The system of support for academic teachers in process of shaping soft skills of their students

Learning communities and peer learning
Module 3 topic 2
Ana Luisa de Oliveira Pires (ESE)
Team: Maria do Rosário Rodrigues (ESE); Ana Luísa Oliveira Pires (ESE); Elsa Ferreira (EST Setúbal); João Torres

https://wspaerasmus.wixsite.com/supportsystem

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Introduction

Learning communities usually are referred to learning processes that take place through participation in communities that share the same purposes or aims.

ICTs have been promoting the creation and rapid growth of these communities, whose members interact from remote locations around the world to form online learning communities.

Recommended reading in the context of Covid-19:
https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/learning-communities-matter-in-times-of-crisis/

Key questions:

- What are learning communities?

- What are their educational contributions?

- What is meant by peer learning?

- What are its contributions to higher education students?

- What contexts / conditions are needed to promote learning communities?

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Why do we value learning communities?

- The interest in learning communities has developed since the 1970´s and 1980´s in educational settings,

- Learning communities are consistent with a constructivist approach to learning that recognizes the key importance of interactions with others, and the role of social interactions in the construction of values and identity,

- Learning communities have a common or shared purpose, interests or geography; collaboration, partnership and learning; respecting diversity; and enhanced potential and outcomes.

(Kilpatrick, Barrett and Jones, 2003)

Learning Communities in HE

Learning communities in HE emphasize collaborative partnerships between students, faculty, and staff, and attempt to restructure the university curriculum to address *structural* barriers to educational excellence (Center for Engaged Learning, Elon University).

6 major principles for the development of learning communities (Schroeder and Mable, 1994, *in* Center for Engaged learning, Elon University):

- Learning communities are generally small, unique, and cohesive units characterized by a common sense of purpose and powerful peer influences.

- Student interaction within learning communities should be characterized by the four I's – involvement, investment, influence, and identity.

- Learning communities involve bounded territory that provides easy access to and control of group space that supports ongoing interaction and social stability.

- Learning communities should be primarily student centered, not staff centered, if they are to promote student learning. Staff must assume that students are capable and responsible young adults who are primarily responsible for the quality and extent of their learning.

- Effective learning communities should be the result of collaborative partnerships between faculty, students, and residence hall staff. Learning communities should not be created in a vacuum; they are designed to intentionally achieve specific educational outcomes.

- Learning communities should exhibit a clear set of values and normative expectations for active participation. The normative peer cultures of learning communities enhance student learning and development in specific ways.

(Schroeder and Mable, 1994, *in* Center for Engaged learning, Elon University)

Learning communities and peer learning

- Learning communities are settings that facilitate the development of peer learning relations, based on collaborative work, trust and knowledge creation.

- The idea of learning communities is aligned with peer learning.

- Peer learning communities or peer learning networks, are groups of people within an organization who have a common interest in a particular area of knowledge. These communities can empower people to share knowledge and insights, learn new skills from each other and grow their personal networks. They can be incredibly powerful learning forums, especially in HE, which is a large and diverse organization

    (Univ. of Bristol)

What is peer lerning?

- In literature, peer learning is usually referred 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, Cohen and Sampson, 1999)

- Examples of peer learning include student-led workshops, study groups, team projects, student-to-student learning partnerships and peer feedback sessions in class. (*ibid*)

- They can include activities that involves groups of students working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product.

- Peer learning provides students' opportunities to teach and be taught by one another, expanding their perspectives and fostering meaningful connections.

(Video) Eric Mazur – Peer instruction Harvard University

- https://youtu.be/FUYo49rIjdM

Peer learning

- Peer learning is not a single practice, it covers a wide range of different activities each of which can be combined with others in different ways to suit the needs of a particular course (Boud, 2002):

- traditional proctor model, in which senior students tutor junior students;

- innovative learning cells, in which students in the same year form partnerships to assist each other with both course content and personal concerns;

- other models, involving discussion seminars, private study groups, *parrainage* (buddy system) or counseling, peer-assessment schemes, collaborative project or laboratory work, projects in different sized (cascading) groups, workplace mentoring and community activities.

Peer learning

- "In reciprocal peer learning students within a given cohort act as both teachers and learners. This is in contrast to peer teaching in which there is a clear and consistent differentiation between the teaching and learning role, although all parties may be students. Peer teaching commonly involves advanced students in the same class, or those in later years, taking on limited aspects of a teacher's instructional or pedagogic role." (Boud, Cohen and Sampson, 1999)

Benefits of peer learning

Peer learning provides students' opportunities to teach and be taught by one another, expanding their perspectives and fostering meaningful connections. Benefits of peer learning are usually referred as:

- Improving students' engagement in learning tasks and activities;

- Students are involved in a learning community;

- Students tend to feel more comfortable with pairs, reinforcing self-confidence;

- Students feel more committed to learning;

- Students progression is faster and with deeper understanding, leading to a more effective learning;

Benefits of peer learning

- Students can develop a wide range of competences and skills:

  teamwork and collaborative skills, leadership, organizing and planning, social skills, …

- Students can gain personal insight in self reflection and discovery,

- Increase confidence,

- Learn to discuss and challenge class topics,

- Learn to give and receive feedback in a positive way,

- Evaluate their own learning and the colleagues' learning,

- Learn how to respect diversity, be sensitive to their peers' feelings.

Organisational conditions

- The benefits of learning communities are enhanced by the existence of:

- A learning culture that values development (academic) and professional,

- An atmosphere of openness that promotes knowledge sharing, dialogue, research and risk acceptance, and provides constructive feedback to people at all levels,

- Trust, essential for the success of collaborative work - reciprocity between peers or between peers and their leaders is essential.

- (Kilpatrick, Barrett and Jones, 2003)

Tools to create online learning communities and to enhance ICT-supported peer interaction

Conditions that facilitate the participation: easy to use, hassle-free, ...

. synchronous tools: audio-, web-, and video-conferencing; chat; instant messaging.

. asynchronous tools: blogs, discussion boards, forums, group announcements, group emails, surveys and polls.

. content creation tools: courseware, streaming media, narrated slideshows, webinars, videos and e-books.

(Majumdar, 2016)

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Thank you for your attention!