

PEER TUTORING AMONG UNIVERSITY FACULTY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

TUTORIA ENTRE PARES DE DOCENTES NO ENSINO SUPERIOR: UMA ABORDAGEM INTEGRADA PARA A APRENDIZAGEM COLABORATIVA

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Abstract

This study examines peer tutoring among university faculty as a formative strategy to strengthen professional development and improve teaching quality in higher education. The aim was to explore how systematic and symmetrical peer interaction, integrated with the Self-Study (S-STEP) approach, supports critical reflection, pedagogical innovation, and the formation of professional learning communities. Using an intrinsic case study with a qualitative–interpretive design, six university instructors engaged in periodic tutoring sessions with a critical friend over one academic semester. Data sources included audiovisual recordings, field notes, teaching materials, and additional evidence of teaching practice, all analyzed through thematic analysis. Findings indicate that peer tutoring fosters deep reflexivity, collective knowledge-building, renewed professional identity, and the adoption of evidence-informed pedagogical innovations. Participants highlighted the importance of reflective writing and emotional-professional support among colleagues in transforming their teaching. The study concludes that institutionalizing peer tutoring constitutes an effective mechanism for enhancing faculty development and improving student learning outcomes, despite ongoing challenges such as limited time and heavy workloads.

Resumo

Este estudo analisa a tutoria entre pares de docentes universitários como uma estratégia formativa destinada a fortalecer o desenvolvimento profissional e aprimorar a qualidade do ensino no ensino superior. O objetivo foi investigar de que maneira a interação sistemática e simétrica entre colegas, integrada ao enfoque de Self-Study (S-STEP), favorece a reflexão crítica, a inovação pedagógica e a consolidação de comunidades profissionais de aprendizagem. A pesquisa foi desenvolvida como um estudo de caso intrínseco, com abordagem qualitativa e interpretativa. Seis docentes participaram de sessões periódicas de tutoria acompanhadas por um par crítico ao longo de um semestre acadêmico. Os dados — compostos por gravações audiovisuais, notas de campo, materiais didáticos e outras evidências da prática docente — foram analisados por meio de análise temática. Os resultados demonstram que a tutoria entre pares promove processos de reflexividade profunda, estimula a construção coletiva de conhecimento, ressignifica a identidade profissional e favorece a adoção de práticas pedagógicas inovadoras baseadas em evidências. Os participantes destacaram também o papel central da escrita reflexiva e do apoio emocional e profissional entre colegas na transformação da prática docente. Concluiu-se que a institucionalização da tutoria entre pares constitui um mecanismo eficaz para o fortalecimento da formação docente e para a melhoria da aprendizagem estudantil, embora



Keywords: Peer Tutoring. Higher Education. Professional Learning Communities. Reflective Practice. Self-Study (S-STEP).

persistam desafios como a sobrecarga de trabalho e o tempo limitado para a reflexão contínua.

Palavras-chave: Tutoria entre Pares. Ensino Superior. Comunidades Profissionais de Aprendizagem. Prática Reflexiva. Self-Study (S-STEP).

1 INTRODUCTION

The improvement of university teaching is a relevant and recurring topic in academic discourse. Indeed, how to improve the way instructors plan and implement their classes, how they can make the best pedagogical decisions in their courses—aiming to positively impact the quality of student learning outcomes—remains a major challenge for academia, especially considering the diversity of backgrounds and levels of training in university pedagogy among faculty members.

In recent years, peer tutoring among university teachers has taken on a central role in strengthening professional development, particularly in contexts where collaboration and critical reflection are considered essential pillars for educational improvement. This form of tutoring is characterized by fostering horizontal relationships, the exchange of teaching practices, and the joint analysis of pedagogical experiences, all of which contribute to the consolidation of sustainable professional learning communities (Flores-García, 2024; Leiva & Montecinos, 2023). Recent literature highlights that peer tutoring not only provides support for novice teachers but also generates deep dialogical processes capable of transforming academics' understanding of their own teaching (Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2021; Pérez & Gallardo, 2025).

Teacher professional development in higher education has undergone significant transformations over the past decade, particularly due to the growing demand for reflective, collaborative, and evidence-based pedagogical practices. In this scenario, horizontal support strategies—such as peer tutoring—and research methodologies centered on teaching practice—such as Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP)—have gained increasing relevance as approaches that enable educators to understand and improve teaching from a critical and situated perspective (Berry & Russell,

2022; Vanassche *et al.*, 2023). The literature emphasizes that these approaches contribute both to the transformation of professional identity and to the construction of sustainable learning communities (Flores-García, 2024; Kitchen *et al.*, 2022).

In Chile, the adoption of Self-Study has shown significant progress, especially in inter-university initiatives and teacher education programs. Its usefulness has been documented in terms of reframing the curriculum, strengthening formative assessment, and consolidating teacher learning communities (Villagra Bravo *et al.*, 2022; Vanegas Ortega *et al.*, 2023).

However, several authors warn that its implementation remains limited and insufficiently systematized, which makes it difficult to fully assess its institutional impact (Hirmas & Fuentealba, 2020; Montecinos *et al.*, 2023). This highlights the need for deeper research that addresses the structural, cultural, and political barriers hindering its consolidation.

At Universidad de las Américas (UDLA), a set of initiatives has been implemented in the areas of induction, support, and professional development for instructors. However, despite these efforts, many faculty members who have been trained and supported are still evaluated by their students as performing insufficiently. This confirms findings from various studies (Samaras, 2011; Mena & Russell, 2016), which indicate that unless instructors develop an intentional and genuine sense of ownership over their classroom practices, along with critical reflection on their actions and on how to improve the critical aspects of their teaching, they will continue replicating their habitual practices based on their implicit theories about how classes should be conducted. As a result, the same methodologies and assessment procedures are used for years, despite changes in student profiles over time. In other words, memorization-based pedagogical models centered on content continue to be reproduced, instead of constructivist and social pedagogical models as established by UDLA, where the teaching and learning process is centered on students.

Thus, it becomes essential for university instructors to assume a central role in the development of pedagogical knowledge—specifically, in constructing parameters for improving their own practice through critical reflection on their actions and the development of a personal professional narrative. This process is strengthened when undertaken collaboratively, particularly with the support of a peer tutor or *critical friend*.

From a professional development perspective, the self-study approach—adopted as the methodological framework of this study—serves to professionalize teaching practice by recognizing instructors as key agents in defining and transforming their pedagogical roles (Terigi, 2012). Reflective practice, supported by a peer tutor and embedded within self-study, underscores the deliberative nature of teaching as a stimulus for the construction of pedagogical knowledge. It enables the integration of theoretical insights gained through training and mentoring programs with the experiential knowledge developed through day-to-day teaching.

In this context, when teaching experience is examined through systematic, reflective, and constructive analysis with peer support, it facilitates the development of professional knowledge that integrates instructors' biographical backgrounds, professional training, and experiential learning. In the present study, the implementation of self-study supported by a peer tutor enabled instructors to investigate their own pedagogical practice, thereby creating a substantive opportunity to generate knowledge directly from their university teaching activities (Silva-Peña, 2007).

The study emerged as an intentional and systematic inquiry into instructors' everyday teaching practices, oriented toward both improvement and transformation. It constituted a form of personal practitioner research (Berry, 2016), challenging traditional paradigms by positioning research as a tool to support teaching through sustained reflective practice. Such transformation cannot be achieved through isolated or sporadic questioning of classroom actions; it requires a process deeply embedded in the teacher's professional habitus (Perrenoud, 2010). Knowledge-in-action can only be revealed through reflection on and within the act of teaching (Schön, 1992).

This perspective prompted us, as researchers, to integrate research and teacher education in higher education through an enhanced understanding of the professional self. The legitimization of self-study and other investigative processes within higher education institutions will contribute to the consolidation of genuine reflective learning communities (Samaras, 2011).

However, the study describes and delves into how peer tutoring among teachers allows for reflective analysis of teaching practice, establishing strengths, weaknesses, and proposals for improvement in the development of subjects.

2 THEORETICAL RATIONALE

Peer tutoring (peer-assisted learning) among educators has gained recognition as an effective pedagogical method in higher education, facilitating cooperative learning for both tutors and tutees. This approach is teacher-centered, complementing the self-study methodology discussed in this study.

Peer tutoring among teachers is based on constructivist learning theories, such as those of Vygotsky (1978), who emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development. Teachers work together to collectively overcome zones of proximal development. Learning is juxtaposed with collaborative work, through which teachers jointly address their respective zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Moreover, the self-study approach, which works in tandem with peer tutoring, promotes teacher independence. It is a heuristic approach that leads educators to realize the importance of learning through reflection on their learning process, to understand the crucial elements of reflective practices, and to use techniques that provide access to challenges in their teaching (Zimmerman, 2002).

University teacher mentoring serves as a foundational model for improving academic quality, advancing teaching innovation, and refining lifelong development. In a context where educational institutions face challenges such as the ongoing need to update knowledge, the introduction of new technologies, and the adaptation to social needs, this collaborative activity is a key pillar supporting institutional renewal (García & Pérez, 2021).

The theoretical perspective of teacher mentoring aligns with the community of practice model developed by Wenger (1990, 1991, 1999). This model posits that learning and learning to teach better occur in social settings where teachers collaborate on tasks, reflect on their practices, and support one another in solving common problems. This professional community fosters the development of a collaborative sphere based on trust, where shared experiences and knowledge lead to a collective identity: we develop as professionals through others (Wenger et.al., 2011).

This is reinforced by theories of learning and action-based professional development that focus on the impact of social interaction and reflection in the development of teaching practice (Vygotsky, 1978; Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017). When

teachers engage in mentoring activities with each other, they generate shared knowledge, pedagogical innovation, and problem-solving directly within the classroom setting.

In this way, peer tutoring among teachers can take various forms, ranging from scheduled formal meetings to virtual exchange communities. Some institutions implement structured programs in which more experienced teachers mentor colleagues who are in training or undergoing pedagogical innovation, promoting the transfer of best practices and critical reflection (López & Ramírez, 2020).

Other models are based on informal communities of practice, where teachers participate in discussion groups, collaborative workshops, or digital platforms to share resources and experiences (Wenger *et al.*, 2011). Overall, peer tutoring among teachers can take multiple formats, from structured face-to-face meetings to virtual communities for exchange and collaboration.

Some institutions implement formal programs where more experienced teachers act as mentors or tutors, guiding colleagues who are in training or engaged in pedagogical innovation. These programs promote the transfer of good practices, critical reflection, and support in specific projects (López & Ramírez, 2020). Other models are based on informal communities of practice, where teachers participate in discussion groups, collaborative workshops, seminars, or digital platforms, sharing resources, experiences, and reflections (Wenger *et al.*, 2011).

These activities not only support ongoing updates in teaching methodologies and educational technologies, but also strengthen professional identity, a sense of belonging, and a culture of continuous improvement within academic institutions (Martínez & Sánchez, 2022). Additionally, tutoring makes it possible to identify specific training needs and design targeted intervention strategies.

Despite everything, and as occurred in the present study, peer tutoring among teachers involved a formal and systematic collaborative relationship between peers, with scheduled and ongoing meetings. This approach incorporated a strategy to understand and deepen university teachers' experiences in relation to learning about teaching, through the use of reflective and self-reflective perspectives such as self-study (Álvarez-Gayou, 2013; Crotty, 1988; Sandin, 2003). This qualitative approach formed the core of the study, positioning teachers as both the subjects and objects of research, thereby enhancing learning processes for themselves and what is transferred to their students.

Through tutoring and the self-study methodology, teachers raise questions about their teaching practices. The issues that emerge are those that require deeper exploration and sharing with peers, allowing them through a reflective process to critically examine their habitual ways of approaching formative work. Self-study of teaching practice in higher education refers to the in-depth analysis of how educators reflect upon and evaluate their educational practice within their specific disciplines.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

Strengthening university teaching is a pressing imperative in the context of post-pandemic higher education. Indeed, in academic discourse, it is common to see the implementation of various strategic actions aimed at the academic staff, with the goal of improving how they plan and deliver their classes, in hopes of positively impacting the quality of student learning. Peer tutoring can be observed among faculty members, as illustrated in the present study. In this way, peer tutoring has become an effective pedagogical strategy in higher education, promoting collaborative learning that benefits both tutors and faculty members.

In the context of higher education, peer tutoring among faculty members emerges as a fundamental pedagogical strategy to enrich the teaching-learning process, fostering a collaborative environment between teachers and students. This methodology not only enables educators to support one another in understanding how to improve their teaching practices but also promotes professional development and empowers their role within an educational model that encourages student learning and active participation.

As educational institutions seek new ways to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, peer tutoring both among faculty and students stands out as an effective alternative to complement traditional methods of instructional support, evaluation, and feedback.

It is within this context that the present article originates from research based on an intrinsic case study in support of university teaching, entitled “Strengthening University Teaching through Peer Tutoring”. This study is part of an internally funded research project by the Universidad de las Américas (UDLA), carried out between 2023 and 2024.

3.1 Context description

In the case of the Universidad de las Américas (UDLA), a range of initiatives have been implemented in the areas of faculty induction, support, and professional development. However, despite these efforts, many of the teachers who have received training and support are still rated by their students as underperforming. This confirms findings from various studies (Samaras, 2011; Russell et.al., 2016), which indicate that unless teachers intentionally and genuinely take ownership of their classroom practices without engaging in critical reflection on their actions and how to improve the critical aspects of their teaching they will continue to replicate habitual practices rooted in their implicit theories about how teaching should be conducted. As a result, they may reuse the same methodologies and assessment procedures for years, even though student profiles have changed over time. In other words, memorization-based, content-centered pedagogical models continue to be reproduced, instead of constructivist and socially oriented approaches as promoted by UDLA, where students are placed at the center of the teaching and learning process.

It is crucial that teachers take a central role in developing knowledge about the discipline of teaching that is, building from their own practice and engaging in critical reflection on their teaching actions. By analyzing and constructing a personal narrative, educators can define parameters to improve their practice. This process is significantly enhanced when carried out collaboratively specifically, with the support of a peer tutor (critical friend). From the perspective of professional teacher development, the self-study approach proposed in this study as the inquiry methodology professionalizes teaching practice by recognizing the teacher as a key, actor in defining and transforming their educational role (Schuck & Russell, 2016).

Reflective practice, when supported by a peer tutor and framed within the self-study approach, highlights the deliberative nature of teaching. It fosters the construction of pedagogical knowledge by bridging the gap between theory learned in training programs and mentoring, and the lived experience of teaching. When teaching experience is analyzed reflectively and critically with the support of a peer tutor, it facilitates the

development of professional knowledge that integrates the teacher's personal background and their academic and professional experience.

In this study, the implementation of the self-study methodology, accompanied by a peer tutor, made it possible to examine the very practice developed by the teachers themselves, creating a real opportunity to build knowledge from university pedagogical practice (Silva-Peña, 2007).

The study revealed itself as an intentional and systematic inquiry into one's own teaching practice, emerging from the everyday experience of teaching, with the goal of improving and transforming it. It constituted a personal investigation of one's own practice (Berry, 2016), challenging traditional paradigms by emphasizing research as a form of teaching support starting with each teacher's reflective practice. This process cannot be achieved through isolated or occasional questioning of classroom actions; it requires an ongoing process that becomes part of the teacher's habitus (Perrenoud, 2010), since there is knowledge in action that can only be revealed through experience and reflection on and within the teaching act itself (Schön, 1992).

The teachers were able to critically analyze their classroom teaching practices (Afonso, 2019), demonstrating the capacity to innovate, work democratically, and learn together with their peers (Bolívar, 2015, 2019; Contreras, 2016). Indeed, when teachers manage their pedagogical processes with the goal of achieving and ensuring high-quality learning for all students, we are looking at an educator who leads their pedagogical efforts regardless of the mode of instruction (García-Garnica, 2016), grounded in a culture of equity, inclusion, participation, and innovation that promotes continuous improvement, as Contreras (2016) affirms.

This motivated us, as researchers, to unite research and faculty development through a deeper understanding of our self. Legitimizing these inquiry processes within higher education institutions will help consolidate the creation of true reflective learning communities (Samaras, 2011).

3.2 Materials and methods

The experience is approached from an interpretive paradigm with a qualitative focus, based on an intrinsic case study, following the principles outlined by Sandin

(2003), with the purpose of exploring and understanding the concepts and networks of meaning that teachers perceive through peer tutoring among faculty members.

The sample consisted of six teachers who voluntarily chose to participate through a conversational and instructional support format—namely, academic peer tutoring characterized by a formative, constructive, and respectful approach to teaching practice. A set of evidence was collected, including recordings of the tutoring sessions, which were systematically scheduled in collaboration with the participating teachers every two weeks over the course of an academic semester. This period spanned five months, from July to November 2024.

These tutoring sessions were conducted individually with each faculty member, scheduled at times and on days that worked for them. Using the self-study methodology, the conversations were intentionally guided to focus on the positive aspects of their classes, anecdotal events, main challenges, improvement proposals, and the exchange of experiences and suggestions with the peer tutor. The aim was for the teacher to independently decide on the improvements they would implement in their teaching.

Each session involved evaluating the improvements implemented by the teachers, identifying other emerging variables, and deepening self-reflection and critical reflection based on evidence the teacher had systematically compiled such as recorded classes, field notes, teaching materials, workshops, assessment scenarios, evaluation results, and any other elements the teacher considered relevant to share.

4 RESEARCH FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of this data was conducted using descriptive and thematic coding with the software Atlas.ti version 23 and the thematic analysis method. Within this context, analytical patterns were identified within the consolidated data. In this way, the qualitative analysis enabled a deeper understanding and insight into the experiences of the teachers who participated in the tutoring sessions. Two descriptive categories of analysis emerged, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1*Descriptive Categories and Units of Meaning*

Descriptive Categories	Units of Meaning
Collaborative Work Among Peer Teachers	<p>“...within the framework of the Self-study project, I was interested in participating, voluntarily agreeing to review my teaching practice in one of these courses, in parallel with writing my master’s thesis, where I implemented innovations in my classes at one of the university cam”</p> <p>An essential part of the process was talking with other colleagues involved in the project. In those spaces of dialogue, deep resonances emerged: we shared fears, contradictions, but also discoveries. It was very powerful to realize that I was not alone in my concerns. The Self-study allowed me to legitimize doubt as a driving force for improvement and writing as a way of thinking.”</p>
Reflection and Self-Reflection on Teaching Practice	<p>“...I deeply value the opportunity provided by the Self-study methodology implementation project to pause, observe, and rethink my practice. Although I already had reflection habits, this process allowed me to view my teaching with greater awareness, comparing it even to a mindfulness experience: an attentive observation of what I do and what my students need.”</p> <p>“...Alon...”...Along the way, I have always felt the need to pause and reflect on my work, but the demands of daily life often prevent it. When I was invited to participate in the Self-study project, I saw a concrete opportunity to look at myself deeply, with honesty and without fear. I took it on as a commitment to myself, rather than as an external task...”</p>

Based on the two proposed categories of analysis for the teachers’ experiences in Self-Study (S-STEP), it is possible to generate several subcategories with their corresponding units of meaning, as illustrated below:

4.1 Deep teacher reflexivity

Definition: Processes in which the teacher observes, analyzes, and questions their own practice with intentionality, awareness, and depth.

Units of meaning:

- Pedagogical awareness
- Pedagogical mindfulness
- Critical self-observation
- Examples from the text:
 - “pause, observe, and rethink my practice”
 - “a mindfulness experience: an attentive observation of what I do”

4.2 Emotionality and professional vulnerability

Definition: Emotional dimension involved in reflecting on practice, including fears, doubts, contradictions, and personal openness.

Units of meaning:

- Fear and professional exposure
- Doubt as a driver of learning
- Honesty and emotional openness
- Examples from the text:
 - “we shared fears, contradictions”
 - “legitimizing doubt as a driver of improvement”
 - “to look at myself deeply, with honesty and without fear”

4.3 Collaboration and peer resonance

Definition: Processes of exchange, dialogue, and collegial support that enhance reflection and create shared meaning around the experience.

Units of meaning:

- Professional dialogue
- Shared resonances and learnings
- Teacher support community
- Examples from the text:
 - “it was very powerful to realize that I was not alone in my concerns”
 - “talking with other colleagues was an essential part of the process”

4.4 Construction and re-signification of teacher identity

Definition: Transformations in the way teachers understand themselves, their role, and their professional agency.

Units of meaning:

- Personal commitment to development
- Renewed teacher self-concept

- Re-examination of the professional role
- Example from the text:
- “I took it on as a commitment to myself, rather than as an external task”

4.5 Writing as a tool for thought

Definition: Understanding writing not merely as record-keeping, but as a means to think, analyze, and transform teaching practice.

Units of meaning:

- Reflective writing
- Writing as the articulation of thought
- Writing to deepen teacher awareness
- Example from the text:
- “writing as a way of thinking”

4.6 Pedagogical innovation and inquiry

Definition: Changes, experiments, and innovations emerging from the Self-Study process.

Units of meaning:

- Implementation of new strategies
- Evidence-informed teaching practice
- Systematic pedagogical exploration
- Example from the text:
- “I implemented innovations in my classes”

4.7 Structural constraints and professional time

Definition: Tensions between the desire to reflect and the demands of everyday academic work.

Units of meaning:

- Lack of time for reflection

- Teacher workload overload
- Need for institutional spaces for Self-Study

Example from the text:

- “I have always felt the need to pause, but the demands of daily life make it difficult”

5 CONCLUSIONS

The study shows that peer mentoring in higher education is a powerful tool that, when properly implemented, can transform the educational experience, creating an enriching environment that enhances academic development. It is imperative that educational institutions continue to invest in these strategies and the resources necessary for their success, thus ensuring a brighter future for future generations.

Indeed, the findings of the study support García-Garnica’s (2016) conclusions regarding the presence of pedagogical leadership in university classrooms, which becomes evident when instructors are able to reflect and self-reflect on their practice with the purpose of improving it and positively influencing student learning. Similarly, the results align with Afonso (2019), as peer tutoring and collaborative work focused on pedagogical and formative aspects enable teachers to share their challenges, seek joint solutions, understand mistakes as learning opportunities, recognize students’ achievements, and disseminate effective practices among colleagues. These processes strengthen professional development and contribute to sustained improvement in teaching.

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