Across the literature researchers agree that the concept of mentoring results in positive outcomes for both mentors and mentees alike (Enrich et al., 2004; Kram, 1985). With regards to mentoring activities within Higher Education, literature in this area tends to focus on the determinants and outcomes of what is, in effect, students helping students by means of reciprocal peer learning and social support (Anderson & Boud, 1996; Topping, 1996; 2005). From a pedagogical perspective, student focused mentoring activities in Higher Education are perceived to comprise dyadic or triadic relationships that encapsulate a diverse range of learning strategies or support mechanisms. Whilst there exists a significant amount of literature regarding the value of Peer Mentoring in Higher Education, there remains a notable gap in knowledge about the value of such programmes in enhancing the first year undergraduate experience and thus promoting a smooth transition to University. Using the emergent study findings of a large international project, a multidimensional conceptual framework bringing together the theoretical, conceptual and contextual determinants of Peer Mentoring is proposed. This framework makes a distinctive contribution to current pedagogical theory and practice – particularly in relation to the first year experience.
programmes in Higher Education. In conceptualising the emergent study findings within the context of the multidimensional framework the paper makes a distinctive contribution to current pedagogical theory and practice.

**Background: Peer Mentoring**

A broad range of terminologies are used across the literature to define reciprocal support and learning activities between peers including: peer tutoring, peer assisted learning, supplemental instruction, peer guiding, peer coaching and peer mentoring (Anderson & Boud, 1996; Capston & Fleming, 2002: Fayowski & MacMillan 2008). Many of these terminologies are used interchangeably, often resulting in misunderstanding and confusion regarding what constitutes each activity (Reid et al; 1997; Topping, 2005). Although such confusion may reflect linguistic anomalies, the terms are often used synonymously. It was therefore decided that, for the purposes of the study, and in order to fully capture the value of student-focused peer support programmes and mechanisms within Higher Education, a single term ‘Peer Mentoring’ would be used.

Contrary to frequently held perceptions describing traditional mentoring as hierarchical in nature, peer mentoring in Higher Education may be defined as a mutually reciprocal relationship between people of equal status. It involves the sharing and transmission of interests and knowledge between students within a mutually supportive relationship (Anderson & Boud, 1996; Reid et al, 1997; Topping, 2001).

**Student Transition into Higher Education**

In the UK there is a growing body of evidence critiquing the underlying factors influencing students’ experiences in the first year (NAO, 2007, Yorke et al, 1997, Yorke & Longden, 2008). Such factors include: the mode of study (full/ part-time); qualifications on admission; gender; a lack of preparation for study at a higher level; background factors including social class and financial hardship; poor academic progression; feelings of isolation; general misgivings regarding choice of institution or field of study (Davies & Elias, 2002; Forsyth and Furlong, 2003; NAO, 2007; Smith and Naylor, 2001; Yorke, 1997; Yorke & Longden, 2008). The impact of student-focused support programmes on student transition across a range of institutional settings does not appear to have been investigated in any depth. Thus, one of the main aims of the project is to identify and analyse the value of peer mentoring in aiding a successful transition into Higher Education.

**Methodology**

Using a critical multiple case-study design (Cohen et al, 2008; Yin, 2001) the value of peer mentoring in promoting and enhancing the student experience is being investigated in eight different Higher Education Institutions in the UK, Canada and Norway.
In deciding upon the research approach and selecting the case-study organisations, various factors were taken into account (see Yin, 2003). The case-study selection criterion necessitated that across the project there should be:

- Common exemplar phenomenon
- Comparable organisational characteristics and features
- Similar regulatory frameworks/ constraints
- Shared objectives (KPIs/ Outputs/ Outcomes)
- Shared interests (policy/ practice/ purpose)
- Theoretical linkages

**Discussion & Concluding Remarks**

The study findings thus far suggest a wide range of perspectives and issues impact student mentoring programmes in terms of the influence such programmes have on student transition in general, and student learning and support, more specifically. Figure 1 provides a diagrammatic representation of a multidimensional approach to conceptualising peer mentoring within Higher Education developed out of the literature and study findings.

**Figure 1: A Multidimensional Approach to Conceptualising Peer Mentoring**

- **Institutional Factors**
  - Building of social and cultural capital

- **Public Policy Drivers**
  - E.g. Widening Participation Agenda

- **Study Skills Development**
  - Academic writing/ Maths/ ICT

- **The Development of Transferable Skills**

Whilst it should be noted that the above diagram represents a 'working model', subject to further empirical analysis of the project findings, four determinants of peer mentoring have thus far been identified: Institutional factors; study skills development; the need for students to develop more generic transferable skills; and wider public policy.
Perhaps the most important factor influencing the outcome of peer mentoring programmes is the institution in which the mentoring occurs. Indeed, by affording access to peer mentoring programmes, institutions facilitate access to academic and social support – thereby ultimately aiding student retention and promoting success. From a pedagogical perspective, the role played by peer mentoring in terms of study skills development represents a key aspect of the student experience. The findings suggest peer mentoring can promote deep learning whilst equipping students with valuable transferable skills. In terms of employability, by enhancing students’ transferable skills, peer mentoring can potentially have long term positive outcomes for both students and the Institutions in which they are situated. Whilst student (and subsequently graduate) employability is one public policy driver influencing peer mentoring programmes, other policies such as the widening participation agenda are also key influences.

In conclusion, the multidimensional nature of peer mentoring depicted in this paper encapsulates the complexities of the student transition experience from both the institutional and student perspectives. The study findings so far suggest that Peer Mentoring represents a valuable institutional and pedagogical tool which in addition to aiding student transition plays a valuable part in promoting student success.

**Word Count:** 994

**References**


