

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

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# The Global Context

2016-7 Realising Engagement through Active Culture Transformation (REACT) investigated student engagement across 15 universities in the UK.

Austen et al wanted to understand the ways co-design and peer learning are effective means for building confidence and belonging

Co-creating, co-developing, co-operating, “co-learning”.

2013 Mick Healey: Students as change agents, the student voice, students as partners

2009 Jennifer Keup: Mentors reflecting on and providing feedback on their experience as mentors



2014 Deakin Students Helping Students Community of Practice for Peer Support Coordinators established.

Finding common ground while retaining local identity. Exchanging expertise.  
Reward and Recognition, Recruitment, Training

Underpinned by work of Etienne Wenger-Trayner and Beverly Wenger -Trayner:

- Social learning theory
- Community of practice approach

## What is a Community of Practice?

“Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”

(problem solving, seeking experience, reusing assets, growing confidence, building an argument, discussing developments, documenting projects, visits, mapping knowledge and identifying gaps)



# Deakin Student Mentor Community of Practice: Students as Partners and Change Agents

Recruitment:

From local programs - Social, Practical, Academic.

Foundation training plus local program training plus experience

- Social learning theory
- Community of Practice approach
- Boundaries and role of professional staff
- Role of facilitator- who will lead?

## Getting started. What would we actually do?

Experiences needed to be real, authentic, meaningful.

Initially: What the mentors are saying is important for them.

Later: Advise on topics that are meaningful to Coordinator CoP as well.

- SHS Awards
- Masterclasses
- Reward and Recognition
- Advise counsellors and health professionals on personal mentoring, wellbeing for mentors

# Challenges

- Multi- campus
- Availability
- Consistency and frequency
- Getting all the programs involved
- Finding authenticity





## Deepening relationship with Coordinators

Mentor attends Community of Practice meeting for Coordinators. Giving and receiving feedback, communicating.

Help at Coordinator Development Program- flipped training. Challenges the role of the expert. Co-creating, co-developing, “co-learning”

Delivering the message at the Students Helping Students Awards- sharing the stories that help legitimise peer support and the student voice. In turn contributing to sustainability, co-developing the strategy for the university



## According to Wenger-Trayners' Social Learning Theory, identity and meaning is impacted

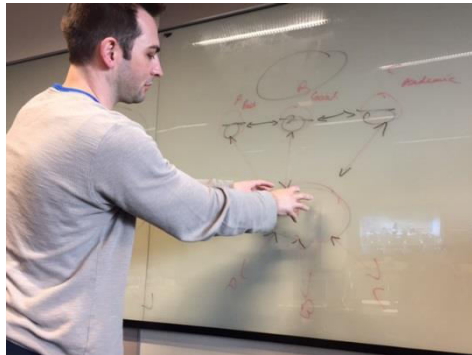
“People learn through co-participation in the shared practices of the ‘lived-in’ world; knowledge production is inseparable from the situated, contextual, social engagement with these practices and learning is a process of identity formation, that is , becoming a different person, rather than primarily the acquisition of knowledge products...”

# But what do the student mentors think?

Deb's story

Rhys' story

Ritika's story



I have learned to effectively liaise with a wide range of people in professional environments.

Shared narratives provide the basis for every interaction and desired outcome.

Students are provided professional challenges in a supportive environment.

For me, it is an expression of mentor diversity.

It is a stable platform that provides an ecosystem within which mentors from all areas of university can build strong connections, can share different perspectives and experiences on what challenges they have faced and what has worked exceptionally well for them.

It is an enabler for change and growth on both personal and professional levels.

It provides mentors an avenue to raise real, practical and legitimate concerns that are experienced through the voices of students with whom we work with on a daily basis and these real world experiences contribute towards the development of the Deakin Student Voice.



## Ritika's Voice. For me the Student Mentor Community of Practice is:

- a place to improve mentors' soft skills
- a group of people wanting to ensure they do the right thing
- a tool to identify and bridge gaps between various programs
- a community that would think both as a student and as a mentor
- a place to identify and bridge gaps, ensuring program boundaries are clear but the purposes fit each other like one giant puzzle.



## Ritika (cont)

- a place to identify and bridge gaps, ensuring program boundaries are clear but the purposes fit each other like one giant puzzle.
- a way to empower students
- a community for students, by students

## Moving forward: potential for improvement (Deb)

**Including smaller programs and communities.**

**Creating avenues of connection for others within the student community.**

- A generalised call out made to the student community, particularly towards those involved in social programs, to gain a better understanding of student's social challenges, such as homesickness, and how these impact academic development of students.





## Potential for transformation

The concept of “listening to the student voice”-implicitly if not deliberately- supports the perspective of student as “consumer”-whereas “students as change agents” explicitly supports a view of the student as “active collaborator” and “co-producer”, with the potential for transformation’.

(Healy 2013)



# References

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