Book Review

Connecting the Dots: Collaboration across Learning Support Professions in Higher Education to Enhance Student Learning.   Michelle Schneider, Jade Kelsall, and Helen Webster (Editors). 2016. Innovative Libraries Press. 184 pages. Standard list price: £19.95 (approx. $NZ36.00). Pdf version: £9.95 (approx. $NZ18.00)
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Connecting the Dots is a rare example of a book about a central issue in our practice – how to develop successful collaborations for the benefit of our learners - which is also written and published by our fellow practitioners.

The publisher, Innovative Libraries Press, was founded by Andy Walsh, a librarian from the University of Huddersfield. The aim is to publish books about professional development for librarians and information / academic literacies for students.   Innovative Libraries publications are available as low-cost paperbacks, pdfs and e-books, which makes them particularly accessible for ATLAANZ members. I bought *Connecting the Dots* from the website, paid by paypal, and Andy sent me the pdf the next day. Its eight chapters (in addition to the introduction) discuss a range of collaborations among librarians, learning developers and other professional staff at universities in the UK, Australia and the US. The authors include long-serving members of our counterpart association, ALDinHE, such as Kim Shahabudin, Michelle Schneider and Janette Myers. The book includes a helpful index allowing readers to locate references to themes such as inclusive models and relationship building across several chapters.

Making partnerships work: Practical strategies for building successful collaborations begins with a review of literature on student experience and collaboration. It then presents five principles and seven themes for successful partnerships, which emerged from data gathered at several tertiary institutions. The principles are sensible reminders of the need for institutional support and for rewards for those who engage in the typically messy and time-consuming process of collaboration. The themes are recommendations for managing and developing collaborations, such as engaging stakeholders and defining roles and responsibilities. This framework underpins the Self-Assessment Toolkit for those engaging in collaborations, which was developed by the authors and is available from the HE Academy website. The chapter will be a useful resource for learning advisors looking to present a case for their own collaborative projects.

Plotting and planning: Analysing the alignment of learning support practices is an insightful discussion of tensions in learning development practice (particularly between the desire to support students, while at the same time cultivating their autonomy). To help tertiary professionals understand and align their practices, the author, Janette Myers, has developed the EN-MAP tool. Practices are mapped against a matrix, comprising one axis of autonomy and the other of need; a practice based on high need, but low autonomy (such as texting at-risk students reminders to hand in assignments) is categorised as 'ensuring'. This kind of 'push' approach to student support is seen as the opposite of traditional student learning services, which Janette describes as 'responding', and sees as based on somewhat questionable assumptions of high student autonomy coupled with low need. Janette presents examples from Australian and British contexts in which groups of professionals used the matrix to explore the difficult trade-off between support and autonomy in the provision of student services. It provides a useful framework for learning advisors wishing to conduct critical evaluation of their services in relation to the key (and conflicting) objectives of support and autonomy.

Connecting with focus explains how a manager of an expanded learning and teaching unit used principles derived from the servant leadership tradition within management. These principles underlie the four roles of leadership proposed by Covey (2002): being a role model through acting with integrity and credibility; path-finding; aligning vision and values with systems and structures; empowerment.
The chapter discusses how this approach to leadership helped the diverse staff to develop into a community through shared projects, such as employability workshops for students and incentives for staff to gain Higher Education Academy fellowships. It will be of particular interest to managers of learning centres wishing to align their practice with collaborative, facilitative principles.

Critical collaboration: A narrative account of a newly established interprofessional team is another collective account of developing collaboration by a team of learning development, library and support staff brought together by a restructure. The formation of interprofessional teams had created opportunities to provide students with more coherent and contextualised advice. There is the same emphasis on the importance of having a shared, common space and of developing relationships as in the previous chapter. However, this one presents a more 'grounded' perspective on theory, which is seen as emerging from the experiences and reflections of the team. There is an especially interesting discussion of embedded learning support; in relation to a consultation with a Fine Arts student, one of the authors comments that "'embedding' means locating moments such as these where 'content' and language are effectively meshed together, and turning these into learning opportunities for students by making them explicit within the main provision of the course, rather than as an 'add-on' or 'support'" (pp. 84-5). This is a scenario to which, I think, many of us can relate.

Terms of reference: Working together to develop student citation practices describes a project in which a learning developer, librarian and EAP academic tutor developed an in-house resource (*The Academic Integrity Toolkit*) for tutors to use in EAP courses to help students develop their information literacy and citation skills. The toolkit evolved into a comprehensive and educational set of resources and activities, with a strong focus on

independent learning. The background to this collaboration will be familiar to many New Zealand practitioners: the shift of study skills support to the library within a 'one-stop shop' model of student service provision. While acknowledging the inevitable tensions that can emerge when different professional cultures collide, the authors argue that "differences can, if managed with sensitivity and mutual respect, produce creative collaborations that can help us to meet the increase in demand for support and to maximise the effectiveness of teaching activities" (p. 97). The chapter identifies a number of practical challenges which had to be overcome – for instance, timing of meetings to fit in with the different routines and busy periods of the team members. As in other projects in this volume, the authors put considerable effort into building a team ethos, including informal lunchtime meetings. They describe how the team pooled their expertise and tapped into the professional networks of each team member to expand the project beyond its original goals. This multiplier effect of collaboration will give encouragement to learning advisors that the considerable work they put into collaborative projects should have meaning and value beyond the team itself.

Transforming practice and promoting academic excellence through collaborative cross-unit partnerships is another account of librarian and learning development teamwork in producing academic literacy resources - this time at the Australia Catholic University. Like several NZ tertiary institutions, this university is spread across widely-separated campuses, which makes it difficult to provide comprehensive and coherent student services. The team developed an online resource using a design-based research (DBR) methodology – an approach I was unfamiliar with, but which seems quite similar to action research, given its collaborative and iterative nature. One interesting aspect of the project was how the team raised awareness of the resource, by having it incorporated within the professional development course for teaching staff; this led to several 'early-adopters' including the resource in their own online teaching. As in other chapters, the authors provide evidence of the transformative impact of collaboration through the pooling of expertise and exposure to different practices.

Living, learning, and the library: A collaborative effort to bring information literacy, research, and beyond classroom experiences to residence halls describes a collaborative project at the University of Oregon to provide academic and living support to students in a designated library space within a new university hall. The authors refer to Kezar's (2001) model which identifies four drivers of collaboration between learning development and student services: enhancing student learning; environmental factors, such as a campus ethos of collaboration; managerial trends among external bodies; and leadership trends within the campus. Like other studies referred to in earlier chapters, Kezar emphasises the need for collaborative projects to be based on a shared philosophy of student learning. This chapter shows how the authors had to deal with a number of conflicting pressures as the project developed and had to refocus on their shared principles in order to bring it to a successful completion. Their observation that "while we were focused on student learning as the reason for our partnership, others above us may have had more managerial-based reasoning" (p. 148) is one that I am sure will resonate with learning advisors working in the NZ tertiary context. One interesting aspect of the collaboration was how the different practitioners had to explain their 'trade jargon' and develop a common language for the project; for instance, jointly naming one of the spaces and specifying its use. It was again impressive how much

effort the team put into developing and sustaining their relationships, with weekly meetings and out-of-work social events. As in the projects described in other chapters, the authors note the positive benefits of collaboration for student learning, professional development and awareness-raising.

A tale of three cities: An interprofessional, inter-institutional collaboration describes an informal collaboration among a team comprising a learning developer, librarians and a learning technologist working at different institutions to produce the open-source *Student Guide to Social Media*. As the authors point out, a strong rationale for such interprofessional collaborations is that "the boundaries between the remit and roles of these professionals are often fluid, both within and across institutions" (p. 155). The chapter is structured around principles which could apply to any collaboration, together with examples of what this team did successfully and what they could or should have done differently. For instance, they learnt that even within an informal collaboration, it is essential to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities (particularly that of the project manager), though these can be allowed to evolve as the particular expertise of team members emerges. The way the team dealt with the thorny issues of project branding and approval procedures will provide food for thought for learning advisors working across institutional boundaries in an increasingly commercialised tertiary environment.

This volume is timely, as tertiary learning advisors are increasingly engaged in collaborative projects both within and across institutions. It contains useful examples, practical advice and relevant models and principles to draw upon in developing our own initiatives. It is reminiscent of our own collaborative publication from a few years back (Manalo, Fraser, & Marshall, 2010) and a reminder of the potential for further action and research in our own context.

References

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