



University of Minho
Institute of Education

Tutoring in Higher Education

Sandra Fernandes

sandrafernandes@ie.uminho.pt

Maria Assunção Flores

aflores@ie.uminho.pt

4–8 July 2011

University of Minho, Braga, Portugal.



University of Minho
Institute of Education

Outline

1. Introduction
 - Tutoring in Higher Education
2. Context of the Study
 - A case study of Project-Led Education (PLE)
3. Methodology
4. Findings
5. Conclusions

Tutoring in Higher Education

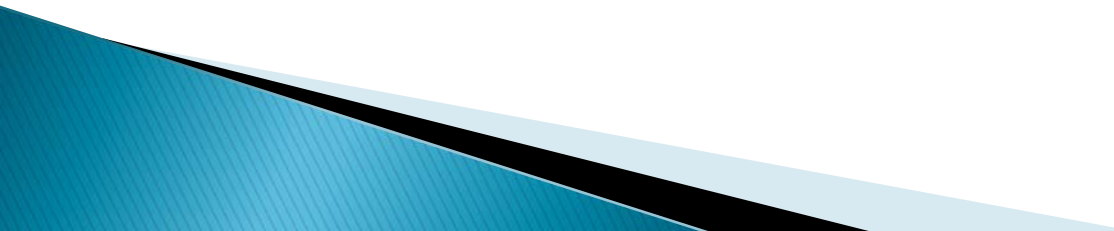
- ▶ Tutoring has been one of the issues which have received growing interest within the restructuring process in Higher Education under the so-called Bologna process in Europe.

Educational Reorganization

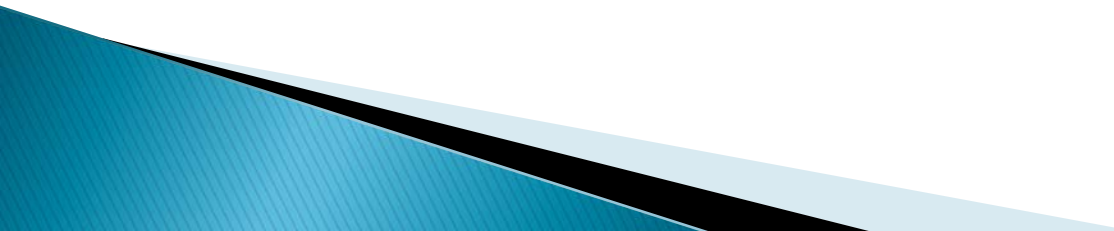
- More flexible curriculum;
- A distinct organization of teachers and students;
- The adoption of schemes of tutorial support;
- New ways of teaching and assessment ;
- Greater coordination between research and teaching;
- Smaller classes.
- Etc.

(Lima, 2006:9)

Tutoring in Higher Education

- ▶ This new way of understanding university education implies quality teaching, a redefinition of Faculty staff work, their training and professional development.
 - ▶ It also entails a significant change in their traditional role of knowledge transmitter to include designing and managing complex learning scenarios, engaging students in the search and construction of knowledge through adequate strategies and activities.
- 

Tutoring in Higher Education

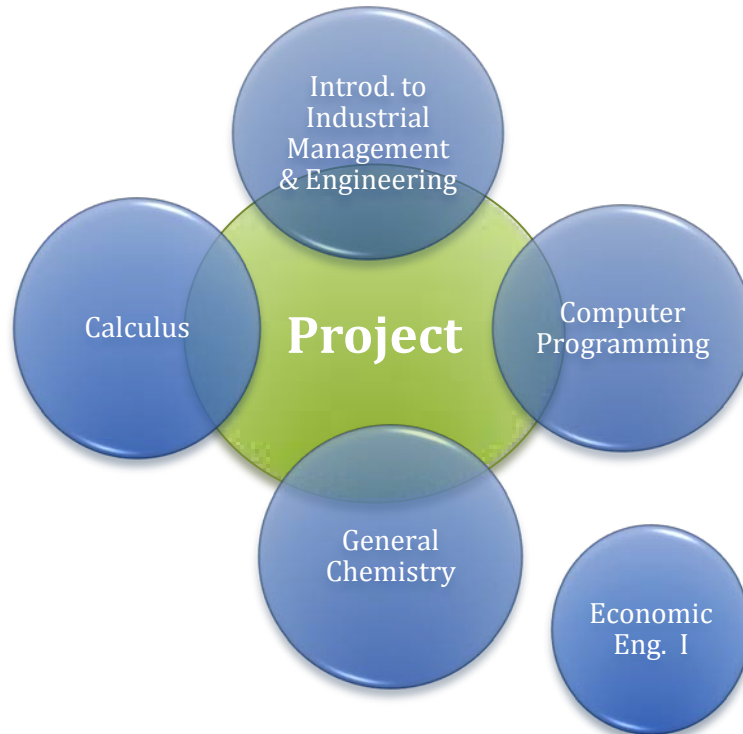
- ▶ This new way of understanding university education implies quality teaching, a redefinition of Faculty staff work, their training and professional development.
 - ▶ It also entails a significant change in their traditional role of knowledge transmitter to include designing and managing complex learning scenarios, engaging students in the search and construction of knowledge through adequate strategies and activities.
- 

Case Study

The tutor in Project-Led Education

Context of the Study

Encouraged by the demands of the Bologna Process, a group of teachers took the initiative to implement, in 2004/2005, a **Project-Led Education (PLE)** experience with first year Industrial Management and Engineering (IME) students.



Project Supporting Courses of PLE

▶ **Students:**

- 6 teams of 6/7 students
- 1 tutor for each team

▶ **Staff coordination team:**

- Course Lecturers
- Tutors
- Researchers

▶ **Tutors (2008/2009):**

- Course Lecturers (2)
- Faculty Staff (3)
- Researcher (1)

Context of the Study

What is Project-Led Education (PLE)?

«...team-based student activity related to learning and to solving large-scale open-ended projects. (...) A team of students tackles the project, provides a solution, and delivers a 'team product', such as a prototype or a team report at an agreed delivery time (a deadline). Students show what they have learnt by discussing the 'team product' with each other and reflecting on how they have achieved it».

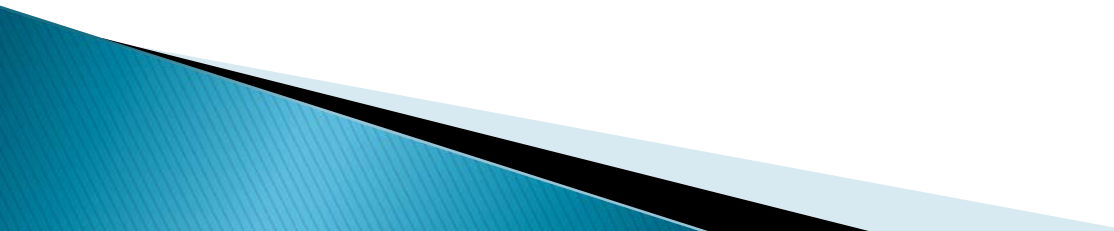
Powell & Weenk (2003:28)

The Tutor in PLE

“The PLE tutor’s role is to facilitate the student progress, not least by encouraging and advising, inspiring, sometimes pulling and pushing, and, as a last resort simply insisting on hard work.”

(Powell, 2003:245)

Possible Roles of the Tutor (Powell, 2003):

- Project Manager
 - Motivator
 - Facilitator of the learning process
 - Technical Expert
 - Evaluator
- 

Methodology

This presentation draws upon data from a broader piece of research within the context of a PhD, which aimed to evaluate the impact of Project-Led Education (PLE) on students' learning processes and faculty staff's work.

The main focus of this study was to analyze tutor's perceptions about PLE as an educational approach and discuss its strengths, weaknesses and challenges for faculty staff work.

Data Collection:

- ▶ **Group Interviews (1st Phase):**
 - Staff Coordination Team of PLE
 - At the end of each project edition

- ▶ **Individual Interviews (2nd Phase):**
 - Course lecturers of the 1st semester, 1st year of IME
 - Tutors involved in PLE.

Findings from Tutors

Experiences in Tutoring

Positive Aspects

Student and Teacher Relationship

- More contact with students
- Better understanding of students motivations and interests
- Higher student motivation for learning

Teaching Practices

- Changes in teachers attitude with students – more informal contact with students
- PLE also develops teachers' transversal skills

Professional Development

- Feeling of professional accomplishment

Findings from Tutors

Experiences in Tutoring

Problems / Difficulties

Educational Background

- Lack of training in this area (need to learn by experience)

Role of the Lecturer and Tutor

- Combine the tutors role with the lecturer´s role (what can the tutor do and not do? How far can he go in his competencies?)

Relationship between the team and the tutor

- How to make students feel comfortable and open with tutors

Coordination between Tutors

- Coordination amongst tutors, teachers and coordination team

Findings from Tutors

Tutoring Practices

Tutorial Meetings

Periodicity: weekly

Duration: 1 hour, approximately

Place: students project rooms

Participants: student team and tutor

Subjects discussed in the meetings:

- State of art of the project
 - Discussion and planning of the project tasks
- Group functioning / teamwork
 - Existing conflicts within team members, student motivation, discussion of peer assessment results

Findings from Tutors

Tutor's Role

Providing Feedback

- Provide formative feedback to students each time they have a milestone

Supporting Decision Making

- Supports students in decision making – help students make important decisions that will contribute to the projects progression.

Increasing Student Motivation

- Tutor should motivate the team and show that he believes in their success. Many strategies were used to attain this goal: group dynamics, extra-curricular activities, open talk with students, etc.

Findings from Tutors

Tutor's Role

Monitoring the Project	Motivating the Team	Supporting Problem Solving	Assessing the Project
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monitor the project's development• Indicate who could best help solve the teams's problem/situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish a close relationship with students• Constantly motivate the team to meet its goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To identify and report existing problems in the teams to the staff coordination team• Communicate information between the student team and the staff coordination team	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contribute to the assessment of the project (team reports and presentations)

Findings from Tutors

Tutor's Voices

- Being a tutor is like supervising – there are different ways of doing it. In some cases, it is more effective to be more directive, in other cases it results better to stimulate student reflection, ask them questions. There is no standard way. In summary, it means meeting with the students and **supporting** them in whatever they need.
- I try to give **feedback** about the projects progression. At a certain point, I ask them what they want to do from now on. I try to understand when do teams need to make decisions. Sometimes the team doesn't go any further because a decision needs to be made.
- In PLE, the role of the tutor is not to direct but to guide. He/she should make the team believe that they can do even better. The tutor also plays an important role in keeping teams **motivated** and identifying strategies to overcome the difficulties.

Findings from Tutors

Tutor's Voices


- In regard to the topics discussed in the **tutorial meetings**, what I usually do is see at what point are students at in the project, I ask them if they are late in their planning, I discuss tasks with them.
- This is one of the advantages of learning with projects: since the projects are **open ended** it is always possible for students to deepen even more their understanding about the subjects. It is not like an exam or an activity, where students are usually just concerned with what is necessary to study for examinations. And with projects, the difference is that the study is never enough!
- At the middle of the semester I had an individual talk with each team member. The goal was to concentrate on each single person in the team and try to **motivate** them and get a commitment from them. The sense of responsibility is very important.

Findings from Tutors

Tutor's Voices

- At a certain moment, I had to make them believe that the choice they had made was the best one. Even if that decision could limit the project, it was important to **support** that **decision** and make them think that this was a great solution.
- I provide **feedback** to students every time there are milestones (the students want to know how well they did. They want to know the tutors opinion).
- In regard to **student's individual learning**, I usually ask the course lecturers how students are doing in each subject and I make an effort to let them know that I know how well or bad they are doing in the courses.
- My main difficulty as a tutor was the **lack of experience** on what to do. As a tutor, if there had been a meeting at the start of the semester discussing tutorial issues, I think it would have been very useful.

Final Conclusions

- Project-Led Education (PLE) was considered a positive approach to enhance student centered learning;
 - Teachers and tutors recognized the benefits of project approaches in relation to traditional teaching and learning:
motivation; interdisciplinarity; collaborative work; student and teacher relationship; changes in curriculum design; teachers' professional development.
 - A set of weaknesses and improvements were also identified by the evaluation process:
heavy workload; teacher/tutor's role; lack of training in pedagogy; teaching and research activities; institutional support.
 - Teacher's role is more demanding – being a tutor or facilitator requires new competencies for faculty staff;
 - Staff development and training should promote discussion and exchange of experiences and practices amongst colleagues;
 - Institutional support – organizational policies and procedures which encourage and reward teaching are needed.
- 

Thank you for your attention!

Sandra Fernandes
sandra@dps.uminho.pt