Serving the World Communities - Tutoring & Mentoring as an Agent of Change in a Multi-Cultural Society

First, I want to outline the background to our peer tutoring system where I work at UNITEC, which is one of the three major tertiary institutions in Auckland, New Zealand offering a range of Certificate, Diploma, Degree and Post Graduate courses. Then I will describe the training and support the tutors receive, and explore how tutoring is seen by our tutors and students as an 'agent of change in our multicultural society'.

Background to the Peer Tutoring System at UNITEC

In the 1980’s a Self-Access resource and study room for students of Languages was first established in a small relocatable classroom near the Languages building, then shifted to a room within the Language School in 1992.

In 1995, a Peer Tutoring Scheme for English as Second Language students was established with training and administration help from a Home Tutoring Programme and a UNITEC-wide Learning Centre, called Te Tari Awhina. Now, Peer Tutoring is also offered in other International Languages such as German, Mandarin, Japanese and Spanish.

Next year the Self-Access Centre or Language Learning Centre, and the Peer Tutor scheme will move to a new purpose-built facility within the Main Library Development, thus becoming accessible to all students at UNITEC. It is also seen as an important stepping stone for language students moving to further studies in other fields at UNITEC, and indeed, for ALL other students, including the International students (who are full fee-paying students in New Zealand on study visas for finite periods of time). International education is an area of rapid growth in the New Zealand tertiary education sector, and we find that many students require informed use of the Library and continued language support.

Peer tutor management is shared by the 2.35 equivalent full time staff of the Learning Centre, who also manage and develop the Self Access Resources, and help disseminate the latest information about Autonomous Learning and Learning Strategies.

Simply administering the Peer Tutoring Scheme uses about .7 of a fulltime staff member. By ‘administering’, I mean making appointments, writing up appointment cards, organising the 16 peer tutor timetables and session cards, meeting and taking

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1 Arbury, Jacquelyn (1999) "Developing a Peer Tutoring Programme in the School of Languages, UNITEC" paper presented at the 2nd Regional Conference on Tutoring and Mentoring
students to the tutors, maintaining records of attendance, organising relievers, making relevant resources, organising recruitment, training, pay claims etc

Aims.

The Language Peer Tutoring Scheme has always had three main objectives

*Firstly,* to give individualised language learning support on a 1:1 basis e.g. class-work revision, homework help, proof-reading, other assistance such as form-filling, letters, news story background, learning methods and material selection

*Secondly,* to offer listening, speaking and conversation practice and authentic communication with native speakers of the target language, and

*Thirdly,* to make opportunities for semi-formal or informal contact and socialising between English language learners and other English speaking New Zealanders, to help promote mutual cultural understanding and make it easier for people to adjust to a new life in New Zealand. As Varner and Beamer report, we know "a person entering another culture will always have to adapt to a number of cultural conditions" so we aim to assist our students in this process.

After the Tutoring and Mentoring Conference in Perth in 1999, my colleague reported that little was done elsewhere in the world in the languages area, although I notice now that in Western Australia there were some opportunities for peer tutoring among students of Japanese, Indonesian and Chinese.

**Development & Use of the Language Learning Centre and Peer Tutoring Scheme**

Over the last decade the Schools of Languages have experienced significant growth in the number and range of courses offered and the number of enrolled students (from less than 100 Equivalent full time students in 1990 to a little over 1,000 in the year 2000). This includes both Permanent Resident and International students. From a week-long study conducted earlier this year, we found that an average of 260 students per day were using the Centre.

For several years we have offered Certificate and Diploma papers in International Languages (e.g., Dutch, German, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Samoan, Spanish). This year we introduced a BA in International Languages course, a conjoint degree (Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Business Studies) and a Language component in the Bachelor of International Communication.

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2 Arbury, Jacquelyn (1999) "Developing a Peer Tutoring Programme in the School of Languages, UNITEC" paper presented at the 2nd Regional Conference on Tutoring and Mentoring
5 Arbury, Jacquelyn (1996) Future relocation and development of the Self-Access Centre, UNITEC.
6 Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Predictions for 2000 (15.8.00), UNITEC Management,
We continually fine-tune the tutoring appointments available to adapt to the changing demands and timetables of both the tutors and students, so currently we offer 70 half-hour 1:1 appointments plus 8 one-hour 1:4 conversation groups, of which students can attend two per week.

So far this semester we have 112 English language students taking advantage of peer tutoring and 21 students of International Languages. As courses start and finish throughout the year, sometimes after 2 weeks, 5 weeks, 10 weeks or 16 weeks, but particularly with each new semester, our client base also changes.

Limiting factors to the number of sessions we can provide are:

- peer tutor availability
- space availability
- students’ timetable
- students’ extracurricular work & commitments
- finance for tutors and
- current coursework options, some of which require more learning support or conversational support than others

Another tutoring service that interrelates with the one UNITEC offers is

The Home Tutoring Scheme

UNITEC supports the West Auckland Home Tutor Scheme – one of the biggest of 27 such groups nation-wide. To date it has done this by providing free office, resource, and teaching space (where possible) plus some funding for resources ($2000).

Home Tutor Groups arose in the mid 70’s after the arrival of unprecedented numbers of non-English speaking immigrants, particularly refugees from South-East Asia, coming to New Zealand as Permanent Residents. Some government funding was made available in the 80’s to pay co-ordinators, and this was usually channelled through polytechnics, which have always been tertiary providers with a special focus on applied skills and research.

A national organisation was formed in 1992 with assistance from Lotteries Grants, and in 1995 it became government bulk funded and entirely independent.

Now it is 75% government funded, with ¼ of this funding going in staff costs and the rest being used for materials and resources. The remaining 25% funding for the scheme is raised by the Home Tutor Association, which applies to other agencies such as Lotteries Boards, local Councils, Banks, and also does community fundraising such as garage sales (second-hand goods) and raffles. The tutors pay a small amount to do the training course.

Last year, the Home Tutor Scheme country-wide catered for about 5,000 students (of which 656 were from the West Auckland Group, and forms a community-based

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7Martin-Blaker, Jeannie The New Zealand Association of Home Tutor Schemes, 2000
voluntary service that meets the English language and social needs of adult New Zealanders from non-English speaking backgrounds.

In 1999, the West Auckland Society, had 3 part-time co-ordinators, a financial manager and a resource manager. 170 tutors were involved with 213 students (note there were also 135 on a waiting list, 20 referred elsewhere and 288 in groups) so student numbers in December 1999 actually totalled 656. The total hours worked by the co-ordinators, part time tutors and interviewers was 85.5 per week, while volunteers worked approximately 235 hours per week, and the financial manager 11 hours per week (this year increased to 13 hours).

The largest learner groups are Ethiopian, Somali, Mainland Chinese, Iranian/Persian, Kurdish, Afghani, Macedonian, Russian, Bosnian, Eritrean and Korean, with a lesser number (ie under 10) of 28 other nationalities from Europe, the Middle East, South America, Asia and the Pacific. So we see that the Home Tutor net is spread far and wide, servicing people from a multitude of different nations.

The UNITEC Peer Tutoring and the Home Tutoring come together in the crossover of some staff, some students, some classes and more importantly for this paper, the Training of Tutors.

Our tutors for this year have also come from a range of countries – Korea, Japan, China, New Zealand, Fiji, Turkey, Britain, Germany, South Africa and Columbia/South America.

Training and Support for Peer Tutors

Training
Up till this year, there have been four initial training sessions of two hours per week, with the fourth session taking place after the tutors’ first week of work, so they can relate questions and concerns to their initial experience
The training has always been based on the Home Tutor model, and implemented by the Co-ordinator of the Centre. However, it has proved very difficult to find convenient times for tutors to all come to training sessions due to other work, home and study commitments. Therefore a range of training options is being offered and peer tutors are strongly encouraged to undertake one of these before they start tutoring.

The main option currently being used is the Home Tutor Training Certificate, which is a comprehensive 20 hour course, plus 25 tutoring sessions. It covers:

- East-West social, cultural and educational differences
- The Maori Dimension in NZ

[comparison sheet, family trees, case studies]

[history and interaction of new peoples, Maori language and culture in NZ, issues for Maori in NZ]

8 West Auckland ESOL Home Tutor Society Inc Annual Report March 1999 - February 2000
UNITEC is also very fortunate in being able to recruit Peer Tutors amongst the students of the (British) Cambridge Language Teaching Certificate (CLTA or RSA) being taught at UNITEC, and the UNITEC Graduate Diploma of Language Teaching. These students need minimal content training to become effective tutors, simply orientation to our resources, courses and Learning Centre.

Next year, UNITEC is offering a new paper called “Introductory Tutoring Skills”. Students can undertake a 96-hour tutor training course which contributes toward their degree and which also involves some form of direct voluntary practical service to the community in the form of tutoring practice.

While other universities around the world award marks for student tutoring, UNITEC awards marks for the training component, which is similar to Australia’s Murdoch School of Education, where the students work in secondary schools.

Support

There are follow up sessions about once a semester to discuss successes and problems or to explore ideas for development of the system, for example, a workshop tutors may want to help them with their tutoring, a new initiative they may want to try out and so on. These meetings help with Peer Tutor team-building, allow us to update training needs and stop the tutors feeling too isolated in their work.

At other times, tutors may be offered relieving work in the Learning Centre itself, which increases their familiarity with the resources, and the good rapport with the tutees and other peer tutors.

Tutors are also welcome at any time to talk to the Learning Centre staff about any concerns, queries, difficulties and positive experiences. Most tutors work about 2-3 hours per week and we have to be very flexible, as their timetables and workloads change every semester, particularly towards the end of semester as assignment and assessment deadlines approach!

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Tutors are also supported financially, as they are paid per hour worked at a rate commensurate with other semi-skilled student employment (rather than academic credit as at some universities\(^{12}\) or fees paid via scholarships\(^{13}\)). Like Saunders and Kingdon, who emphasise “the voluntary status of tutoring should be preserved at all costs”, UNITEC peer tutors are not forced “into tutoring via a compulsory curriculum element”\(^{14}\) but may choose to do the course.

**Tutoring as an agent of change in our multi-cultural society**

I took a qualitative ‘case-study’ approach to investigating this, and asked the students and tutors to anonymously complete questionnaires about peer tutoring. As can be expected, the responses from the 16 more articulate native-English speaking tutors were more extensive and generally went into more depth than was possible from the 21 language students, most of whom are studying English (71.4% of the students were Permanent Residents in New Zealand).

However, very interesting comments were made in response to the question:

> **How does peer tutoring change your life in NZ, where you live with people from several different cultures?**

The responses were fairly evenly split between three main areas:

The first was: **finding out about NZ customs and culture**:

- “Helps me to find out about New Zealand culture – how to make social conversation...when you meet someone for the first time...taking and leaving messages” (dictated by student)
- “To be frank, I don’t think peer tutoring can make great change of my life, but it help me to adapt the live in NZ....”

The second main area of comment was: **assistance with study content**:

- “Improving myself in communication”
- “Helps me study English – so can go to things alone...library, collect child from kindy (pre school), talk to son’s teacher, help son with homework”, and

and the third area was: **concerns with crossover of cultural information and ideas, and developing new friendships with the host culture**:

- “I think my peer tutor told me about many NZ story, about NZ culture so I know how to make up friends..”


\(^{13}\) Elsegood, Russell *Summary of report on “University Students as Tutors and Mentors – Aiding Transition and Retention”* (p1)

• "...We can get more opportunity to speak, we can discover some customs from them, we can exchange some opinions to each other"

From these comments we can infer that students see the benefits of increasing opportunities for social communication, and for an exchange in understanding each other’s ideas and lifestyles, both within the framework of subject tutoring and with effects stretching out to the wider community.

As the tutoring at UNITEC involves pairing people from a range of different cultures, it can also be seen as an agent leading to better job prospects for both parties. This is articulated by Beamer when she states that "More and more firms are finding (…that) effective intercultural communication is crucial for success, domestically and internationally"15, indeed "business communication is intercultural communication"16.

She claims that work in the future, particularly in Asia17 will be more relationships based than results based and require a real understanding of meanings as workers deal with a wide variety of people from many cultures (preferably) face to face and also through global communication and commerce.18

At UNITEC, most courses have a very ‘applied’ focus, to equip students realistically for the workplace. The international component of the student body is increasing, (1200 out of 7000 equivalent full-time students this year)19, or to put it another way, 6,554 out of an estimated final total of 20,242 students enrolled have English as an Additional Language20, so it also part of our role to help prepare students for life and work within our multicultural and increasingly global society.

Valuable comments were also made by tutors, who were asked:

**How do you see your role of tutor as an “agent of change” in our multi-cultural society?**

Some of the representative comments were centred on **assisting student’s to new awareness and perceptions as they adapt to the NZ way of life:**

• "helping acculturate new arrivals"
• "As a responsibility’ to help students ‘fit in’ (to our multi-cultural society), feel more comfortable and give them confidence in speaking and understanding of our language & culture in NZ...an encourager, helping students to adapt and comprehend, whilst being aware of their difficulties and cultural differences”

Others were interested in the **welfare of the student:**

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16 Varner, Iris and Linda Beamer (ibid:xi)
17 Varner, Iris and Linda Beamer (ibid:74)
19 Information from an unwritten address to SoL staff, 30.8.00 by John Webster, CEO, UNITEC
20 UNITEC Memorandum "Increased Provision for Students with English As An Additional Language (EAL) at UNITEC" from English Language Entry Levels Working Group (3.10.00) p. 2
• “As a supporter, a confidante and a counsellor…”
• “For many of the students we are almost the only contact that they have with native English speakers. We need to help to give them confidence to make contact with the English speaking community. Therefore we are helping them make one of the biggest changes of their lives”

Another group of tutor responses were concerned with their ‘brokering role’ between the students and the host culture:

• “Wherever possible, I try to raise awareness of the positive things that others can bring to NZ and to the difficulties they experience while learning English”
• “Mainly as a listener, observer and student of other cultures. Perhaps to act as a stabiliser when confusion occurs in the differences. Hopefully to represent an interest in other cultures and ways of living. Maybe a conduit for a lack of knowledge among my own friends”
• “As a one-to-one Kiwi contact the tutor can act as a mediator in our multi-cultural society – reassuring/advising overseas students about cultural differences in behaviour/tutor/student relationships etc. For some students this type of information/reassurance appears to be difficult to obtain elsewhere. Many are physically, emotionally and linguistically isolated from the New Zealander in the street”

From these observations we can determine the tutors beliefs, attitudes and understanding, which can have a very positive effect on the well-being of the student, both at an individual level and at a wider societal acceptance level. Like Cartner’s study, these responses show that “trained and suitably skilled peer tutors can become positive role models and mentors” where “concepts (are) explained from a student’s perspective” and “provides a safe situation where students can ask questions without fear of judgement”.

21 Cartner, Margaret (1999) Using different methods of delivering peer tutoring to meet the diverse learning need of students at The Waikato Polytechnic, New Zealand p1. Paper presented at the 2nd Regional Conference on Tutoring and Mentoring
23 Nuibe, Yoshinori (1994) Start from the Learners: Confluent Approach to Teaching and Studying Japanese as a Foreign Language Hiroshima University
relate to authentic learning, while also increasing their cognitive abilities, their personal level of interest and motivation, and their development of relationships within the wider community.

These learning domains are: (i) the **Linguistic** (ie Cognitive proficiency, knowledge and understanding, which involves Thinking) (ii) the **Affective** (ie the ‘here and now’ interests, dreams and curiosity of the student, leading to of self-awareness and self-identity, which involves Feeling) and (iii) the **Interactive** (ie the humanist aspects of human dynamics, which involves Relationships).

Peer tutoring is also an agent of change with respect to the tutor’s knowledge base – some commented on a need for further training on relevant topics – reinforcing the old adage the “the best way to learn something is to teach it”\(^{24}\).

Other interesting points arose when I analysed the answers to the question:

**What did you gain from being a peer tutor?**

A little more than half the tutors highlighted aspects of *cross cultural knowledge and understanding*:

- “...it broadens your mind in a way...”
- “...learnt a lot about other countries and cultures and why Asian students ‘act’ as they do”
- “I have been gaining valuable experience in how other people think, of how New Zealand is seen by our students...”
- “...increased my awareness of the difficulties faced by recent immigrants/foreign students in NZ”
- “To know different people. To learn to appreciate them more”

A peer tutoring project at Flinders University in Australia experienced similar gains in cross-cultural communication and understanding.\(^{25}\)

The next two aspects were evenly commented on by nearly two thirds of the tutors.

The first of these was the benefits for the tutors’ own *work experience*, akin to the “improved transferable skills” discussed by Topping\(^{26}\) and Wood\(^{27}\).

- “It was helpful for me whilst I study for the Grad Dip LT to be able to work with individual students at various levels of language acquisition, and

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\(^{24}\) Jones, Ann, John Jones, and Phil Ker *Peer Tutoring for Academic Credit* HERDSA News Vol. 16 No. 3 November 1994


\(^{27}\) Wood, Jim *Quality Assurance Through the Accreditation of Student Tutoring and Student Management of Tutoring* in Mentoring and Tutoring by Students (ibid:87)
The second was the benefits for the tutor’s own learning:

- “...in particular, a better understanding of problems to be overcome during the learning process”
- “Identified my own learning style and process...working with other students who are very committed encourages me to keep up with my own work”

I expect these two areas of tutor awareness to increase as we have more tutors completing the certificate, diploma and other credit-bearing courses:

The tutors also had the benefits intrinsic in experiencing a growth in personal qualities and enjoyment:

- “patience, understanding...”
- “It has been very rewarding and very enjoyable”
- “Fun”
- “It is very satisfying seeing student making progress and using their new language skills with confidence”

This study has focused mainly on the responses from Permanent Resident students who are, as Griffiths describes, “mature learners, women returnee’s and/or adult unemployed students” who have been shown to be “particularly receptive to peer support, peer collaboration and peer-led learning...” and this UNITEC study also reinforces her belief that “…a peer tutoring scheme can encourage students to talk to one another, to teach one another and to assess one another ...and encourage students to take a measure of responsibility for their peers, as well as for themselves.”

UNITEC is also part of another successful initiative, a mentoring programme for 61 Pacific Island Year 10 students (14 year olds) which encourages them to aim for a tertiary education by giving them careers advice and helping them to choose subjects accordingly. This is similar to the collaboration between schools and universities in the Netherlands albeit on a much smaller scale. So far this has involved a two-day programme with a follow-up workshop, and is run by liaison officers from the four major tertiary institutions in Auckland – the University of Auckland, the Auckland University of Technology, UNITEC and the Manukau Institute of Technology. It gives guidance to students “who knew little about tertiary education” and is beneficial for “kids who have been pulled back on track and have a focus for the first time”. This is similar to the goal described by Saunders and Kingdon, that “the ultimate aim of student tutoring is that of providing positive role models for underachieving pupils who then become more aware of higher educational pathways and opportunities”.

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28 Griffiths, Sandra “Origins and Establishment of the Peer Tutoring Project – University of Ulster”
29 Hofmeister, Jane Evaluation Research Findings of the Pre-University Project on Transition and Student Mentoring Into University in Mentoring and Tutoring by Students (1998) ed Goodlad, Sinclair. London: Kogan Page (p116)
30 Schuster, Ezra quoted by Bodger, Stacey in a report in The New Zealand Herald, 29.8.00 p A10
31 Saunders, Danny and Ray Kingdon Establishing Student Tutoring Within a Higher Education Curriculum Through the theme of Personal and Professional Development in Mentoring and Tutoring by Students (ibid:93)
Tuakana/Teina and Peer Tutoring Pilot Scheme

In 1994, a pilot scheme called Tuakana/Teina was trialed, using courses in the Humanities and Business faculties. It was aimed to meet the needs of Maori students, offering an holistic approach to learning support which could include peer tutoring, and peer tutoring was also offered to meet the needs of students other than Maori. Tuakana/Teina also included other strategies such as a buddy system for students to discuss any personal issues they may need (eg finance), learning support, and a Maori cultural emphasis.

There were 30 students matched with 11 paid tutors. The pilot showed that it was “a feasible and beneficial service for peer students, peer tutors and departmental staff… a solution for many of the problems encountered by students”\(^{32}\), but was discontinued, mainly due to a lack of continued funding. From 1999, Maori students have had a specialised Maori Development Support Centre, which offers tutoring (although not with peers), along with an advocacy role for the students at UNITEC, cultural and social support, course information and potential funding advice.

Except for this pilot study, UNITEC Peer Tutoring has been exclusively for Language students, although the Learning Centre I mentioned earlier (Te Tari Awhina) offers learning support to all other students.

There is currently some concern about student retention among both the domestic and international students\(^{33}\), so it may be wise to extend peer tutoring to encompass mentoring to meet the needs of these students as well. Of course, the extra advantage is that students of other professions such as engineering, medicine, business, education, architecture and so on, would be able to practise effective communication of ideas and information to others – an ideal mentioned as an “original and continuing object of the ‘Pimlico Connection’” by Goodlad\(^{34}\).

To sum up then, we have seen that while both tutors and students view Peer Tutoring as an ‘agent of change’, mainly in terms of the impact on students receiving that tutoring, it can also be seen as an ‘agent of change’ (and development) for the tutor, and (by extension) to the tutor’s acquaintances. Of course, while undergoing the training courses, members of the community (usually refugees) also benefit from informed intervention and support, so the Peer Tutoring scheme in UNITEC has an extra dimension and far-reaching effect within UNITEC and the wider community.


\(^{33}\) Nicholson, Diana *Report on Success and Retention at UNITEC*” (2000)

\(^{34}\) Goodlad, Sinclair *Students as Tutors and Mentors* in Mentoring and Tutoring by Students (ibid:13).
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