STUDENTS LEARNING WITH COMMUNITIES

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Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)

- Officially established in 1992 from a merger of several vocational education colleges.
- One of the largest third-level institutions in Ireland, it awards qualifications from certificates to PhDs.
- Programmes’ emphasis applied learning and research, and have strong links with industry.
DIT’s Community Links Programme has been building civic engagement successfully since 1996, helping the alleviation of educational disadvantage at local, national, and international levels.

Since 2008, DIT’s center for Community Based Learning (CBL) and Community Based Research (CBR) has been based in Community Links. This center is called The Programme for Students Learning with Communities (SLWC).

www.communitylinks.ie/students-learning-with-communities/
As part of the EU Public Engagement with Research and Research Engagement with Society (PERARES) project, staff in Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) are formally mentored by staff at Queen’s University Belfast (QUB), with over 20 years experience fostering Community Based Research (CBR) projects.
LEARNING FROM MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

WITHIN AND BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTE STAFF
Case Study One: QUB and DIT Mentoring

- **Hierarchical**
- **Lateral**

Group
collaboration

Relationships

trust

pairs

lateral

networks

good council

mentees

mentors

Hierarchical

reciprocal

active

support

mutual dialogue

challenges

shared Activities

role model

learning
Were there CBR projects already happening in DIT?

Who are the key people to talk to?

What is the purpose of an advisory board, and what format would it take?

How can we start up CBR projects in DIT?
Aims of the Mentoring Relationship:
- build networks and relationships with colleagues and peers
- access to ‘know how’ on CBR: projects, models, practices, experience and policy.
- mobilize knowledge gained, to continue to grow and support CBR projects in DIT in line with best practice.
- sound out ideas on CBR projects and related issues
- explore possibilities for collaboration
Agenda
Conference Calls
E-mail
Face to face meetings
Seminar and Conference Participation
These conversations, emails, seminars, and meetings have had a positive impact on our work and have aided with changing and developing our work and work processes in the following examples:
Impact of Mentoring on SLWC work

- Building processes for developing and maintaining relationships between SLWC staff, academic staff, Civil Society Organisations (CSO’s) and students in setting up CBR projects, examples of procedures include:
  - Meeting checklists
  - Application forms for students
  - A Community Based Research process map
  - Timeline agreement form for all parties in a project to sign.

- Developing processes to ensure we and CSOs receive results of Community Based Research.
Looking for opportunities for promoting CBR projects in DIT including:

- e-mailing heads of schools with updates on CBR projects in their schools
- faculty board presentations
- Asking for a short window in a lecture to promote CBR topics from CSOs to students in high-demand areas (such as Information Technology)
- Adverts in students journals
- Production of promotional material
- Policy work embed involvement in CBR into DIT, such as inclusion in promotional criteria from Assistant Lecturer to Senior Lecturer.
Challenges

• Finding time in busy diaries
• Limitations of our different institutional structures and political systems.

Another possible challenge – which hasn’t been an issue for us is if the mentor and the mentee have different expectations of the relationship.
DIT’s Top Tips for setting up mentoring;

- What is the focus of the relationship - i.e. a particular project.
- Identify a purpose and goals, considering partners’ needs and potential benefits.
- How long will the relationship last? Identify a time frame.
- Is the relationship formal?
- How will you communicate?
- How often will you communicate?

Structure but allow room for flexibility.
“Are very happy with the relationship”

“Flows both ways”

and feel they can “raise different and sensitive issues’ because of the “trusting and interpersonal relationship” they have with staff at DIT.

Positive outcomes of the mentoring relationship for Queens University

(Mentors: McKenna, Martin 2012)
Positive outcomes of the mentoring relationship for Queens University

- Ask staff to reflect on their practice
- Staff can bring models of practice from DIT back to QUB
- DIT staff are able to point to other successful Science Shops in Republic of Ireland and this helps provide a national context for work.
- Staff are able to use staff at DIT as a sounding board for ‘new’ issues.

(Mentors: McKenna, Martin 2012)
CASE STUDY 2: INFORMAL MENTORING PILOT IN DIT
DIT Staff experienced in Community Based Research and Community Based Learning had capacity and knowledge to informally mentor staff new to this area.

In 2011/12 we piloted an informal mentoring relationship between two lecturers.

Mary Moloney, Senior Lecturer in Nutrition and Dietetics, and Sara Boyd, lecturer in Environmental Health.
to provide a space where Mary’s knowledge and experience could be shared with Sara
“To offer support, develop and build a relationship with a faculty member from a sister college that might not otherwise develop”

“To provide information on a lecturer’s (mentor) experience in relation to the actual work undertaken in projects” as well as to “create the opportunity for collaboration on future research projects”

(Mentor: Mary Maloney 2012)
“a non threatening, positive, encouraging, and motivational experience for the mentee” where the “mentor’s positive experiences and mistakes can be shared” and “future anticipated problems and difficulties can be discussed”

Mary sees her role as a mentor as a “valuable career development tool” which can “build leadership skills”, and may provide opportunities for possible collaborative work.

(Mentor: Mary Maloney 2012)
Marys Top Tips on being a mentor

- Mutual respect and recognition between mentor and mentee
- Allocation of 1.5 – 2 hours to explore possible opportunities for the mentee’s students to work with CSOs.
- Discuss the design of a realistic and measurable programme for the students within an achievable time-frame.
- Set achievable goals.
- Liaise with SLWC staff for advice and support.

(Mentor: Mary Maloney 2012)
Marys challenges on being a mentor

- Investment in self and time for the mentor
- Before assigning a mentor to a mentee, make sure that the mentor appreciates the importance of keeping to their commitment, as cancelling or not showing up for a meeting, or poor provision of support, can be worse than not being mentored at all.
- Ensuring there is strong SLWC support for the project.
- Ensuring that all staff in DIT are aware of the outcomes of the SLWC projects i.e. these projects have been successful in providing a positive experience for both the lecturer and the students.
- Consideration of the possible implications for financial costs.

(Mentor: Mary Maloney 2012)
“very encouraged by the success of her mentor- it can be done and it’s a very positive experience for all involved. It’s achievable”.

“the relationship provided an opportunity for her to “listen to her mentor’s project in detail and the process she went through”

“Although they were working in different disciplines she could certainly identify how transferable some of the processes and techniques were”

(Mentee: Sara Boyd, 2012)
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