

Peer-Learning Addressing First Year Challenges

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PALNET Symposium

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Session Overview

- Peer-learning in Trinity College
 - Transition difficulties
 - Why peer-learning
 - Key elements of peer-learning in TCD
 - Benefits of peer-learning
 - Peer-learning in TCD
 - Student comments

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School - University

"The Leaving Certificate itself is a national institution with even newspapers devoting large sections of their publications at exam time to analysing and criticising the exam papers. An exam paper which deviates in the slightest way from the norm creates outcry in the media and is deemed unfair. Perhaps for this reason, the content of each question [...] is usually highly predictable. This predictability has **serious knock-on effects in third level.**"

(O'Shea, 2006)

"It was reported by many respondents that while students were adept at cramming for examinations and rote-learning methods, **second-level did not adequately prepare them for a higher education intellectual experience.**"

(Keane, 2006)

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Transition in Learning

- **From Leaving Certificate curriculum:**
 - 'cramming' mentality
 - memorising & learning what comes up in the exam
 - reliance on teacher telling student what to learn
- **From third-level curriculum:**
 - 'cramming' AND continuous learning
 - understanding
 - independent & autonomous learning

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Areas of Transition Difficulties

students	staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • change of learning behaviour & styles: • change of learning environment: • change of social environment: • often change of residence or parent / child relationship 	attrition & declining student numbers, pass / fail rates

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Peer-Learning as a Solution

Student	Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • change of learning behaviour & styles: new study skills and transferable skills required ⇒ reassurance • change of learning environment: lectures, labs, seminars which include different forms of learning & assessment ⇒ revision • change of social environment: initially very strong focus on socializing, learning can be done before exams ⇒ refocusing • often change of residence or parent / child relationship ⇒ resettling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attrition & declining student numbers, pass / fail rates Motivation, extracurricular activities, promotion ⇒ retention
⇒ feeling of belonging to a group of students / a department / a school new communities of learning (Wenger, 1998)	

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Expected Benefits of Peer-Learning

- Academic outcomes - performance
 - Study skills outcomes - acquiring & practice of new study skills
 - Meta-cognitive outcomes - reflection, transfer of learning
 - Non-academic outcomes - integration, retention, attrition
- (Falchikov, 2005)

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Two Levels of Transition and Integration

- Social integration into the department, school, university
 - Student Motivation
 - Student Retention
- Academic integration into higher education
 - Adaptation to different learning styles & skills
 - Adaptation to course content

"Social integration into College is crucial at the outset of the year, academic integration is a more important determinant of persistence later in the year" (Attinsai, 1989; Tinto & Goodsell, 1994)

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Key Elements of Peer-Learning in TCD

- Course work or subject material essential
But emphasis not solely on this, also
 - transition & integration - socialization & enculturalization process
(Anderson & Boud 1996)
 - Motivation
 - Transferable Skills
 - Student-student focus
- ➔ Peer-Learning provides holistic student support

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Integration and Motivation

"The more they find value in learning, the more they see it connected to their interests, the more they will become involved in learning.[...]

The more students are academically and socially involved the more likely they are to persist and graduate.[...] Therefore motivation is a core factor." (Tinto, 2000)

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Peer-Learning in Modern Languages

2001: Russian as a pilot in one cohort (BSL), 3 tutors, 9 tutees

2002: 3 year funded (HEA) project in Russian, German, French
25 tutors, 71 tutees

2006: Expanded to 8 language departments including Russian, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Greek, Latin

2007: 63 Second Year tutors with 150 tutees, also 18 Third & Fourth Year tutors

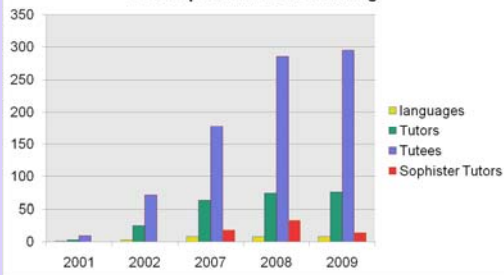
2008: 66 Second Year tutors with 239 tutees, also 13 Fourth Year tutors

2009: 63 Second Year tutors with 253 tutees, also 14 Fourth Year tutors

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Peer-Learning in Trinity College

Development in Peer-Learning



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Tutee Survey 2010

- Why did you consider dropping out?
 - the course was much harder than expected
 - work load
 - not being good enough
 - not being able to keep it up
 - did not like the course
- Why did you stay with the course?
 - support from staff
 - support from peers
 - small group teaching
 - not knowing what else to study
 - want a degree

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Tutee Quotes 2010

"It was good to be able to chat to some one who had been through what you were going through and they could offer advice and make suggestions. Even if you didn't take their advice it was still nice to have someone to talk to. You could also ask **them questions that you didn't feel comfortable asking your lecturers.**"

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Tutee Quotes 2010

"Peer tutoring helped not just in terms of **consolidating work done in class**, but in getting to **know someone who's been through the sometimes stressful world of first year** in Trinity College. As my peer tutor is also a European Studies student, it was a great help to find out more about next year, Erasmus options etc."

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Tutee Quotes 2010

"I got really good advice and help understanding subject matters! I felt there was someone there to give me guidance whenever I needed it! It was good to hear our peer tutor talking about how the Erasmus program is set out and what colleges in France are available. I felt more prepared and at ease going into the exams due to peer learning. It was also good to get to know someone from the year above us and to hear how she found first year. My peer learning experience makes me **want to be a peer tutor next year.**"
