

Widening Peer Mentoring Among Postgraduate Tutors Using a Wiki

Dr Jessie Paterson, Dr Sara Parvis
*School of Divinity, University of
Edinburgh*

Aims and Objectives

- To trial formalised peer support as an effective means of enhancing PG tutor support.
- To trial use of wikis as suitable means for sharing expertise and resources among PG tutors.
- To produce a repository of helpful material for tutors in future years.

Why?

PG tutoring can be:

- Scary!
- Each student cohort is different
- Tutors have range of experiences/abilities

Tutors have said that:-

informal peer support (sharing resources, techniques & experience) “most valuable teaching support they get”

BUT

sporadic and hard to come by

SOLUTION

wiki?

How we did it!

- Over 2 semesters
- All 1st year courses – 4 courses per semester (one from each of 4 subject areas)
- Course managers and other lecturing staff had **NO** access. Tutors to see as “their space”

- Tutors paid to contribute 1 hour per week
- Tutors split into
 - Mentors = those tutored on the course before
 - Novices = those not tutored on the course before (but could be experienced tutors)
- NB 2nd semester gave each group choice on what they did
- Mentors post prior to tutorial, novice after
- Comment on content, management issues, resources found useful, etc, etc
- Groups varied in size from 2 to 5 tutors!

Wiki Setup

- Support
 - Training session on wiki in lab start session
 - Technical help available by email or appointment (paid PG student to set up and maintain wiki)
 - “Pastoral” help at weekly clinics
- University Confluence
- All can view all wikis
- Have edit permissions on only their subject area wikis

Evaluation

- Focus groups at end each semester
- Questionnaires at various points
- Looking at the actual wiki content

Preliminary Findings

- All the groups worked differently
 - Some produced one long page
 - Others used a page per week
 - Some used the comments area, others ignored this
- Most ignored the scaffolding provided and found their own way – 2nd semester we provided only an empty page

Positive aspects

- All participated to some degree – level dropped over the year
- Very little use was made of the support in place. Most found few access/use issues (minor issues quickly fixed by PG assistant)
- Networking for those groups that were large and disconnected
- Reported effective method of passing on information, sharing resources
- Novices felt supported
- Some mentors recognised that this would have been useful when they were new tutors
- Sense of community

- Feeling of being more “recognised/valued”?
- Some groups of experienced tutors bonded in recognising the producing a product for future tutors was worthwhile

Negative Aspects

- Some groups found other methods worked better – they used face-to-face
- Some didn’t see any point – they had a wide experience anyway
- For some mentors they were pressurised to give a lot
- Some novices wanted more than the mentors willing to give

- No cross-over of the subject areas – ideas or sharing (didn’t look at each others)
- Tutors felt this was an extra chore/burden – another pressure on their time
- Little evidence of the tutors reflecting on their own tutoring (too public?, lack time?)

Mentor/Novice Idea

- Some cases too successful – burden on mentors
- Some felt “patronised” by classification – made bonding more difficult
- Some groups had no mentors

Issues/Conclusions

- Payment significant – future?
- Revision of PG Tutor support within the School – PG Tutor Handbook, local training sessions
- Excellent resource for future years – will this be added to?
- Groups bonded over constructing a resource for future tutors
- Doesn’t solve isolation issue but helps!
- Time pressure significant

Future Work/Study

- Every group different; groups from same subject area different each semester – why?
- Results from one School over one year – other areas behave differently (our School group work not common)

Team Members

- Mr Jason Wardley (PG assistant)
- Director of Undergraduate Studies