Distributed and collaborative: Experiences of local leadership of a first year experience program

Jo McKenzie and Kathy Egea,
Institute of Interactive Media and Learning, University of Technology Sydney.

Abstract

The first year experience (FYE) is a domain in which local level leadership is critical for engaging academics in taking a whole of curriculum focus on student transition and success, and working collaboratively with professional staff. This paper describes ways in which local leadership is experienced at the faculty level in an institutional FYE program, based on interviews with faculty coordinators and small grant recipients. Initial analysis using the distributed leadership tenets described by Jones, Hadgraft, Harvey, Lefoe and Ryland (2014) revealed features, such as collaborative communities, that enabled success, as well as differences across faculties. More fine grained analysis indicated further themes in engaging others, enabling and enacting the FYE program: gaining buy-in; being opportunistic; the need for evidence of success and recognition; the need for collegial support for coordinators and self-perceptions of 'leadership' being about making connections, collaboration, trust and expertise.

Introduction

Successful student transition to university requires a whole of institution approach that ensures that students are supported inside and outside the curriculum (Kift and Nelson, 2005; Thomas, 2012; Zepke 2013; Nelson 2014). Such an approach involves collaboration between academic and professional staff across traditional institutional boundaries. This requires top-down, bottom-up and middle-out leadership that recognises the range of contributions made by different people on the basis of their contexts and expertise. Leadership of this kind has come to be known as distributed, collective or shared (Bolden, Jones, Davis & Gentle, 2015). The first year experience (FYE) is a domain in which local level leadership is critical for engaging individual academics in taking a whole of curriculum focus on student transition and success and working collaboratively with professional staff. This paper analyses the ways in which local informal leadership at faculty level is enacted and supported in an institutional-wide FYE program.

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership involves individuals with diverse forms of expertise collaborating with others on shared goals and initiatives (Bolden, Petrov and Gosling 2008, Jones, Lefoe, Harvey and Ryland 2012; Jones, Hadgraft et al, 2014). It works alongside formal leadership, and involves informal leadership that engages people with shared change through collegiality and collaboration (Gosling, Bolden and Petrov, 2009). This view is aligned with Ramsden's perspective that leadership is enacted through "*how people relate to each other*" (1998, p.4), and contrasts with a focus on the traits of individuals in formal leadership positions.

Within higher education institutions, distributed leadership can be successful in facilitating alignment between top-down strategic directions and bottom-up emergent approaches,

ensuring cross-organisational collaboration (Bolden et al, 2008) and engaging academic and professional staff in collaborative activities (Jones, Harvey and Lefoe, 2014). Evidence of successful implementation of distributed leadership in higher education that develops both formal and informal leadership capacity is found in teaching and learning setting (Carbone et al., 2017; Beckmann 2016; Hamilton, Fox and McEwan, 2013). Distributed leadership approaches are thus potentially appropriate for facilitating engagement and change aligned with strategic, institution-wide learning and teaching programs.

Studies of change leadership in higher education learning and teaching have also acknowledged the importance of formal leadership at the local or meso level, in between senior leaders and individual academics (Martensson and Roxa, 2016). Local formal leaders, such as Heads of School may influence and facilitate change in different ways depending on the strength of their support from both higher level leaders and academic colleagues, with more or less sustainable outcomes (Martensson and Roxa, 2016). This paper aims to provide evidence of factors from distributed leadership that support academics in informal leadership roles and these are seen to support those in meso- level management roles.

The gap in the literature

- implementation of DL
- local level implementation of DL
- how the factors that influence formal leadership are the same as those for informal leaders – role of external and internal mandate on informal leadership positions
- FYE practice institution wide with informal leaders and DL approaches

The UTS First Year Experience Program

The UTS FYE program is an institution-wide, systematic approach to supporting transition, retention and success for first year students (see McKenzie and Egea, 2016). While it aims to support students from low socio-economic status (LSES) backgrounds, it does so from within a philosophy that good practice for these students is good practice for all students (Devlin, Kift, Nelson, Smith and McKay, 2012). Since 2011, the FYE program has engaged almost 700 academic and professional staff and influenced significant improvements in student pass rates, particularly for students from LSES backgrounds, using distributed leadership, communities, forums and small grants.

From 2011 to 2012, representatives from faculty and professional staff worked on an advisory group (central FYE advisory group) worked with the central T&L unit to structure a FYE framework, and designed to support students' sense of belonging and identity, in the context of curriculum, teaching and infrastructure. While members of the advisory board engaged broadly with the project, it was recognised that greater buy-in would be achieved with academics teaching in the first year space, and formally recognised within the faculty.

In 2013, Faculty-based First Year Transition Experience (FYTE) coordinators were appointed to provide leadership at the faculty level. This leadership is seen as informal, as coordinators have no line management or course coordination responsibilities. Employed for one day a week or the equivalent, most of the coordinators were female and previously in casual or short-term contract positions but two were male, one senior lecturer, and one professor who was part of a faculty team.

Faculty FYTE coordinators meet regularly as a group with the central FYE coordinator and project owner, and most meetings include professional staff from a FYE advisory team. FYTE coordinators report to their faculty Associate Deans, aligning their work to faculty goals within the central FYE strategy.

Overall, leadership of the FYE program involves people in both formal and informal roles at central and local levels, including central and faculty coordinators but also grant holders and other committed practitioners. However, there has been considerable variation in the ways in which leadership has been enacted at the local, faculty level. The paper draws out some of this variation in local or meso leadership and its consequences for sustainable practice.

Methodology

This paper draws on data collected through interviews with FYTE coordinators and FYE grant recipients using two different interview structures.

Past and present faculty FYTE coordinators were interviewed by the central FYE coordinator, using the Action Self-Enabling Reflective Tool (ASERT) matrix (see Jones et al, 2012) as a trigger to reflect on FY practice within their faculties. ASERT includes the criteria, dimensions and values of distributed leadership, and can be used to identify enabling features and barriers to distributed leadership in an institutional context. The coordinators had previously used the ASERT matrix as a tool for reflecting on their experience in the UTS FYE program (McKenzie and Egea, 2014), and were asked to revisit their ratings, using a traffic light metaphor, as preparation for the interview. Interviews were semi-structured and took around 45 minutes. Each faculty was represented by either a current coordinator (6) or past coordinator (2). The interviews were transcribed and themes were identified qualitatively, initially through mapping their ASERT responses and discussion to the five tenets of distributed leadership described in the benchmarking framework from Jones, Hadgraft, et al. (2014): Engage, Enable, Enact, Assess, Emergent. The transcripts were then analysed in a more fine-grained way to identify further themes, including in the ways that the tenets are realised.

An example of this process is shown in relation to the ENGAGE tenet for Faculty X.

- Context of trust – wide range of grants and practice change, also experience as tutors in the faculty, supported by senior academics in the faculty
- Culture of respect – lots of experience with grants and methodologies – particularly for [C1], for [C2] – works as a tutor and has done this role for a number of years; [C1] on T&L committees; [C2] in the T&L group for faculty
- Acceptance of need for change – change for learning.futures for year 1 and the 11 week semester was trialled in 2015, so 2016 is less of a challenge
- Collaborative relationships - tutor training – limited to the commencement and to the role of the coordinator, but opportunities for ongoing connection with FYE forum
- Previous CoP has not been revived since 2015, but there is keen interest for it to continue [..]wants to run it)

FYE grant recipients who had completed two or more grants participated in semi-structured interviews around three themes: reflection on their grant projects; practice change and influence within the faculty; and their experience of the FYE strategy, collaboration and dissemination. Interviews were conducted by a research assistant, and took 30 minutes to one hour. Twenty grantees participated. Interviews were transcribed, and themes coded using

Dedoose software, using the tenets of distributed leadership from Jones, Hadgraft, et al. (2014) as an initial coding frame, then adding further categories to represent new themes. Three interviews were selected for this paper, and were chosen from their early engagement with the FYE program (since 2011) and their leadership and influence within the faculties under discussion.

Differences in the experiences described in the interviews will first be illustrated using contrasting vignettes from two larger enrolment faculties, focusing on how they manifested the distributed leadership tenets. These two faculties were chosen as academics experienced contrasting external mandates for academic engagement with the FYE program, . Over the period of 2010-2016, Faculty X grew considerably, increasing its commencing undergraduate cohort by 81%, while Faculty Y grew by only 12%.

Academic engagement in the FYE program across the two faculties was a significantly different. whilst Faculty Y gained 9%; across 9 subjects with 20 academics involved in the grants.

Following this, further themes in how local leadership in the FYE program was experienced across all faculties through the voice of faculty FYTE coordinators enacting tenets of distributed leadership will be described.

This case study provides the reader with evidence that when informal leaders work within a culture of distributed leadership, with a strong external mandate for change, they are able to engage academics into a practice change to support transitioning students. In particular, the DL tenets of engaging, enabling and enacting not only create the change but ensure sustainability of ongoing engagement. It is argued that this same framework supports leaders working at the meso level of faculty leadership.

Findings 1: Faculty differences in local leadership in the FYE program

Faculty X

This faculty has been the most successful in engaging staff with the FYE program and bringing about change in learning and teaching practices. From 2010, large increases in first year enrolments (up 81% from 2010 to 2016), increased student diversity, issues with student success and retention, and subject and course performance issues created an external mandate for change in first year. A number of academics sought first year grants, making changes that improved pass rates and student feedback in their subjects. These early adopters began to influence a culture of change in first year.

When FYTE coordinators were appointed, a team of four was appointed in this faculty, including a professor who had been head of school. The professor and a professional staff coordinator initiated a faculty FY community of practice (Baker and Beames, 2013), and an academic coordinator, previously a casual, ran workshops for casual academics and supported colleagues in gaining grants. The Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) was noted to be '100% supportive'. The team encouraged engagement and collaboration and the community of practice, typically attended by 20-30 people, enabled staff to share practices developed though the grants with colleagues:

> The faculty first year community of practice was a really wonderful innovation and allowed a lot
> of communication about … teaching and learning grants, whether they were first year grants or

other grants. Innovative ideas, so that was one forum in which people teaching other subjects would have heard about mastery learning. (grantee 1)

While leadership of change was supported top down, it was largely enacted informally through the community of practice, through the coordinators working with colleagues one-to-one, and through grant recipients influencing their colleagues:

I don't see myself as leading any of the change, not telling people what to do and follow, I collaborate and I consult with the academics. (coordinator 1)

I have to interact within the faculty with other academics who are teaching subjects which I share with them, and they just get infected with that [laughs]. . (grantee 2)

An academic language specialist from the academic development unit also played an key informal leadership role, encouraging academics to take up grants, writing applications with (or for) them and sharing practices developed in one subject with academics in others. Her expertise was highly regarded by faculty academics:

Her expertise was really valuable in that part. You can see that grant had extension for another year, so that's quite successful in that respect because we really could do a lot, then talk in the community of practice and other areas about it. (grantee 2)

Over the period 2011-2017, Faculty X gained the highest proportion of grants (32%), across 29 subjects with 52 academics involved in the grants. Many grant recipients have presented and published their work, and this was seen as valued, encouraging further engagement. Several, including two of the coordinators have been promoted, and some gained formal leadership positions.

The changed practice is being sustained, despite turnover in the first year team and .

However, new approaches have emerged to continue the culture of collaboration. A new group that includes local formal leaders and two of the former coordinators provides an environment for new ideas and for the new coordinator to find her feet.

Changes to staffing have also meant that new academics are taking over first year subjects. The former casual coordinator, now learning designer, intentionally engages with these new people to ensure that good transition practices remain embedded:

So just about all of our first year subjects have had a first year experience grant at some point in time. ...[But] I am seeing when new academics are coming in, into teaching first year, they aren't aware of the decisions that were made to say why the structure is the way it is. In which case, there is a need to explain all the transition pedagogies involved. (coordinator 1)

In faculty X, the climate of readiness and early success with change, the intentional development of collaboration alongside the activities of individuals engaging others, and valuing and recognition by the formal leadership has enabled improved first year practice and local leadership approaches to become embedded and evolve. The new coordinator (coordinator 2) commented that *"It's just an evolution anyway. You wouldn't want necessarily a role to be doing exactly the same thing now as what it was two years ago."*

There have been significant benefits for students. Pass rates increased from 82% in 2010 to 88% in 2015 or all students, and 82% to 90% for LSES students, despite a 68% increase in overall student numbers. Retention rates increased significantly from 81% to 86% over the equivalent period (2011-2016) for all students and 82% to 86% for LSES students. As noted

above, staff who have contributed as coordinators and grantees have also benefitted in tangible ways, through promotion and awards.

Faculty Y

In contrast with Faculty X, Faculty Y had the lowest level of staff engagement with the FYE program. In 2011, there was a strong pressure to increase disciplinary research, but few drivers for change in first year learning and teaching. However an innovative first year teacher was nominated for the central FYE advisory group and for her, the discussions led to '*a whole paradigm shift in how I thought about what these students are experiencing when they come in*' (grantee 3). She was particularly struck by how few students knew others and decided to apply for a grant to experiment with networking ideas in her subject:

> It kind of connected them into also the support services of the university, the connection with one
> another, but also the significance from a [] curriculum point of view is professional networking's
> a really important part of your career. … And I've actually carried that activity through with my
> final year (grantee 3)

The grant outcomes were successful, and the academic presented them at a FYE community forum and built on them with two further grants. She also took an informal leadership role with colleagues in a first year coordinators committee to try to engage them with transition:

> We all go back into our different disciplines … so my role … in the early stages was in
> influencing that group of core coordinators to get buy-in for this, and I did that through the
> meetings that we had and presenting the information to them there, advertising the grants when
> they first commenced. … But I was also focused there on trying to get my casual academics to
> give me ideas for that … because they were the ones, as I said, who had a better understanding of
> what it [transition] meant. (grantee 3)

However, despite her commitment, she had difficulty in influencing colleagues to take up grants, although some interest was shown by casual academics. The core coordinators' committee focused more information exchange than on sharing teaching and learning practice, but the academic found the central FYE forums personally valuable and supportive:

> My personal experience and my knowledge of talking to other people who work in first year is
> that it is an increasing, incredibly time-consuming job, I mean generally thousands of students and
> you've got a whole casual staff that you're managing. You just don't get time to go to forums …
> It's a luxury actually. So to be going to this [central] forum, because we were there to discuss
> what it was that we were doing in our roles, that was invaluable. And to be able to have a
> sandwich and talk to somebody was just gold, it really was. (grantee 3)

By 2013, this academic was moving away from teaching first year and another academic was selected to be the FYTE coordinator. This coordinator took up the role with a focus on improving orientation for students and identifying those at risk, and less focus on engaging colleagues in creating change within the curriculum. Orientation improved, and the coordinator contributed ideas within the central FYE group, but few academics from faculty Y participated in the grants or FYE forums and no faculty community developed.

In 2016, a new FYTE coordinator took over the role, bringing a high level of enthusiasm and desire to influence change, but encountering competing pressures:

> This whole networked improvement community stuff that [X] is doing a lot of work on, just
> makes sense to me. But when we've put feelers out within [Y], to try something like that, 'oh, no,
> no time'. (coordinator 3)

Noting that in the faculty 'we just don't seem to be a very collaborative bunch', she set about trying to initiate engagement and collaboration by developing a grant to address a common problem that affected a number of first year subjects but that no individual academic had time to address, students' limited mathematics preparation:

> With this maths diagnostic, I got everybody to send me their bits and pieces. And my next task is to try and get them all in a room, at the same time, and say, 'okay, out of all these pieces, here are the sorts of things that we could ask. Let's build a test that's representative of the entire faculty'. (coordinator 3)

She is also engaging junior academics, with the specific intention of encouraging them to value and be recognised for teaching, and slowly change the culture:

> I've made a very clear decision over the last year, with some new junior staff coming in … to really talk to them individually, as group, informally, about the importance of teaching and learning, and encouraging their passion for teaching. And when they do something great … I go, 'oh, I heard from my students, they really loved you this week, and your example of this,' to make them feel like it has value. (coordinator 3)

Unlike in Faculty X, in Faculty Y, local embedding of the FYE is not yet sustained, despite the concerted and targeted endeavours of the initial grantee and successive coordinators, although emergent practices are evident. Benefits for students have also not been as strong as in Faculty X. Pass rates have increased, but not by as much, from 84% in 2010 to 86% in 2015 for all students, and 85% to 87% for LSES students, with a 9% increase in overall student numbers. However retention rates were unchanged, from 92% to 91% over the equivalent period (2011-2016) for all students and 90% to 87% for LSES students.

Findings: Further themes in local leadership in the FYE program

While analysis using the distributed leadership tenets described by Jones, Hadgraft, et al. (2014) revealed some features, such as collaborative communities, that supported success, and some differences across faculties, more fine grained analysis indicated some key themes in engaging others, enabling and enacting the FYE program. Themes that emerged in addition included: gaining buy-in; being opportunistic; evidence of success and recognition; the need for collegial support for coordinators and self-perceptions of leadership.

Gaining buy-in was a common concern, with coordinators adopting a variety of different approaches, depending on the context. Sometimes, as in faculty X, external drivers and supportive faculty leadership facilitated engagement:

> Often I'll get an email saying "Oh [coordinator], this is so and so. He wants a little bit of help with blah, blah, blah". So [the ADean] will often pass people on to me. (coordinator 4)

All coordinators spoke about acknowledging the workloads and alternative priorities of their colleagues, and, like coordinator 3, finding ways to engage them despite these issues:

> I think a good thing to do is look at why there's resistance and then try and find another way to do something (coordinator 2)

> I just have to get buy-in, and it's a lot of work because I've got to do that individually … time is a real issue. The only way I can get buy-in is to show people that what I'm suggesting is going to reduce their problems (coordinator 5)

Some coordinators, like coordinator 3, also focused on engaging junior and casual academics, knowing that they are often closest to the students and could do things in their classes which might slowly spread further.

> So my bigger thought is, rather than imposing a strategy on everybody, how do I slowly change culture? To be honest, the way that I've done it is through junior academics. (coordinator 3)

Being opportunistic often went hand-in-hand with gaining buy-in, but also meant seeking out opportunities and being proactive. "I've just got to pick my moment" said one FYTE coordinator (5), echoing the experience of others seeking to engage time-poor academics. Another made use of a range of informal opportunities:

> it was very easy to just talk to people, and in a multitude of ways. I did knock on some doors; I did just talk to people, you know, casually in the corridors and in on the stairwells; I did make meetings; I did get referrals from heads of school…(coordinator 6)

Some, but not all, coordinators had gained positions on one or more faculty committees concerned with teaching and learning, and made the most of their opportunities:

> at every meeting I'm going "Oh, but what about the first years? And what about the transition? And how are we going to do this?" and we give time to it. So, you know, things like I get all of the subjects together in a table, I show where the scaffolding is, I show where the assignments are due, (coordinator 7)

Evidence of success and recognition went together, with evidence of success in small grants enabling academics to be recognised and valued for what they had been doing, encouraging them to continue and potentially encouraging their colleagues:

> The things that [grantee] did, they were really valued within the school, and respected, especially because she'd had such poor SFS scores in the past, and they could see that she was using best practice, you know, things she'd changed…(coordinator 6)

The framework of the transition pedagogy principles enabled grantees, particularly many in faculty X, to frame and evaluate their initiatives, present then and write about them for publication. This evidence enabled grantees, and the program as a whole to gain recognition, supporting its sustainability at local and central levels.

> Foregrounding this framework [transition pedagogy] has really been successful. I've seen a lot of interventions. I've been here twenty five years and this is one that I think has really worked and I think it's worked for those reasons that good practice gets noticed, gets evaluated, gets written about and then a set of principles are developed. The principles guide an intervention, the intervention is successful. It's just so sensible. (grantee 1)

Collegial support and informal mentoring were important for coordinators. As the role was new in 2013, all of the coordinators were inventing it at the local level. Almost all were committed to first year students but most had little or no formal academic leadership experience. The team in faculty X was the exception, with the professor having had several formal positions, and the team and community of practice providing supportive learning environments for new coordinators. The other coordinators were working on their own in faculties, so drew on support from different sources. The FYTE coordinator group meetings stood out for most of them as an essential forum for community support and mentoring:

> I found particularly the First Year Transition Experience Coordinator meetings with other colleagues both personally and professionally supportive, for myself but also for what I bring back to the faculty, things that we know that other faculties have done (coordinator 4)

> I'm not sure that I got the mentoring earlier on. I found my way in the role. But I think the mentoring hasn't necessarily come from within my faculty but came from the FYTE coordinator group. So that's where I got the support, was from there. (coordinator 1)

However, not all coordinators felt comfortable discussing all of their needs in the full group meetings, with one junior member (who was widely admired in the group) commenting on the support provided through informal conversations with similar others:

> one of the things we never really wanted to do [in the whole coordinator group] was talk about our weaknesses, or where we felt we weren't doing a very good job, and that was something I appreciated being able to do with [coordinators 4 and 7], and – I'm just trying to think – [coordinator 8] as well sometimes. We would talk about the things that we felt we were failing badly at, and give each other feedback on how we dealt with those things (coordinator 6)

Coordinators also made use of other forms of informal support, including from the central FYE coordinator, professional staff, occasional meetings with senior faculty staff, and academic development and academic language staff:

> I think [academic language lecturer] would be my number one...I mean she's got endless expertise in all sorts of things. She's passionate about first year but she also sits outside of the faculty and in the faculty at the exact same time and so she's a really amazing resource to mentor me in all things. (coordinator 7)

The *local leadership* of the coordinators was experienced by them as *informal*, and sometimes not even as leadership:

> I really don't see myself as the leader in the faculty in that role; I see myself more as someone who can help people plug into the systems and the connections in the university, and support them rather than… (coordinator 6)

Leadership was experienced as being about connection, collaboration, trust and expertise:

> so that has built my leadership capacity for sure, just that level of "You can go and do it and we trust you to do it, and we're giving you a seat at the table" and it's not about an official platform of seniority, it's about collaboration. (coordinator 7)

> In teaching and learning or in education, it's recognised through any projects that we do; if we do things like, for example, working parties, we would ask somebody who might not have a formal leadership role because of their expertise, their experience. We identify people. (coordinator 8)

Discussion

As the vignettes of faculties X and Y illustrate, there are considerable differences in the ways in which the distributed leadership tenets of engage, enable and enact (Jones, Hadgraft, et al, 2014) have been manifested at the local level in the FYE program. In faculty X, formal leaders and disciplinary academics at different levels were highly *engaged*, an academic literacy expert worked alongside the coordinators and informal leadership has been exercised by grantees who share practice as well as by those in FYTE coordinator and more formal leadership roles. *Enabling factors* included academic ownership of the need to change first year subjects, and encouragement of team approaches, and some local recognition of learning and teaching grants and publications, along with the external mandate provided by improving student retention and success in the face of increasing enrolments. Leadership was *enacted* through the community of practice by grantees and teaching and learning professional staff prior to the appointment of FYTE coordinators, and continued in their presence. By contrast, in faculty Y, formal leaders were less engaged and the *enabling factors* were not present.

Disciplinary academics reported a need to increase their disciplinary research rather than spend time sharing learning and teaching practice, so there was no critical mass to form a community. However, in both faculties and across others, individual grantees and coordinators provided local leadership, working opportunistically to gain buy-in and supporting others to connect and collaborate.

Assessment was similar across all faculties, focusing on engagement and benefits for students and staff, however, as noted above, the indicators used for assessment were associated with stronger mandates for improvement in some faculties, like X. All faculty coordinators took *emergent* approaches, evaluating and reflecting on practices and changing in response to changing local situations. As new coordinators took over, local knowledge was shared but new initiatives also developed.

Like Martensson and Roxa's (2016) formal local leaders, the FYTE coordinators worked in different ways that were influenced by the local relevance of the external mandate to maintain or improve student retention and success and the internal mandate of their academic colleagues for engaging with the FYE. In the absence of hierarchical leadership roles, they sought to influence opportunistically, supporting others to connect and collaborate where they could, gaining buy-in from the willing and recognising and sharing the evidence of participating colleagues' success in order to engage others.

Limitations

This study provided a case study of two large faculties for deep change of practice, and demonstrated that the engagement of academics required a strong external mandate and a collaborative community to build strong and supportive internal mandate. It may be pertinent to examine those faculties with smaller student cohorts, and those having very successful student success rates. The study did not enlarge on the challenge of having large populations of international commencing cohorts, and how these influenced the practice of the academic in considering student transition.

It would be useful to examine the other tenets of the DL benchmarking tool, that of assessment and emergent. These will be considered in later papers.

Conclusion

Through the examination of the leadership challenges across the two faculties, informal leadership requires a strong and supportive external mandate, with collaborative communities enabling a strong internal mandate for change. Factors identified from this case study indicate that informal leaders within an higher education setting can create academic engagement by (1) gaining buy-in; (2) being opportunistic; (3) rewarding success and recognition individuals; (4) drawing on collegial support for coordinators and (5) developing self-perceptions of 'leadership' being about making connections, collaboration, trust and expertise. It is argued that these same practices support those in the meso leadership level both at formal and informal roles.

Similar to the First Year Teaching and Learning Network coordinators described by Clark et al. (2015), the FYTE coordinators worked both individually in their faculties and collectively as a group, providing mutual support for facilitating change in faculty FYE practices. Collaborative communities, in the form of the FYTE coordinator group, the FYE forums and, in faculty X, the local team and community of practice, were critical to these local leaders in

learning to be a coordinator and continuing to enact their roles. The sense of belonging with other FYTE coordinators and the ability to share weaknesses as well as effective practices and achievements were seen as essential for building their leadership capacity. As Morieson, Carlin, Clarke, Lukas and Wilson (2013) observed, a sense of belonging is essential for staff who are seeking to encourage belonging in students. In the case of the FYE program, belonging to a community outside their faculty helped coordinators to build and sustain their local leadership in both more and less supportive local contexts.

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