

Lecturers' Role in Tutor Development from an Activity Theory Perspective

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Background

- Most of the **tutoring literature** alludes to tutors' experiences of tutorials and the positive effects on tutors (see Retna, Chong & Cavana, 2009; Schleyer, Langdon & James, 2005).
- The exploration of **social interactions** in tutoring occurs with less frequency and when it does occur the focus is mostly on **tutor-student interactions** (Colvin, 2007; Colvin, Fozdar & Volet, 2012).

Background

- The **relationship between tutors and lecturers is under-represented** in the tutoring literature. The study described in this article attempted to correct that deficiency by documenting the **interaction between tutors and *lecturers***

Aim of the study

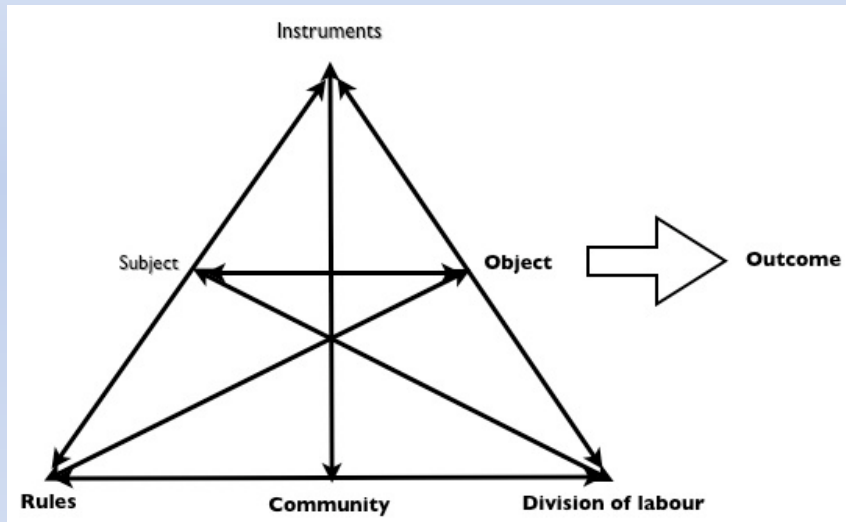
- To determine **how lecturers were supporting tutors** within their departments w.r.t. enhancing their knowledge and skills for facilitating learning within tutorials.

Research questions

1) How are tutors trained and developed at departmental level for their role as facilitators of learning within tutorials?

2) What is the nature of support that lecturers provide to tutors to help them cross the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and what is constraining that journey?

Activity theory (Engestrom 2001)



- **Subject:** Lecturer
- **Tools:** Course materials, technology
- **Object:** Tutor support
- **Outcome:** Enhanced learning
- **Rules:** Policies
- **Community:** Lecturer, link lecturer, tutor, students
- **Roles:** Who does what

Concepts used

ZPD

Knotworking

Contradictions

Concepts used

- **ZPD:** A comparison between what a person can achieve on their own, without support and what they can accomplish with the assistance of a more experienced, more learned person (Vygotsky 1978)
- **Contradictions:** Systemic tensions or disturbances (Engeström, 2008).
- **Knotworking**

Knotworking

Characterized by a movement of tying, untying and retying together seemingly separate threads of activity.

Engeström, 2008



FIG. 16.—Open-hand knots.

Context of the study

- University in SA: 30 000 students; 2000 academic staff.
- Generic tutor training was provided through a centralized model and de-centralized model.

Research method

- Purposive sampling.
- Respondents: 6 tutors; 10 lecturers
- Qualitative study involving face-to-face interviews.
- Data analysed through coding, categorization and identification of themes.

Results

Post training support

- Strategies used to help tutors cross the ZPD:
- Information briefing sessions;
- Course materials & revision questions were provided;
- Lecturers intervened when tutors could not answer questions posed by students.

Post training support

- No support from some lecturers:
- Tutors indicated that they struggled to interact with students and there was **nowhere to turn to for help**.
- Lecturers did not collaborate with them.
- One tutor remarked: **“We felt like we were a nuisance”**.

Division of labour between lecturers and tutors within departments

- One lecturer respondent explained that her subject (health sciences) is difficult to learn and that she cannot rely on tutors to explain the concepts (in a formal tutorial setting) because they are only at second year level.

Division of labour between lecturers and tutors within departments

- **Lecturer 1:** 'We work well as a team, we use the same tutors.'
- **Lecturer 2:** 'There is no professional jealousy between tutors and lecturers....we are quite relieved that we have tutors.'
- **Lecturer 3:** 'I had the same tutor for three years in a row. She knew exactly what I expected from her. She did well in my subject....She has more than adequate knowledge.'
- **Lecturer 4:** 'We work well together (with tutors). We have an open door policy.'

Discussion

The notion of knotworking in providing post-training support for tutors to cross the tutoring Zone of Proximal Development

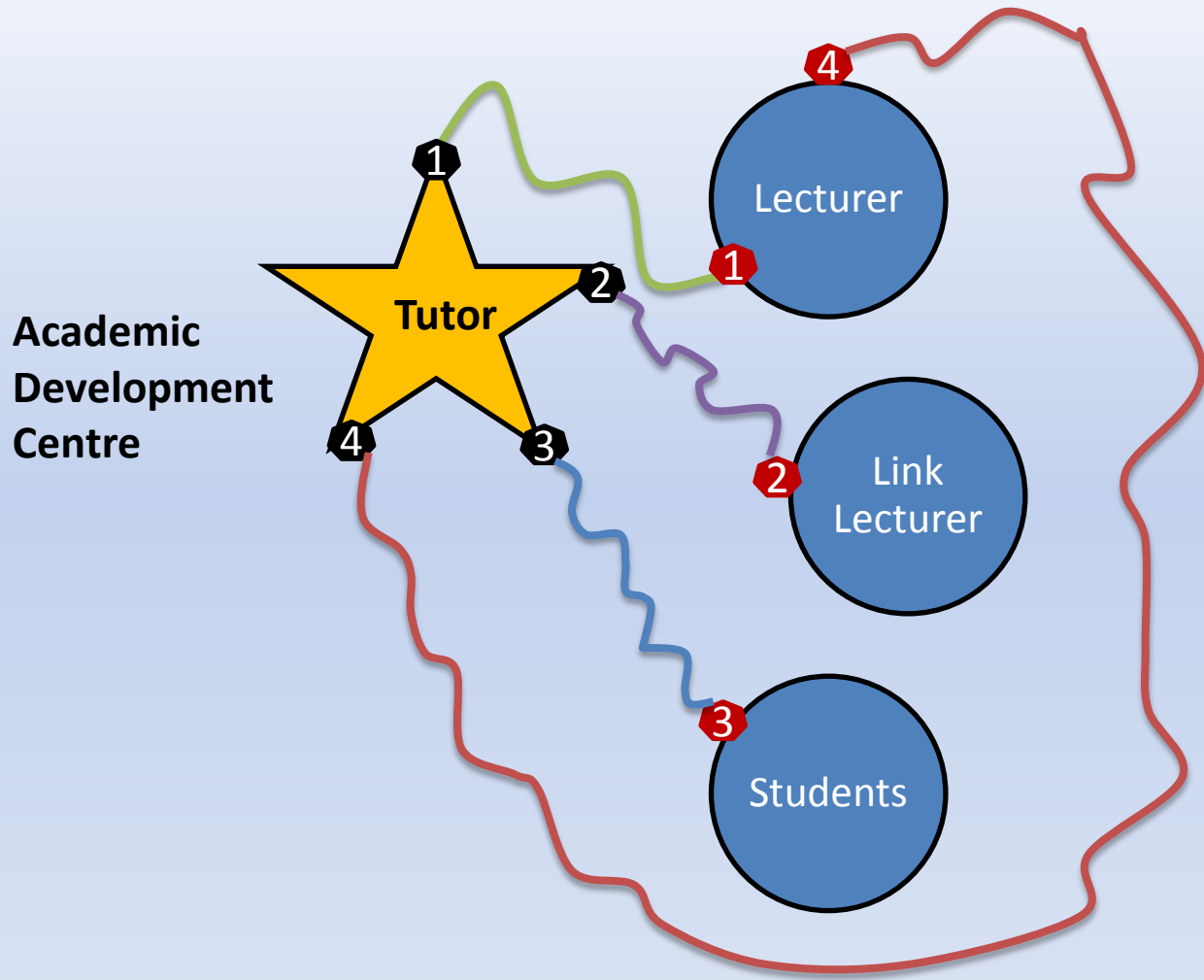
- **Generic TTP was structured**; post-training support was unstructured, loose and disconnected.
- Although loose, **knotworking** had an aim, namely to **help tutors cross the ZPD**.
- Knots were created, untied and new knots were formed Engeström (2008) as tutors were supported in their journey across the ZPD.

The notion of knotworking in providing post-training support to cross the tutoring ZPD

- Tutors were given **course materials**, allowed to attend **lectures**, having **debriefing meetings**. This constituted one **type of knot**.
- Thereafter, the **knot was untied** when tutors worked on their own in **facilitating tutorials**.
- The **knot was retied** when they returned to work with the lecturer by **attending lectures** to refresh their memory in terms of the discipline knowledge.
- **Another knot was tied** when the lecturer and tutor kept in **contact via email** communication.

The notion of knotworking in providing post-training support to cross the tutoring ZPD

- When tutors needed help with **administrative matters** such as claiming for numeration of services rendered, they would **create a knot with the link lecturer** who would co-ordinate the process.



The notion of knotworking in providing post-training support to cross the tutoring ZPD

- Knotworking was not a power-free space.
- **Power dynamics existed**: Some lecturers were reluctant to utilize tutors and perceived them as being ill-prepared in terms of the discipline-knowledge.
- These **lecturers did not 'trust' tutors** and there was little opportunity for them to conduct tutorials except after hours in the student residences.
- Other **lecturers were unwilling to provide guidance** and assistance to tutors which became evident when they **did not share resources** with tutors.

The need for a Zone of Proximal Development for the subject (lecturers)

- What was constraining lecturers in helping tutors cross the ZPD?
- 1) **Lack of confidence** in tutors being able to help students effectively.
- 2) Perception of **tutors as a burden** or nuisance.
- 3) **Absence of training for lecturers** on how to conduct tutorials and how to mentor tutors.
- 4) Some lecturers were **under prepared** for supporting tutors.

The need for a Zone of Proximal Development for the subject (lecturers)

- A **training programme for lecturers** on how to conduct tutorials and how to mentor tutors should be in place.
- Focus on lecturer support and ***lecturer development*** should become the object.

Conclusion

- Knotworking was applied in explaining the nature of post-training support.
- No need for a structured, rigid, hierarchical coordination of post-training, discipline-specific support for tutors.
- Knotworking, as a loose, unstructured tool, was used to achieve the outcome of tutor development, in the various departments.

Thank you!