



From anxious to awesome!: co-creating a community of peer writing praxis

Key Words

writing support, peer instruction, co-creation, students as partners, transition

Abstract

“Working with student writing,” argues Harris (1992) “is one of academia’s most labour intensive activities” (p.109)¹. Given both the increasing diversity of Australian university students and downward pressure on staff numbers, the task of guiding and developing student writers is becoming increasingly complex. Unlike in North America and Europe, where many universities have established writing centres with student tutors, there is no strong tradition of providing centralised writing support in Australia. Supplemental instruction initiatives are also vulnerable to both funding precarity and a growing preference to outsource components of academic writing support. Set against this drive for economic and institutional efficiency, however, are the goals of providing effective writing support to students, especially those in the early stages of university study, and of engaging students to provide this support. Within this context, one small Academic Language and Learning (ALL) unit in a metropolitan Australian university piloted a peer-writing support program called WriteWISE. WriteWISE is designed to foster students' self-efficacy and academic writing skills during the critical period of transition to tertiary study. By working closely with academic staff in 100-level partner units with high enrolments, WriteWISE works within and across disciplines to provide peer guidance in writing skills and processes for students in these units. WriteWISE also aims to increase student engagement, encourage aspiration and foster a sense of institutional belonging by partnering with student writing leaders to provide writing assistance and to train new leaders. This paper analyses three key elements of the WriteWISE program: 1) the capacity of a unit-linked model to create a learning community in which both generic and discipline-specific writing expertise are cultivated 2) the specific advantages of devolved delivery: expanding the help options available for students, flexibility, increased motivation for help-seeking, and feedback to lecturers on assignments 3) the tensions surrounding centralised administration, devolved delivery and equity of access.

References

Harris, M. (1992). The writing centre and tutoring WAC Programs. In S. H. McLeod & M. Soven (Eds.), *Writing across the curriculum: A guide to developing programs* (pp. 154–174). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.