Megan, design and prototyping at The U

How do you define peer-to-peer-education and learning?
While there are numerous models for peer-to-peer learning in formal and informal educational institutions as well as the community sector, I am most interested in peer learning as a means to unlocking and spreading the knowledge that exists within communities in order to create relationships and empower communities to take positive collective action.

What are your experiences with p2p education?
I have most recently been involved in the development of The U, a social venture within the Young Foundation which aims to create connections and share useful skills among people who wouldn't normally meet. Our motto is, "the knowledge is in the room." We recruit volunteers to act as facilitators who guide the sessions, but they clearly position themselves as 'non-experts' and the participants take the lead in their own learning. We find that this highly social atmosphere creates an enjoyable and empowering learning experience, and gives participants the chance to make connections with one another. I have been involved in the design of our delivery model and course content, and train all of our local volunteer facilitators. In my wider role at Young Foundation, I support a lot of third sector organisations in their development and have found peer learning techniques very useful in this context.

What would you say is the biggest benefit/advantage of p2p-education?
I feel that the biggest benefits comes from the relationships involved in peer learning. In the context of The U, people are constantly fluctuating between being the learner and being the one sharing their expertise. This they are building their own confidence as well as gaining knew knowledge. This dynamic creates a sense of solidarity with one another and a real sense of shared accomplishment.

What are the limits of p2p-education?
We've found that even quite technical skills, like first-aid, which many people believe can only be taught by certified trainers, can be effectively shared through peer learning. I think we've only just begun to tap into the potential for using peer learning in a variety of contexts. Through intensive and creative experimentation we will gain a greater sense of these limits. That's really what we are setting out to explore through this progrramme.

What, in your opinion, are the requirements of individual learners and teachers for p2p-education and learning to be successful? (this question is focused on what the facilitators, teachers and enablers of p2p-education need to make p2p-learning processes possible)

Mutual respect is key. And I think environment is a huge factor in effective peer learning. Spaces such as lecture theatres which reinforce traditional educational power dynamics will aren't conducive to peer learning. I'm very excited to explore how space influences peer learning methods through this programme.