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Learning through teaching: Building a mentoring community around PhD students as academic apprentices

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Learning through teaching: Building a mentoring community around PhD students as academic apprentices

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PhD students—next gen academics

The provision of feedback to students is a complex activity which requires an understanding of learning, academia itself, academic literacies and intercultural understandings. PhD students working as sessional academic staff often find themselves in situations of contributing to student feedback in these four areas — and working with feedback as part of their own research activities. The dual role can provide a learning space for re-conceptualising feedback.

The Learning through Teaching Program (LTTP) was developed to provide a mentoring-based professional learning opportunity for teaching PhD students working in a sessional capacity to foster and develop academic literacies in particular and understandings to enable a considered approach to both roles— teacher and researcher.

Learning through Teaching (LTTP): A pilot study

LTTP mentoring program—qualitative study of pilot:
- 8 participants (4 x PhD students, 4 x academics)
- 10 week program (as part of OLT Extension program based on PATS scheme)
- 4 workshops + 4 - 6 x1:1 mentoring meetings

Data
- Pre and post surveys
- Workshop notes
- Interviews
- Participant reflections

Results

Fake it till you make it!

Challenges for PhD students:
- Expectations regarding working with supervisor feedback.
- Developing teaching skills, in particular, delivery of meaningful feedback & classroom management techniques.
- Marginalisation from professional learning opportunities.

Enriched understandings and skills

Unanimous agreement— mentors and mentees agreed that their understandings of assessment, academic literacies and feedback were enriched

Mentoring works!

All participants agreed that mentoring provides a particularly effective model for transformative professional practice.

- Mentors were able to revisit, explore and recalibrate understandings
- Mentees were able to question, inquire, experiment and learn

Collegial culture

Range of expertise represented by peer partnership group leading to enriched practice for all . Evidence of quality improvement following a social cultural theory

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Summary

1. PhD students – as sessionals are marginalised from academia yet often are face of uni for 1st year students - contradicts recommendations from retention and transition research.
2. PhD students aspiring to an academic career require targeted professional learning support.
3. Mentoring model resulted in effective outcomes for all participants
4. LTTP pilot— a model for *quality improvement* of teaching & learning practice.
5. Academic and intercultural literacies fundamental to understandings of good practice in teaching and research practices
6. Holistic university approach to quality improvement
7. Implementation of socio-cultural approaches to transforming professional practice (ZPD and MKO (Vygotsky) in action!)
6. Ongoing initiative

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