

A review of the BIA peer tutor program

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About the project

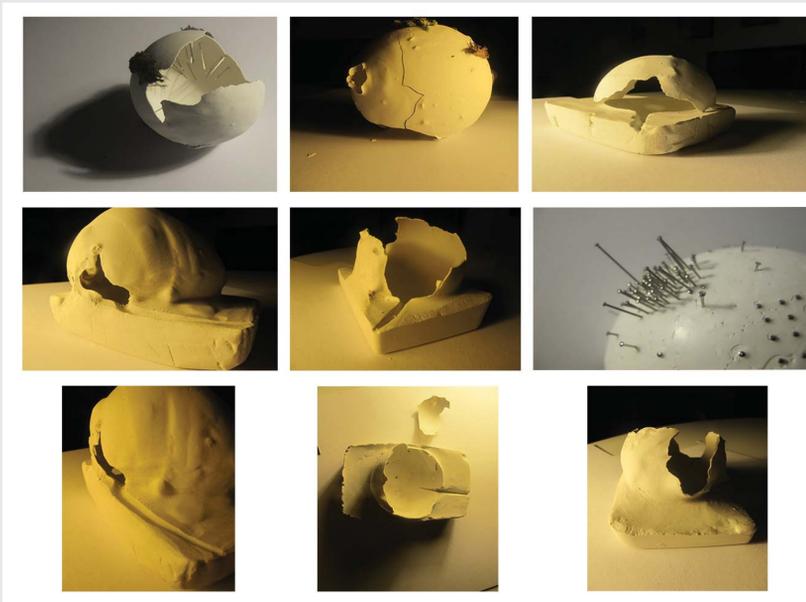
This project reviewed the impact of a revised peer tutor program in a first year design studio. An earlier study, reported in Zamberlan and Wilson (2015), outlined the redesign of a peer tutor program for first year UNSW Interior Architecture students that was informed by student focus group data, research on peer learning and a consideration of best practice at other Australian universities. The project described here represents the subsequent phase of the action research cycle and focuses on the evaluation of the revised program.

Aim

The aim of the project was to investigate the extent to which a revised peer tutor program supported the successful engagement of commencing students in the design studio environment. The study examined the impact of peer tutors on first year students' transition experience, learning interactions and engagement with creative processes.

Approach

The effectiveness of the revised program, particularly its capacity to support learning for commencing students in the studio environment, was examined through focus groups with first year students and third year peer tutors, CATEI results and staff reflection. Results were assessed in relation to current theories about what constitutes a successful peer tutor program, growing evidence of the unique role played by peer tutors in design and other practice-based disciplines, and the potential contribution of peer tutors to the development of creative skills valued in 21st century design practice.



Outcomes

The data provided critical perspectives on the contribution of peer tutors to the student learning experience in design studio. A number of key themes emerged from the first year student focus group. These included:

- the support and encouragement students felt from peer tutors.
- the positive impact of peer tutors on productivity and creative and collaborative processes in studio.
- the contribution of peer tutors to students' learning of the design process.
- the accessibility of peer tutors and associated benefits.
- the impact of peer tutors on the quality of students' studio work.
- the role of peer tutors in contributing to students' sense of belonging to the discipline.
- peer tutors' contribution to students' aspirations and levels of motivation.

Some overlaps were found between the above themes and those that emerged from the peer tutor focus groups. Themes included:

- the importance of relationship building.
- the benefits of the 'intermediary' role played by peer tutors.

- the evolving and flexible nature of the peer tutor role and its contribution to studio culture.
- the role of peer tutors in enhancing dialogue, student engagement and collaboration.
- reflection on peer tutors' own first year experience and learning.
- benefits to students related to peer tutors' enthusiasm for the creative process.
- peer tutors' engagement in the teaching and learning of design.

The study suggested that peer tutors played a pivotal role in the studio that was different from, but complementary to, the role of the studio tutor. When employed purposefully, peer tutors can make a significant contribution to the development of a positive studio culture and the enhancement of a collaborative community of practice, and amplify students' engagement with iterative processes of design learning.

This project has been documented and submitted to the Journal of Peer Learning.

Zamberlan, L. & Wilson, S. (2015). Developing an embedded peer tutor program in design studio to support first year design students, *Journal of Peer Learning*, 8, 2015, 5-17.

