the outcomes of institutional enhancement practices'. Analysing activity undertaken within this scheme, the Developers met with the supporter once or twice for the gains of one chosen activity. It is not, however, clear that the peer support relationship was facilitated or enabled to be sustained for a longer period and has perhaps therefore faded. An example to illustrate this point can be identified within the case in which a supporter was identified to work with a group of colleagues within another subject area to establish a marking and assessment framework due to issues highlighted by an external examiner. The supporter noted difficulties in trying to establish the key points required from the developers and maintaining discussions outside of the initial meeting. A framework to enable sustained peer-discussion would have been beneficial to raise the confidence of the supporter to assist colleagues. Thus it might be concluded that peer support is a 'one-off' event, but to be effective this needs to be sustained to enable continued professional development, and to strengthen cross-discipline partnership.

It has been argued that PSDS should be linked to appraisal in order to encourage colleagues to participate and increase the level of 'peer support' taking place within the institution. This is still a contentious debate. Menter et. al. (2011) discuss the issue of tensions arising

between staff and concerns about anonymity when disclosing information, whilst Race (2010 p228) identifies that feedback from peer observation is 'valuable evidence' towards appraisal. Embedding a discretionary scheme within mandatory managerialist systems, however, may devalue the intrinsic pro-social notion that underlies 'peer support'.

Conclusion and Recommendations for change

In conclusion, peer support schemes are tangentially different to mentoring and coaching. Whereas mentors are assigned for a (sometimes undefined) period of time to (newly-appointed) colleagues, peer support enables colleagues to participate at any stage, and for timescales set by the Supporter and Developer depending on the activity in question, and the requirements set by the Developer. A key aim is to enable structured dialogue on any aspect of academic-related practice and facilitates discussion and joined-up practice not only among teaching staff, but support staff and across disciplines and departments.

The notion of 'peer support' holds several characteristics. Moreover though, as Cowie and Wallace (2000 p86) note 'regardless of the particular type of peer support service, most peer supporters need to have similar qualities and attitudes'. Firstly, participation of either colleague is voluntary, because one colleague has self-identified an area of personal development and another colleague altruistically agrees to support this aspect of professional practice. The supporting peer should not necessarily be a more senior member of staff, but instead they should have the required skill or experience identified by the developer. In order to support effectively, such capacities as being able to listen, having empathy, being co-operative, being supportive not controlling, valuing difference and having problem-solving skills are beneficial attributes. Likewise being able to pose challenging questions and offering constructive feedback are useful to nurture professional development without the developer feeling like they have another line manager or simply being told how or what to do. In order to develop an institution with genuine and real 'peer support', colleagues need to be willing to participate. An environment of pro-social behaviour needs to be fostered whereby colleagues are altruistic, nurturing inclusive-practice.

In order to further enhance the notion of 'peer support' within the PSDS, guidance needs to be developed in conducting structured, productive discussion. This should facilitate all colleagues in generating and sustaining a supportive collegial discussion. There remains, as well, the discussion around whether or not such peer supported schemes should be emphatically tied into institutional processes or whether or not this devalues the voluntary nature and sense of inclusive community generated.

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Peer Tutoring

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Abstract

Peer Tutoring schemes frequently appeal to educators in Higher Education and there is much literature examining implementation and assessment; this study wishes to understand the lesser considered student experience. In particular how students act as peer tutors on an accredited programme. The stories students tell give a picture of the complex, multi-faceted interpersonal relationships that comes into play as a peer tutor and the problems faced in the role. This inquiry finds the student perspective of peer mentoring shows us how to better support them on accredited programmes.

Keywords: Peer tutoring; student mentors; narrative inquiry; student experience; media production; accredited peer tutoring.

Peer Tutoring

Peer tutoring is not a new idea, it is possibly as old as any form of collaborative or community action and has probably always taken place implicitly or vicariously (Topping 2005) but in a changing Higher Education landscape, more formalised and even assessed forms of peer teaching are becoming ever more popular. Indeed Peer tutoring schemes appear to be becoming strategized; developing to meet calls for accountability, better assessment, and improved outcomes for students.

Peer tutoring (also referred to as peer learning, cooperative/collaborative learning and peer collaboration), is taken here to refer to the 'use of teaching and learning strategies in which students learn with and from each other without the immediate intervention of a teacher' (Boud et al., 1999: 413). The literature shows evidence that peer tutoring is being increasingly used across all disciplines as a type of supplemental instruction or surrogate support. Programmes are being implemented in various ways to enhance the curriculum and/ or support students through transitional stages of University life. These exchanges can range from formal teaching in the classroom to sharing information informally. In general, peer tutors help other students either on a one-to-one basis or in small groups by continuing classroom discussions, developing study skills, evaluating work, resolving specific problems and encouraging independent learning (Colvin 2007; Falchikov 2001; Goodlad 1998; Boud et al 2001).

This popularity of peer tutoring has produced guidance on the structuring and content of tutor training. This literature provides much advice on how to implement and manage schemes for them to work well, including an enthusiastic and committed approach from