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## How Can I Learn About Teaching Academic Writing From a Peer Tutoring Pilot Project?

**Introduction and Rationale**

My professional experience in learning support began when I was an undergraduate student; intrigued by a module called *Teaching Writing*, I registered without realising that this decision would set my career path for at least the next decade. When I moved to the UK from Canada in 2004 I was surprised to learn that 'composition pedagogy', the teaching of academic writing in universities, was still in its infancy. Having trained as a peer tutor and then worked as a professional writing counsellor and manager of peer and professional writing tutors in Canada, I was interested in how this commonplace approach to teaching academic writing in North America could be adapted to the UK context.

As Coordinator of the Study Skills Centre (SSSC), I was awarded an internal 'Learning and Teaching Development Grant' to investigate the possibility of using peer tutoring to teach academic writing at Bath Spa University (BSU), a small, teaching-led university. This paper outlines the aims, rationale, scope and limitations, methods, and results of that research project; discusses the implications for continuing the project at BSU and/or developing peer tutoring at other institutions; and examines the influence on my own learning and professional development.

*Aims and Research Questions*
The initial funding proposal outlines the aims of the research:

> This project aims to investigate the effectiveness and viability of a peer tutoring scheme in the Student Study Skills Centre at Bath Spa University. The study will evaluate the pedagogical validity of employing peer tutors to support students' academic writing development and identify potential benefits, challenges, and barriers involved in developing such a programme. (Appendix 1)

By using the funding to hire three third-year and/or postgraduate students, teach them the theory and practice of peer tutoring and monitor and evaluate the results, it was hoped that the project would give a small indication of whether peer tutoring had any effect on the
- learning of the students tutored,
- learning of the tutors,
- academic achievement of the students tutored, and/or
- employability of the tutors, and
- to provide data for the possibility of extending peer tutoring in the Student Study Skills Centre.

The specific questions asked in the research proposal were

- What role can peer tutoring play in the Student Study Skills Centre?;
- What are the pedagogical implications/benefits of a peer tutoring scheme?; and
- What impact might a peer tutoring scheme have on the employability of Bath Spa graduates? (Appendix 1)

In addition, the project aimed to deliver the following:

- 3 trained year-3 or post-graduate peer tutors,
- peer tutoring support offered to Bath Spa students,
- data contributing to the decision about whether such a scheme is worth pursuing in terms of pedagogical benefits and employability,
- a conference paper at the 2009 European Association of Teachers of Academic Writing (EATAW) or other similar conference, and
- possibly a scholarly article for inclusion in an appropriate publication. (Appendix 1)

*Definitions*
Because 'the term "peer" is now used to describe a variety of relationships in the context of teaching and learning' (Falchikov 2001:1), for the purpose of this project, the term 'peer' refers to students studying at the undergraduate level at the same university.

*Project Scope and Limitations*
Though the Study Skills Centre teaches a variety of 'skills' (academic writing, presentations, exam preparation, etc.) this project focused exclusively on academic writing for several reasons. First, I, as lead researcher, have several years of experience acting as both a peer tutor and as a manager of peer tutors; consequently, I have a great interest in how peer tutoring can be utilised in learning contexts and the theoretical and practical knowledge to facilitate the research. Second, writing still constitutes the primary method of assessment for most courses taught at BSU; as such, student requests for advice from the SSSC usually pertain to academic writing. Even those initially identifying their concern as 'time management', for example, are often seeking help for managing their time in relation to written submissions for assessment. Finally, due to the scale of the project and the available literature, academic writing was an obvious focus for a project investigating peer tutoring in higher education.

Due to the relatively small size of the project budget, only three tutors were hired to act as peer tutors. Although only a limited amount of data could be generated, administrative and financial constraints made a larger team of tutors impossible to train and observe within the project timescale.

In addition, the timing of the project was extremely tight; funds were released in early 2009 with a one-year timescale for completion. As the project was designed to pilot the possibility of on-going peer tutoring, it was decided to recruit and train the peer tutors in the early spring, with peer-led tutorials beginning after the Easter break, in the hope of generating data to inform a decision about continuing peer tutoring in the 2009/10 academic year. The effect of the timing of the project is discussed further below.

*Rationale*

The university at which the project was conducted is a 'new' (post-1992, with full postgraduate degree-awarding powers only granted in 2008), teaching-led university with an arts and humanities focus. Eight 'Schools' comprise the university (Art and Design, Education, English and Creative Studies, Historical and Cultural Studies, Music and Performing Arts, Science and the Environment, Social Science, and the School for Development and Participation, which remains focussed on administration of academic-related activities, including the Study Skills Centre that conducted this research).

As an experienced teacher of academic writing with experience as a peer tutor, I believed that the students of this university would benefit from the extra-curricular advice, training, and support that a peer tutoring scheme offers. In addition, with a sector-wide focus on the 'employability' of university graduates, I identified an opportunity for the peer tutoring project to develop students' knowledge of composition and pedagogy, as well as some practical training that could transfer into teaching, lecturing, or other careers.

Furthermore, peer tutoring in academic writing is beginning to be practiced in other UK universities (London Met, University of the Arts London, for example) and a growing body of literature outlines the theories and practices related to peer tutoring of academic writing in the UK higher education context.


## Literature Review

The deep theoretical underpinning of peer tutoring can be found in the work of social constructionists such a Piaget and Vygotsky  Piaget argues that co-operation between peers can facilitate thought and discussion conducive to learning (1971); peer tutoring in academic writing builds on this idea by providing a semi-institutionalised context for that co-operation to take place. Similarly, Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development', or

> distance between the actual development as determined by individual problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (1978: 86)

encourages social interaction for optimal learning.

I like the idea that social interaction encourages learning: I see this happen often both for my students and in my own learning. However well I think I understand a concept, it is not until I try to apply it in my teaching, talk it over with a colleague, or write about it for others that I feel I have truly *learned* something. When training peer tutors, I talk about this need for conversation with others and ask the tutors to talk to each other often about the concepts and practices studied in the course. Seeing how conversation, social interaction, improves their own understanding, they can then see how students they tutor might benefit from the tutoring sessions, within that 'zone of proximal development'.

My own learning about peer tutoring developed in that undergraduate module, *Teaching Writing*. The theorists studied gave me a broader understanding of the

context of academic communication; for example, from Bartholomae (1995), I learned to socialise my students to the context of higher education, and that they had a right to understand their audience and the ways in which knowledge is constructed and valued in 'the academy'. These ideas are also evident in Lea and Street's 'academic literacies' framework (1998), which argues for a comprehensive approach to teaching academic writing in the UK, with a focus on the role identity, power, and contexts play in student learning and communication.

Reading Harris (1995) and North (1984) introduced me to the concepts of peer tutoring and the culture of the North American writing centre. I began to understand that writing could be a social act, and that a 'centre for writing' was a place for learning, sharing, growing, and sometimes, socialising. I like Harris's notion that 'tutorial instruction is very different from traditional classroom learning because it introduces into the educational setting a middle person, the tutor, who inhabits a world somewhere between student and teacher' (1995:27). As a peer tutor I enjoyed inhabiting that 'middle ground' and still enjoy it as a professional teacher of academic writing: it gives me an opportunity to exchange ideas with other learners in way that they may not feel comfortable doing with a module tutor or 'teacher'. It gives me freedom from the need to evaluate or judge, and I think students need that to develop their ideas. When I train peer tutors, I remind them that it is not their job to mark or grade the writing that students share with them; in fact, it is against the principles of peer tutor to offer opinions on 'value' of student work. What is important is the *conversation*, where a student's ideas can grow and develop or simply be articulated.

While Harris, North, Bartholomae, et al introduced me to the world of academic communication and writing centres, *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Ryan 2002, 3$^{rd}$ Ed.) taught me how to *be* a writing tutor: I currently use the latest edition to teach my peer tutors about boundaries, conducting a session, and the writing process. Chapter 1 of *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* outlines what I consider to be the five most important rules for writing tutors:

1. …never write any part of a student's paper.
2. Never comment negatively to students about a teachers' teaching methods, assignments, personality, or grading policies.
3. Never suggest a grade for a paper.
4. Never criticize the grade a teacher has given a paper.
5. Honor the confidentiality of the tutoring relationship.
(Ryan 2002:1-5)

Awareness of these 'golden rules' has helped me convince sceptical colleagues of the value of peer tutoring (and indeed professional tutoring) and kept both myself and tutors I have managed out of conflict with other departments by maintaining strict ethical standards.

Ryan's clear, concise guidance on how to begin a tutoring session advises tutors to 'give the student control of the paper' and 'sit side by side' (2002:15) which relates to Harris' discussions of both body language and the power relationship (or lack thereof) between peer tutors and students seeking help with their academic writing. Finally, Ryan's explanation of the power of active listening, facilitation, and silence (2002:17-22) fundamentally changed the way that I teach. When training peer tutors, I use these techniques in classroom settings to demonstrate their effectiveness and also employ them in my 1:1 sessions with students. For example, employing silence, and not being afraid of it, gives 'space'

for students to speak, to articulate their own ideas rather than relying on the tutor to provide answers. This ensures that students maintain control over the content of their paper and learn about writing, rather than how to fix one particular paper.

Recent literature has begun to examine peer tutoring as a method for teaching academic writing specifically in the UK. In 2006 Devet et al listed several 'concerns' about the adaptation of North American-style peer tutoring schemes in the UK higher education context. For example, they cautioned that 'lecturers' pay, status, and morale' (208) should be taken into consideration. In addition, Devet et al express concern about student identity; they worry that assumptions that students are homogenous group might be false, thereby calling into question the idea that peer tutors are actually 'peers' to those they tutor (210-211). Devet et al conclude that it

> is probable that there will be contexts and situations in UK higher education where student writing can be developed by adopting a peer tutoring model; however, it is important for universities to match staffing models to localised curricular, pedagogic, and micro-political need. Additionally, we have to take account of national policy drivers and the ways in which these affect the local situation. For these reasons we argue that there are dangers in attempting to replicate the US peer-tutoring model in an unreconstructed form. (211)

These valid concerns were taken into consideration when designing this project. For example, union representatives were consulted to ensure that the employment of peer tutors would not be cause for concern among the branch membership; peer tutors were recruited from a variety of disciplines and age groups to address issues of varying student 'identities', and the institutional context was thoroughly discussed with project supervisors to ensure that not only would the pilot project meet 'localised curricular, pedagogic, and micro-political needs' but that the project might also develop into a longer-term scheme also relevant to the needs of the university and its constituents.

*Overcoming Objections to Peer Tutoring*
In his discussion of a peer tutoring scheme developed at London Metropolitan University, O'Neill (2008) takes issue with Devet et al's objections to peer tutoring schemes, pointing out inconsistencies in their argument and arguing that 'the authors underplay the real advantages of the student-student relationship' and that 'no serious objection to peer tutoring is cited' (5).

O'Neill suggests that it 'may well be the case that an ideal [writing development] system would be made up of a combination of undergraduate peer tutors, learning development lecturers and professional writers in residence, all working together to offer the best possible support for a variety of student needs' (6) and that for 'real change to be made in the UK, we will need to show that attention to writing helps the learning experience of *all* students and that we are not simply asking lecturers to deal with the ''problem'' of weak writers, who some academic staff would doubtless prefer not to have to teach' (9). I find O'Neill's objections to Devet et al's resistence to peer tutoring in the UK refreshing and his article about the peer tutoring initiative at London Metropolitan helpful and enlightening. Too often educators, myself included, accept the 'status quo' or are afraid to take risks

with our teaching. O'Neill's willingness to try a controversial approach to teaching academic writing inspired me to try peer tutoring in my own institution and to be more critical of the articles I read and to openly disagree with ideas that conflict with my own values and opinions.

As O'Neill points out, Devet et al present two sides to the peer tutoring debate; in Section One, the American collaborators outline responses to objections to peer tutoring, mostly through educating colleagues about the realities of the tutoring session and the peer tutoring relationship, that the goal is to 'develop writers' independence' (202), for example, and that peer tutors do more student-centred work and rarely act as teachers in a tutoring session (202). Similarly, Falchikov explicitly responds to 'frequently asked questions' about peer tutoring schemes, but in the UK context (2001: 129), which has been helpful for me when designing the peer tutoring pilot project.  While Devet et al focus on the quality of the tutoring received, Falchikov addresses UK-specific concerns about society and standards (eg. 'Isn't peer tutoring really the old monitor system in new clothing?'). As a North American attempting to instate a peer tutoring scheme in a UK university, I found Falchikov's suggestions for overcoming resistance helpful in addressing my colleagues' initial concerns; her list of questions and responses introduced me to the culture, prejudices, and terminology that I might encounter while developing this project.

Overall, I was inspired by O'Neill's account of a peer tutoring scheme operating in a UK university and hoped that this project would add to the literature offering both theoretical and practical guidance to innovative ways of teaching academic writing.

## Project Activities and Evaluation

*Preliminaries*
The first phase of the research project involved ensuring that Devet et al's concerns were addressed in terms of the institutional approach to human resources. Union leaders and other relevant colleagues (e.g. Head of Learning and Teaching) were consulted about the proposed hiring of students as peer tutors of academic writing. All relevant parties agreed that the employment of peer tutors using dedicated research funding did not compromise existing agreements between the university and the unions and was a suitable approach to the teaching of academic writing.
A colleague also helped me draft a Project Initiation Document (PID), which summarised the aims, milestones and deliverables of the project. Keeping this one-side of A4 pinned to my bulletin board as a convenient reference, helped me to make decisions about how to continue with the project using the core aims and purposes as a guide. (See Appendix 5)

I believe that this part of the project was a success. By communicating with colleagues I was able to ensure that the project was suitable to the institutional context and did not fall afoul of the university's agreement with trade unions. In addition, the profile of the project was raised within the university in a positive, open manner, thereby laying the groundwork for a sustainable peer tutoring project. I will also use a PID in all future projects, as I found it invaluable for keeping within the tight time and financial boundaries.

*Recruitment and Selection*

Next, the peer tutoring positions were advertised via the university's internal student employment unit using a professional job description and person specification (see Appendix 2). Applicants were required to submit a CV, covering letter and sample of their academic writing, which allowed the selection panel to evaluate applications against the person specification (see Appendix 3: Peer Tutor Application Evaluation). When choosing applicants, we looked for those who met the criteria and then narrowed the field based on the quality of the covering letter and writing sample.

Using the university's job description and person specification templates created a professional presentation of the peer tutoring position to potential tutors and staff in the institution, thereby ensuring that the peer tutors were perceived as trained, qualified members of the Study Skills Centre; in addition, using the templates allowed colleagues in the human resources department to easily categorise the post in the appropriate pay grade, provided a clear outline of responsibilities, and aided in the recruitment and selection process. Applicants writing samples provided evidence of their ability to write at the appropriate level; while perfection was not part of the criteria, nor expected, it did ensure that applicants had at least a proficient level of academic writing. The covering letter gave a second opportunity for us to evaluate applicants' writing skills and for them to persuade us that they were worth interviewing for the position, as well as outlining why they were interested in peer tutoring and how they could contribute to the project.

Six applicants were chosen to participate in the interview stage of the selection process (see Appendix 4: Interview Questions). The questions were designed to measure the interviewees' level of interest in teaching academic writing (What is your interest in learning about academic writing pedagogy/How might this job fit in with your future career aspirations); their existing relevant skills (What qualities, skills, and/or experience do you have that would make you a good peer tutor); and their general employability (This post will require tutors to exhibit a high degree of maturity, professionalism, and responsibility. Please give us an outline and/or example of how you can meet this criteria). In addition, we asked each interviewee about some aspect of their application package that was relevant to the position (e.g. past employment, academic interests).

I asked a colleague from the university's Business Support Office to sit in on the interviews in order to provide a balanced perspective. I knew that my colleague's perception of interviewees would differ from my own, as we have very different backgrounds: I could assess the suitability of each applicant's academic ability and personality, while my colleague would look for traits such as professionalism and presentation. For example, when making the final decision about who to hire, it was useful to have my colleague's input on one of the applicant's presentation at the interview; she felt that he had been too casually attired, while I thought that his friendly and relaxed nature would help other students feel more comfortable around him. As 'employability' was part of the project's aim, we decided to hire that particular applicant, but to give feedback to all the interviewees that might help them in future employment searches. In addition, we deliberated over hiring 'mature' students (ie. those over 21 at time of starting university), particularly due to Devet et al's concerns over the perceptions of the perceived 'peerness' of

tutors, Bruffee's (1993) argument that the benefit of peer tutoring depends on that 'peerness', and research conducted on the relationship between student identity and writing (Ivanic 1998; Lillis 2001). We decided to hire one mature student over the other mature applicant because she seemed more friendly and approachable; also, because approximately 30% of BSU's student body is classified as 'mature', we felt that this still qualified her as a 'peer' in the institutional context, relating back to Devet et al's caution to take 'localised curricular, pedagogic, and micro-political need[s]' into account (2006:211) when designing peer tutoring programmes.

Tutors were paid £10.18/hour, in accordance with the nature of the position; the grading of the post was agreed upon with guidance and approval from the university's central human resources department. I felt that this was a fair rate of pay and accurately reflected the professional work tutors would contribute to the project; I also hoped that they would gain some valuable skills, knowledge and experience by taking part.

The recruitment and selection methods we employed resulted in a strong team of peer tutors who were committed, engaged, curious, and approachable. The external input into the selection process was extremely valuable to me. I knew that I could easily be swayed by a friendly personality or a high academic achiever, so having a second opinion and someone to discuss the interviews with added a balanced perspective and ensured that all qualities were assessed. In future I would adopt a similar approach to hiring peer tutors; our professional approach gave credibility to the whole project and helped the tutors understand the value of their position.

*Training*
The three peer tutors submitted a Criminal Records Bureau check and took part in the training offered. The training comprised the following elements:
1. self-directed reading (Ryan and Zimmerelli 2006; Harris 1995; Murray 1972; Bartholomae 1985; Emig 1977; Lea and Street 1998; Devet et al 2006),
2. two face-to-face group sessions,
3. online discussion using the university's virtual learning environment, and
4. observations of 1:1 tutoring.

In future projects, I would try to add more face-to-face sessions with the peer tutors; in this instance because of the tight timeline for project completion, along with students' varying timetables, only two sessions were possible. However, the virtual learning environment provided an opportunity for the tutors and I to interact, share ideas, react to the readings, and address concerns. I would also again ask peer tutors to observe me conducting some 1:1 tutorials and keep their own reflective journals. The observations offer a variety of students and concerns to learn from, while the learning journals aid deep learning and provide evidence for project evaluation.

*Peer Tutoring Sessions*
After the training was complete, each tutor led one to two observed peer tutoring sessions, and some tutors led further peer tutoring sessions as time and space permitted. Again, due to the short timeline of the project, I would have preferred the tutors to have conducted more sessions and/or provided an opportunity for two tutors to work together with small groups of students. One of the tutors

reported that she learned so much from the feedback that I gave her from her first two sessions that she is interested in continuing to peer tutor, even as a volunteer.

*Data Collection Methods*
The research questions were answered by collecting data in several ways. First, each peer tutor completed a self-evaluation questionnaire with a member of the university's careers department at the beginning of the project and again at the end; this measured their own perceptions of their 'employability' in areas such as entering the labour market, personal and interactive attributes, and sector-specific skills. In addition, the tutors participated in reflective-writing exercises on the virtual learning environment and in their own learning diaries. Tutors also received feedback on their 1:1 sessions from both me, and the students they tutored.

While the qualitative data collected from tutors and students' reports is helpful in answering the research questions, I believe that in future more quantitative data might be more useful for persuading decision-makers about the value of peer tutoring; for example, a longer-term study of student performance (grades), satisfaction, and/or retention could be suitable.

The comparison of the 'before and after' careers questionnaires did add to the validity of the data and the coupling of the tutors' reports with this slightly more objective data created some convergent validity (see Cohen et al 2007:150 for more on convergent validity).

*Aims and deliverables*

To evaluate the project, I have mapped the professed aims and promised deliverables against the outcomes:

Table 1: Evaluation of aims and deliverables

| Element | As proposed | Outcome Achieved | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aim | investigate the effectiveness and viability of a peer tutoring scheme in the Student Study Skills Centre at Bath Spa University. | The project proved that peer tutoring was a viable option for teaching academic writing at BSU; however, more research into its 'effectiveness' could be required. | |
| Aim | evaluate the pedagogical validity of employing peer tutors to support students' academic writing development | The literature review and record of student learning contributes to the pedagogical understanding of peer tutoring | |
| Aim | identify potential benefits, challenges, and barriers involved in developing such a programme. | Some benefits, challenges and barriers were identified | In particular, resourcing will continue to challenge the sustainability of a peer tutoring scheme |
| Deliverable | 3 trained year-3 or PG peer tutors | Outcome achieved | |
| Deliverable | Peer tutoring offered to BSU students | Outcome achieved | Could have been more if time permitted |
| Deliverable | Data contributing to the decision about whether such a scheme is worth pursuing | Outcome achieved | Again, more data could have been generated if time and financial resources permitted |
| Deliverable | Conference paper | Outcome achieved: project results presented at EATAW conference 1 July 2009 | |
| Deliverable | Scholarly article for publication | Outcome likely to be achieved | This paper may be rewritten as a professional academic article and submitted for publication |

One of my key learning points during this project was the design of the deliverables; the project supervisor suggested that for a 'learning and teaching development grant', the institution would expect a deliverable that could be utilised by other members of staff; as such, there is potential for this project to result in guidelines for peer tutoring to be created and disseminated among subject teaching staff.

**Discussion and Reflection**

This project has resulted in several learning points for me and, I believe, has the potential to add to the body of knowledge regarding peer tutoring in UK HE contexts.

I agree with O'Neill's assertion that 'in practice, when a system is in place, the potential objections to using peer tutors disappear' (2008:8). I would advise others considering developing a similar programme to understand the theoretical rationale for peer tutoring and to solicit advice from colleagues in other institutions. For example, being aware of the likely resistance to peer tutoring can be a prompt to thoroughly researching the pedagogical foundations, potential benefits, possible challenges and practical applications of such a scheme.

From a practical point of view, I suggest that peer tutoring schemes must be properly resourced in terms of time, money, and staff, to ensure that tutors are properly trained to maintain professional standards and provide an environment conducive to learning. In my own experience, space for confidential tutoring is important but can be problematic to secure, and financial resources to pay tutors appropriately can be difficult to find. From a pedagogical standpoint, those considering instituting a peer tutoring scheme should ensure that they understand how learners learn, the relevant theories related to teaching academic writing, and be aware of the contexts (institutional and wider) in which the staff and students conduct their learning and teaching activities.

The question of whether to provide 'generic' or 'subject-specific' help may need to be addressed, again according to both pedagogical and socio-institutional needs. While an argument can be made for either, those planning a peer tutoring scheme should consider their primary purposes: is the tutoring meant to help students with their academic writing or their understanding of subject-specific content? Each institution will need to answer this question accordingly.

For my own practice, this project has helped me realise that peer tutoring for academic writing *is* possible in a UK university, despite some challenges and objections. I have refreshed my knowledge of North American pedagogy and come to understand better the teaching of academic writing in the UK HE context. In future, I hope to be able to offer peer tutors a more comprehensive training programme that looks more in-depth at the theory of composition, as well as a more UK-centred approach and to effectively address colleagues' concerns about the pedagogical and/or ethical value of peer tutoring. Finally, sharing my research findings at the EATAW conference was an excellent opportunity to build networks and learn more about how other institutions address writing development. I look forward to using my new understanding to better help students understand and create their academic writing assignments.

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## Appendix 1: Project Proposal

1. **Title of Project** Investigating the Role of Peer Tutoring in Academic Writing Support

2. **Project Leader**
   Name: Joelle Adams    Email: j.adams@bathspa.ac.uk

3. **Name(s) of those collaborating on this project**
   a)  Adam Powell, Head of Employability

4. **Description of the Project** (max. 2 sides A4)
   **Investigating the Role of Peer Tutoring in Academic Writing Support**
   a) *Aims and Deliverables*
   This project aims to investigate the effectiveness and viability of a peer tutoring scheme in the Student Study Skills Centre at Bath Spa University. The study will evaluate the pedagogical validity of employing peer tutors to support students' academic writing development and identify potential benefits, challenges, and barriers involved in developing such a programme.

   Deliverables resulting from the project will include the following:
   • 3 trained year-3 or post-graduate peer tutors,
   • peer tutoring support offered to Bath Spa students,
   • data contributing to the decision about whether such a scheme is worth pursuing in terms of pedagogical benefits and employability,
   • a conference paper at the 2009 European Association of Teachers of Academic Writing (EATAW) or other similar conference, and
   • possibly a scholarly article for inclusion in an appropriate publication.

   Research questions:
   •    What role can peer tutoring play in the Student Study Skills Centre?
   •    What are the pedagogical implications/benefits of a peer tutoring scheme?
   •    What impact might a peer tutoring scheme have on the employability of Bath Spa graduates?

   b)  *Area of teaching and learning to be researched/developed*
   Peer tutoring has long been an integral part of composition pedagogy in North American writing centres (e.g. see Harris 1996 ); however, writing development teachers and researchers in the UK have thus far been wary of simply importing the American model into the very different context of UK higher education. As recommended by Devet et al, this project will help the staff of the Student Study Skills Centre take into consideration the 'curricular, pedagogical, and micro-political needs' (2006: 211) of Bath Spa University when contemplating the development of a peer tutoring initiative.

   In addition, several universities (notably Bournemouth) in the UK have recently developed Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) programmes, which differ from the North American model used in writing centres. By reviewing the various models, evaluating the needs of the Bath Spa University community, and monitoring a pilot project, this study will contribute to further discussion of potential peer tutoring schemes at BSU.

   c)  *Key Activities*
   1. **Literature review** – a review of relevant studies related to peer tutoring pedagogy and initiatives, including SEDA publications, peer-reviewed articles and information about schemes in other UK universities
   2. **Recruit and train peer tutors** – three year-3 or post-graduate students will be recruited via the JobShop to act as peer tutors for the pilot project; they will be

trained by the Student Achievement Coordinator in the relevant pedagogy and teaching strategies, and given support on issues such as boundaries and dealing with upset students.

3. **Monitor peer tutoring sessions**
Peer tutoring sessions will be monitored by the Student Achievement Coordinator.

4. **Evaluation**: peer tutors will be asked about their learning experiences and any impact the project has on their employability and/or transferable skills; students who have received tutoring will be queried about their experiences and the perceived value of the sessions

5. **Writing up and dissemination:** results will be reported via the usual PedR channels, along with a probable presentation at the European Association of Teachers of Academic Writing conference in Coventry in June 2009, and a potential scholarly paper for publication.

 d)  *Value and Transferability*
This project will give information about the viability of peer tutoring in the Study Skills Centre, which will benefit various university departments; for example, the results may help Schools develop their own peer tutoring schemes. In addition, there are possible employability benefits for the peer tutors, including tutoring and administrative experience.

 e)  *External Engagement (if applicable)*
EATAW conference in Coventry, June 2009 (or similar)

 f)*Timetable*
All projects must be completed by 31 December 2009, including the production of a short report on project findings and outcomes, submitted to the Learning and Teaching Committee. Please state the anticipated start-and-end dates of your project.

Recruitment and training of peer tutors: Feb – Apr 2009
Peer-tutoring sessions: May and June 2009
Evaluation: May and Jun 2009
Dissemination: Jun 2009
Follow-up (possible): Oct – Dec 2009
Reporting: Dec 2009

## References

Devet, B. , Orr, S., Blythman, M., and Bishop, C. 'Peering Across the Pond: the Role of Students in Developing Other Students' Writing in the US and UK'. in Ganobcsik-Williams, L. *Ed*. (2006) *Teaching Academic Writing in UK Higher Education: Theories, Practices, and Models*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 196-211.

Harris, M. (1996) *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference*. Urbana: NCTE.

**Appendix 2: Job Description and Person Specification**

Post Title: Peer Tutor (Academic Writing)

School/Department: School for Development and Participation/ Student Study Skills Centre (SSSC)

Line Manager: Joelle Adams, Student Achievement Coordinator

Grade and Pay:        Grade 5 (£10.18/hour)

**J**ob Purpose:
This post is the result of a Teaching and Learning Research and Development project. Peer tutors will be trained to provide academic writing support to other Bath Spa University students; the sessions and experience will be monitored and evaluated by the Student Study Skills Centre and Careers department to assess the viability and effectiveness of peer tutoring for academic writing support.

Main Duties and Responsibilities:

- complete training programme provided by SSSC
- research fundamentals of academic writing pedagogy and practice
- observe 1:1 tutoring consultations
- conduct 1:1 peer tutoring consultations
- provide information and feedback to Careers and the SSSC about the experience of being a peer tutor

Additional Points:
- possibly contribute to the production and presentation of a scholarly paper

PERSON SPECIFICATION

<u>Qualifications/Experience</u>

Essential:
- 3$^{rd}$ year or postgraduate student
- experience writing for assessment at Bath Spa University (essays, reports, reflective writing, and/or dissertations, etc.)]

Desirable:

<u>Skills & Knowledge</u>

Essential:
- basic knowledge of English grammar and punctuation

Desirable:
- good to excellent knowledge of English grammar and punctuation
- comfortable speaking in public

<u>Personal Qualities</u>

Essential:

- friendly and approachable
- willingness to learn and apply theories and practices of academic writing pedagogy
- confidentiality
- reliable

Desirable:

<u>Special Conditions</u>
This post is subject to Criminal Records Bureau disclosure. Further information regarding this can be found on our website

**Appendix 3:**
**Peer Tutor Application Evaluation**

Candidate Name:

☐ Covering Letter
☐ CV
☐ Academic Writing Sample

| Year 3 or PG | Yes/No | Notes/Comments | Score |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Experience writing for assessment** | | | |
| **Covering letter: explains what they can offer** | | | |
| **CV: well-presented, some relevant experience?** | | | |
| **Writing Sample: scholarly, organised, language** | | | |
| **TOTAL** | | | |

Interview offered?
Interview accepted?
Time and date:

**Appendix 4: Interview Questions**

A. Introduction
   a. introduce interviewers and Centre
   b. format of interview (intro, questions, opportunity for questions)
   c. about the job
      i. training – directed and independent
      ii. observations
      iii. tutoring 1:1
      iv. Careers analysis
      v. Scholarship – contribute ideas for paper/presentation
      vi. Opportunity to go to conference

B. Questions
   a. What is your interest in learning about academic writing pedagogy?
   b. What qualities, skills, and/or experience do you have that would make you a good peer tutor?
   c. This post will require tutors to exhibit a high degree of maturity, professionalism, and responsibility. Please give us an outline and/or example of how you can meet this criteria.
   d. How might this job fit in with your future career aspirations?
   e. Questions specific to each candidate?
   f. Okay with getting CRB?
   g. 2 references?

C. Conclusion
   a. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about yourself that may help us in the selection process?

   b. Do you have any questions?

   c. When we will let them know/method of contact

Joelle Adams
Educational Enquiry
MA in Education (Learning and Teaching)
September 2008                     Word Count:  5005 plus reference list and appendices

## Appendix 5: Project Initiation Document

| **Business Case**<br>• Relates to employability, learning skills development<br>• Gives transferable skills to students<br>• Increases resources for SSSC | **Funding**<br>Internal PedR -<br><br>Time release (e.g., teaching hours)     £ 0<br>Administrative/technical support     £ 500<br>Other  – conference fees, etc.     £ 300<br>Travel and Subsistence                         £ 700<br>Materials – training guides etc                £ 500<br><br>Other costs – wages for tutors             £ 1 300<br>Training events                                       £ 200<br>Space                                                     £500<br><br>**TOTAL                                          £ 4 000** |
| --- | --- |
| **Objectives and Scope**<br>• to train 3 3rd year or PG students to be peer tutors<br>• to investigate the validity, viability and effectiveness of a peer tutoring scheme in the SSSC<br>• to analyse the transferable skills gained by the peer tutors | **Team**<br>Leader: Joelle Adams – j.adams@bathspa.ac.uk<br>Adam Powell – a.powell@bathspa.ac.uk<br><br>**Stakeholders:**<br>BSU student population, trained tutors, Careers, SSSC |

**Rationale**
The SSSC requires more resources and students need skills that will make them more employable

**Milestones**

| Target | Target Date | Responsibility |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Recruit and train students | Feb- Apr 2009 | JA |
| Tutoring session | May-June 2009 | JA |
| Employability Evaluation | June 2009 | Careers |
| Dissemination | 2009-2010 | JA |

**KPIs and Deliverables**
• trained students
• data about peer tutoring, incl. employability implications
conference presentation, possible paper

**Risks**
1. **Recruiting peer tutors**
2. **Ineffective tutoring**