Exploring knowledge through peer tutoring in a transitional learning community: An alternative way of teaching counseling skills to students in social work education

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Abstract

Learning to be a professional child welfare worker involves learning counseling skills. In Norway, these skills long have been taught by teachers, but recent reforms in higher education initiated by the Bologna process encourages giving more responsibility to students for their own learning. This paper describes one of these new initiatives – a peer tutoring program of counseling skills for students training to be child protection workers. Using the results of a series of questionnaires administered to and qualitative interviews with students who participated in the program from 2003 to 2009, this paper provides a summary account of the experiences of student tutees and tutors in the program — especially their evaluations of this alternative way of learning counseling skills. Analyses of the qualitative and quantitative data yielded by the study indicated that peer tutoring programs led to a number of positive effects, especially in terms of increased feelings of security and freedom in exploring different fields of knowledge. In addition, the program`s collaborative and dialogical processes worked to incorporate tutors and tutees into a transitional learning community.

Keywords: Authority of knowledge, exploring knowledge, transitional learning community, peer learning

Introduction

Counseling skills in social work long have been a key component in the education of future child welfare workers in Norway. Acquiring these skills was, in fact, made obligatory by the Norwegian Child Welfare Act (1992) in accordance with the UN's Convention of the Rights of the Child of 1989 (Oppedal 2007; Stang 2007). For 3 decades, teachers in the Child Protection faculty at Oslo University College have been responsible for the process whereby students have learned these skills. This changed in 2002 as a result of reforms in Norwegian higher education initiated by the Bologna Process – especially those calling for greater responsibility by students for their own learning. In line with this goal, the child protection faculty instituted a program so that third-year students could act as tutors for first-year students in a seminar focused on acquiring counselling skills. For a number of reasons, peer learning appeared to be a strategy for helping students acquire these skills as well as give them increased responsibility for their own learning as well as that of others. In order to measure the effects of this change in the curriculum, its participants have been asked to provide information about their experiences in interviews and on questionnaires at different times during the 8 years of the program's operations. Before turning to the presentation of these results together with a discussion of the role of peer learning in the teaching of counselling skills, it may be fruitful at this point to discuss the background for the choice of this peer learning project by the faculty.

The concepts and practices of peer learning are well known at the elementary and secondary levels of education (Topping 1998; Falchikov 2001). But peer learning and tutoring taking place at the university level appears to be rare, and therefore deserves more recognition. While it may be argued that teaching assistants (TAs) are the equivalent of peer tutors, they are nonetheless engaged in paid work teaching undergraduate students. This is not equivalent to *peer tutoring*. Moreover, while TAs usually work under the supervision of particular instructors and/or teach well-structured courses, they usually function less than students and more as 'mini-teachers' (Bruffee 1999).

Results from the relatively few studies of peer tutoring in higher education showed that peer tutors found the experience unusually valuable for a number of reasons (Bruffee 1999; Boud, Cohen et al. 2001; Falchikov 2001; Fougner 2008). In the first place, this research showed that giving advanced students opportunities to facilitate the learning of less-advanced students increased their own learning potentials in different areas critical to their future professional work. They also learned how to express and to explain knowledge to an audience resulting in improved understanding of concepts and greater interest in lower and higher level teaching material. Moreover, tutors often became involved in processes leading to the creation of what can be understood as transitional learning communities (Bruffee 1999; Fougner 2008)by helping newer members to practise the language that the new community requests. Finally, the studies showed tutors developing skills in organizing and leading group work as well as improving their listening-skills and abilities for stimulating group discussion. They also reported improvements in their ability to give emotional support within a framework of responsibility and mutual trust.

Since there has not been corresponding research on the experiences of tutees in peer tutoring programs, a special concern of the program instituted in Oslo was to learn more about this little explored area. Accordingly it was decided that its results would be studied within the frames of evaluative research going in two directions allowing both tutors and tutees to assess their experiences with the learning process. Owing to the limits of the article format, this paper has narrowed its focus to an examination of the value of the tutoring experience for first-year students in the light of the theory of peer learning as a socio-cultural strategy for learning. First, the paper describes the peer tutoring program and the research methodology chosen to study it. Next, it presents a theoretical model of peer learning as a socio-cultural learning strategy. This is followed by the study's results and a discussion of these – especially in terms of the implications of programs of this sort for learning and future research.

The research study's organization and methods

Counseling skills have long been a main component of the curriculum for first and second year students in our program. These skills have been dealt with through exercises in role-playing, video analysis, and group discussions. Prior to 2002, teachers had sole responsibility for both years of the program but their roles changed when third-years students began to participate as peer tutors in the first-year seminar.

There teachers assumed new roles as collaborators, supervisors and researchers while their positions and the curriculum in the second year remained unchanged.

Each autumn semester, one week is set aside for peer tutoring by 24 third year students who have volunteered to work with 95 first year students in groups of 8-10. The tutors, who have been drawn by lots, work in pairs. Prior to beginning their tutoring, they have three preparatory meetings with the methods teachers. The first two meetings are forums for discussing and exchanging ideas about the form and content of the seminar. The final meeting is devoted to presentations by tutors of their plans for exploring theories and concepts of counseling skills with their tutees. During the seminar week, tutors and teachers meet before and after the sessions to reflect and discuss each day's activities. These collaborative encounters are designed to provide tutors with a secure framework for creating their own educational discourses. Also these meetings provide space for explorations of knowledge by tutors and teachers as well as for discussions about having responsibility for other students' learning. Perhaps most importantly, these encounters serve to foster relations of mutual trust understood as basic to the learning process.

Since the program began, teachers in these new roles have become engaged with tutors in a series of collaborative processes whereby research questions have been constantly developed and examined. This strategy of evaluative research was chosen to: 1) improve existing pedagogical praxis and advance the learning of both students and teachers in a more democratic learning community; and 2) produce knowledge about constructive processes of change potentially useful in other settings. Aspects of validity in this study are grounded in evidence drawn from years of gradually acquired experience and emerging insights (e.g., Eikeland 2006; Fougner 2008). Since 2002, the seminar has been a central object for ongoing processes of research involving both teachers and students as collaborative investigators. Throughout this period, they have employed combinations of qualitative and quantitative methods to

gather data about the learning experiences of tutors and tutees. These forms of data *and* investigator triangulation (Denzin 1970) involving more than eight hundred co-investigators (tutors, tutees and teachers) have provided an ongoing check of the validity of the findings about the program. Data about the experiences of the tutees have been obtained from the following sources:

- In 2004 and 2005, open questions about experiences of being both a tutee and tutor were posed to 32 tutors.

- At the end of the seminar in 2007, in depth interviews were conducted with 12 volunteer student tutees

- At the end of the seminars in 2008 and 2009, statements regarding themes important to the peer tutoring strategy were administered to 169 tutees.

Scales ranging from 1 to 5 (1=totally disagree,2= disagree, 3=neutral, 4= agree, 5=totally agree) were utilized when measuring the values of a series of statements answered by the 169 students about their experiences in the program. The findings presented here are those showing the clearest profile and highest correlations – especially in relation to tentative theoretical categories. The qualitative data collected from interviews with both tutors and tutees have been summarized, grouped and analyzed as categories or narratives of learning experiences (Kvale 1977; Malterud 2003). These provide representative as well as best-practice examples for how students express their learning experiences relevant to the answers reported from the quantitative data.

Throughout the analyses of these data, a central aim has been to keep an open frame of reference to allow the data to generate theoretical propositions (Lather 1991). This has been done to extend the theoretical and conceptual framework of the socio-cultural paradigm of learning represented by the program's peer tutoring strategy. These theoretical categories include the following:

- Feeling free to actively explore knowledge

- Acquiring standards for quality of knowledge

- Forming professional identity in a transitional learning community

Theoretical perspectives

Authority of knowledge

A socio-cultural perspective on learning emphasizes learning through collaboration and dialogue (Dysthe 1996; Rommetveit 1996; Bruffee 1999; Boud, Solomon et al. 2001). This perspective questions *the authority of knowledge* (Bruffee 1999) as it is performed in the traditional class-room, where knowledge is regarded metaphorically as transferred from teacher to student. (Säljö 2000; Wells 2006). The teacher in this position is coding and transmitting information through language, either orally or written. The student receives and decodes, or acquire (Niemi 2009) the information and stores it in the memory for later use. This is a simple and technical view of how people learn from each other, and i t is, according to one critical researcher, `a historically dominant approach being the problem of teaching, rather than a solution to learning.' (Säljö 2000: 26). In contrast, teachers using collaborative/dialogical curricula of learning are regarded as agents of cultural change who foster "re-acculturation" of the students in order for them to speak and write in ways unlike their former habits of speaking and writing. In this way it is believed that they will eventually understand and learn what it takes to become a member of the new learning community represented by their teachers (Bruffee 1999; Dysthe 2001; Niemi 2009).

Exploring knowledge

A number of educational researchers have pointed out some other key issues in teaching. (Wells 2006) have maintained how learning is likely to be most effective when students adopt an *inquiry* approach to the curriculum. Other researchers (Bruffee 1999; Boud, Solomon et al. 2001) have underscored the central role of *exploration* and conversation as tools for

constructing knowledge by showing how scientists learn collaboratively throughout their education and continue to learn collaboratively in their research. The learning potential of the individual student, these investigators have shown, is greatly enhanced through processes involving collaboration and exploring with others knowing more than the individual student.

Transitional learning communities
In examining the social conditions conducive for helping students gain fluency and become acculturated into the knowledge community to which their teachers belong, numerous researchers emphasize the importance of creating good surroundings for learning (Lave 1991; Bruffee 1999; Dysthe 2001; Taasen 2004; Niemi 2009) . Beginning university students must adjust their dialects and discourses and their world views and knowledge paradigms in order to succeed. This means giving up some of the comfort and sense of identity that their former communities provided. Several researchers have shown that one way of easing this move is represented by the transitional community created by student tutors and tutees in collaboration with teachers. (Bruffee 1999; Fougner 2008). This community is a protected area and a 'temporary fusion of interests' which can be regarded metaphorically as bridging a border to the new learning community (Säljö 2000). In this temporary fusion existing in this borderland, the differing perspectives and manners of speech students bring with them into the new learning community are accepted and renegotiated. These processes involve using elements that students already master, while at the same time bringing in the language and other elements required by the new learning community. The notion of participating in a new learning community involves processes of situated, authentic learning encouraging newcomers to develop identities by becoming part of a community of practice (Andersson 2005). The

dialogical give and take encouraged in these communities facilitates a number of processes crucial to the development of students. Central among these are acquiring experiences that:

- Meaning and understanding cannot be transferred but are explored and developed in dialogue

- Dialogical processes serve to create a borderland community bridging between the past and future perspectives, discourses and knowledge.

- Identity formation depends on processes fostering active participation among community members.

Peer learning

Peer learning implies that students teach as well as learn from one another, formally and informally. Studies have demonstrated that when students work together in pairs or smaller groups, their motivation and attention increases compared to traditional classroom teaching (Topping & Ehly 1998, Falchikov 2001). Typically, peer learning has been viewed as a learning strategy complementary to professional teaching where the teacher has an expanded role (Topping 1998). Researchers focusing on peer learning processes seldom have questioned the authority of knowledge as it comes to expression in the traditional classroom and have shown little interest in exploring relationships between student and teacher in relation to this kind of authority. Nevertheless, this research literature has provided ideas about designs, strategies and implementations of peer learning.

One of these involves the distinction between peer learning and peer tutoring. Falchikov`s (2003) concept of `near-peer` tutors underscores the closeness that this role creates among students even though a status differential still exists when more advanced students facilitate the learning process of less-advanced students. Some researchers suggest that peer tutoring may be compromised by tasks assigned to tutors by lecturers which may be reinforced by the authority structure of traditional education. In this respect, a distinction must be made between *monitor-like* tutoring mobilizing undergraduates as institutional manpower as teaching assistants and *peer tutoring as collaborative learning* mobilizing interdependence and peer influence for more broadly-defined educational ends.

These and related issues had pivotal roles in forming the 3 main questions our research aimed to address: 1) How did peer tutoring facilitate the acquisition of counseling skills among tutees? 2) Was there a difference between what tutees learned from their tutors and their teachers? 3) Did the skills tutees acquired from the program match the quality standard required of first year students?

Research findings

Feeling free to actively explore knowledge

A central goal shared by the Norwegian Bologna Process and our peer tutoring project was to stimulate students to become active participants in their own learning. In this respect, feeling free to speak was understood as one indicator of student activity. When presented with this statement on the questionnaire, all tutees *but two* totally agreed or agreed to feeling free to express themselves in the presence of student tutors (Table 1).

Table 1. *I feel free to express myself in the presence of a student tutor*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Totally disagree	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	0
3	2	1.2	1.2	1.2
4	24	14.2	14.3	15.5
Totally agree	142	84.0	84.5	100
Total	168	99.4	100.0	
Missing system	1	.6		
Total	169	100		

As indicated below, there was a striking difference in reported activity when these figures were compared with response to the question about how free students feel about expressing themselves in the presence of teachers. Less than half of the tutees (41.6%) report that they totally agreed or agreed about feeling free to express themselves in the presence of teachers.

Table 2. *I feel free to express myself in the presence of a teacher*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent	
Totally disagree	5	3.0	3.1	3.1	
2	35	20.7	21.7	24.8	
3	54	32.0	33.5	58.4	
4	42	24.9	26.1	84.5	
Totally agree	25	14.8	15.5	100	—
Total	161	95.3	100		
Missing system	8	4.7			
Total	169	100.0			

One set of answers possibly explaining these differences were found in responses made in 2007 by a sample of tutees (N=12) in 2007 to interview questions about their experiences in the program. One student made a relatively representative report in recalling that:

They (the tutors) had a safe and warm relationship. They had a playful approach. We all talked a lot about how we felt in relation to what we did. Listening to other students talk about this made me feel good. The tutors are on our level. It is easier to ask questions and participate. They (the tutors) told us for instance:""We know what you think, and this is why we do it this way..." It was not frightening not knowing things or giving the wrong answer. I do not say one word or ask questions during lectures. I prefer to look up in the books. The tutors were open and explained everything very well to us. My motivation for learning is higher when I collaborate with student tutors. (A)

Although reflections of this sort provide some support for the differences shown in tables 1 and 2, they do not of course give the full explanation. But the results do strongly suggest how tutees in their first semester perceive the cultural power structure of the learning community and *the authority of knowledge* traditionally incorporated into this structure. For beginning

students, learning in the presence of a teacher might evoke feelings of insecurity and anxiety of being assessed and failing to succeed. Students are fully aware of the fact that in the final instance it is the teacher who possesses the authority of knowledge as well as the power to decide who succeeds or fails in the learning community and this may explain the relatively low level of activity reported by students when the teacher is present. This contrasts with student reports of emotional safety and experiences of playfulness in peer tutoring situations at this *beginning* stage of their education. Recently, this finding was given support by a researcher who found that the nature of the culture of the learning situation often explained why many learners did not actively seek help with their academic problems and tasks (Niemi 2009). Judging from the experiences reported by the tutees, it appears that a counter-culture is generated by the learning community created by tutors and tutees. They tell of a milieu providing space, security and chances to get away from the traditional authority structure of the learning community *without losing opportunities for learning*.

Being a first year student is often associated with the tension and uncertainty accompanying entrance into a new learning community(Skovholt and Rønnestad 1992). It is therefore interesting to see how their feelings of this sort are influenced by their tutors. As a result of earlier research focused on the program, student tutors are made aware of this reality and therefore they consciously try to ease the tutees` emotional difficulties by creating *transitional learning communities*(Fougner 2008). A main goal for tutors involved in forming these communities is to help their younger peers feel free to *explore* knowledge through dialogues and collaboration with them. Tutors emphasize the importance of being able to cope with anxiety and strain when tutees are challenged to role play a child or a social worker in front of

the group while being videotaped. This behavior includes controlling emotional impulses, having an empathic attitude, and being able to enter into constructive relationships with other people (King 1999; Falchikov 2001; Fougner 2008). The results of research carried out elsewhere (Bruffee 1999) and the findings from the interviews and questionnaires administered with the tutees strongly suggest that the transitional learning community brought into being by the program helps provides tutees with freedom and opportunities to create and articulate new knowledge in dialogical and dynamic processes. There is little evidence indicating that similar communities result from traditional cultures of learning where the authority of knowledge and the role of teachers dominate.

Acquiring standards for quality of knowledge

Exercises providing students with opportunities to practice counseling skills are central to the peer tutoring program. As earlier shown in studies of their education, the methods for acquiring these skills consist of learning how to role-play, analyze, and assess performances in group settings (Nerdrum 1995).

Given the importance of processes involved in learning these skills, it is of interest to explore to what degree the transitional learning community helps tutees participate in these pedagogical methods. In the years after the program was first instituted, a number of changes occurred (Fougner 2008). In comparison to earlier years, the participation rate in role playing exercises steadily increased to a current average of 95 %. Because their own experiences tell them that role playing is useful for learning skills, tutors collaborate together to make role playing and video filming of role plays compulsory. This practice was initiated in 2005 and continues today. An item of faith in the program is that most students are equipped with naturally acquired (tacit) knowledge of emphatic communication and that learning to become aware of this and

related forms of knowledge and then apply it in professional relationships is vital for their academic development (Niemi 2009). This other knowledge includes understanding the theory and practice of counseling skills including: listening to and tuning in to the feelings of the other, reflecting and paraphrasing verbal expressions of the other, as well as understanding the significance of when to ask questions and give advice. It also involves understanding the meaning of giving the other person time to think, as well as the ability to reflect on one`s own contributions in the dialogue. Tutees report that some peer tutors approach this process by first letting them practice videotaped role-plays and then introducing them to theoretical concepts when discussing the role-plays. One tutee interviewed recalled:

The tutors gave us a case and let us role play a child needing support and a helper helping. After role playing we watched the videotape and discussed our performance. The tutors explained how we could analyze the play in view of the concepts from counseling skills. In that way we broadened our understanding of counseling with children, building upon our naturally acquired knowledge…. It is important to make the children feel safe communicating with them. I have become aware of my tendency to ask leading questions. I learned about active listening and the efforts it takes to understand other person`s feelings. I learned about tuning in and what it means to mirror feelings. I also learned about the need for pauses and self reflection. I played a six year old child. It was shockingly interesting to watch the video. I recognized my tendency to use a childish voice when I meet a child. I now realize that this is not necessary. I have been afraid that the child would feel rebuffed. I have also reflected on my anxiety for silence in the dialogue. I have realized that the consequences of not enduring silence are interrupting the child`s need to express itself. (respondent B)

In attempting to measure effects of the videotaping of role-playing exercises, tutees were asked to evaluate the usefulness of this kind of training. The results are shown in table 3 below:

Table *3. To what degree did you find it useful to work with the video material*?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not useful	0	0	0	0
1	0	0	0	2
2	5	3.0	3.1	3.1
3	12	7.1	7.5	10.7
4	56	33.1	35.2	45.9
Very useful	86	50.9	54.1	100.0
				—
Total	**159**	**94.1**	**100.0**	
Missing system	**10**	**5.9**		
Total	**169**	**100.0**		

The results of this showed that 89.3% of the tutees found it useful or very useful to work with the video material. These figures about the usefulness of this method correlate with the responses made by the tutees as to whether they regarded the training useful as preparation for their first in-field practice period.

Table 4. *The seminar as preparation for praxis*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
No meaning	2	1.2	1.2	1.2
2	1	0.6	0.6	1.8
3	4	2.4	2.4	4.2
4	49	29.0	29.7	33.9
Very meaningful	109	64.5	66.1	100.0
Missing System	4	2.4		
Total		165	97.6	100.0
Total	169	100.0		

Again there was near total agreement (i.e.95.8%) among the tutees that the method was meaningful or very meaningful as a foundation for their first field practice. In interviews, the tutees reported a shared feeling that this method for learning skills was crucial to their practice as future child welfare workers. Some indications of how the tutees felt were found in their reflections about this method.

One reported: *Communicating with other people is after all our most important tool in child welfare work. They (the tutors) made us aware of knowledge that we were not conscious of ourselves. They helped us to give word to knowledge that we knew in advance, thus strengthening our self-confidence. They went thoroughly into things and they did not do it too complicated. There starting point was often experience from their field practice…Before the dialog seminar I was totally unaware of how I communicated with other people. I have become more conscious of the meaning of dialogue. During the course of the seminar I have started to*

notice myself and others. I notice for instance how my parents speak to my younger siblings, and I think "ah, there I notice a paraphrase! Silence and pauses are important in order to make the other person think on a deeper level! I am more aware of communication practices in my daily life. (respondent C)

When reading this we can reflect on the authenticity of these utterances and what they reveal of genuine interest, curiosity and observation while learning. The students do not appear to be under too much pressure or striving to provide the right answer. Instead they seemed to experience the program as instrumental in giving them freedom to explore the meaning of the professional dialogue. Curiosity, of course, may serve as a strong incentive to *explore knowledge*. The table below demonstrates the tutees experienced a high level of involvement where curiosity in learning was reinforced by a feeling of safety as well as by a milieu where an exploring attitude replaced competitiveness.

Table 5. *The tutors made me curious to learn something that was new to m*e

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	0
3	7	4.1	4.2	4.2
4	46	27.2	27.4	31.5
Totally agree	115	68.0	68.5	100.0 —
Total	168	99.4	100	
Missing system	1	1		
Total	169	100.0		

Once again there was near unanimity (95.9%) among the students in reporting their positive experiences of enhanced curiosity and exploration of the program. One tutee reported:

The most important thing was not that we should do it right, but rather develop consciousness about what was right. Previously I have always wanted to understand the other person. Now I realize that I do not have to understand in order to be a good listener. When there is quiet it may be because the other needs to sort out things and be in his or her chain of thoughts instead of me interrupting. I have become cleverer at listening without reaching for a solution. This is hard to do because one feels one ought to bring up a solution. Often it is the dialogue in itself that is the solution. (respondent D)

Role play implies simulating a situation the way it might be experienced in contextualized learning situations(Andersson 2005). The challenge shared by peer tutors and teachers is to introduce their students to authentic activities reflecting real world experiences and thereby provide opportunities for learning. Role playing therefore provide the student with opportunities to be confronted with and reflect on former and new ways of thinking and doing.

Research on the program have shown that the tutor role may reflect power and status differentials which are traditionally held by the teacher(Fougner 2008). Consequently, the program instituted procedures for discussing these issues prior to the tutors' meetings with their tutees. The findings indicate that 40% of the tutees actually regard their tutors as teachers, while 60% do not. This can be understood as evidence that all tutees perceive the tutors as facilitators of important knowledge. There was near total disagreement (96,4%) expressed by the tutees with the statement saying that student tutors facilitate knowledge of little value. This clearly demonstrates that tutors have the authority of knowledge first and foremost as near-peers.

Role-playing in the presence of teachers can easily reinforce competitive attitudes of "being clever" among students hindering their curiosity and creativity. Anxiety about performing in front of the teacher can also constrain exploring attitudes. The interview data suggests that peer learning situations, with no teachers present, tend to create a more relaxed and playful atmosphere stimulating the curiosity of students. More importantly, the findings indicate that these situations help first-year students feel confident about their abilities to analyze performances and concepts in role-playing exercises. This serves as a solid base for further development of their counseling skills in the second and third year of their education.

The formation of professional identity in a transitional learning community
Tutors, it must be emphasized, have all shared important experiences of being tutees. One of them reflected:

I thought the peer tutors then were so clever and I wanted to be like them. I felt the difference between them and us was so small. The contrast consisted of their having more knowledge than us. Now I knew what was expected of me, and this gave me inspiration to create my own tutor role. Seeing and experiencing the peer tutors in action gave me ideas as to what this education would lead and that it would make a difference and bring results. (respondent E)

Owing to this kind of apprenticeship, tutors gain a fairly good grasp of how tutees think and what makes them feel insecure. Also, tutors have experienced what it is to look up to others as well as being looked up to. As former tutees they are well positioned to visualize the goals of the program. As shown in an earlier study by Fougner (2008), this supports the view of Falchikov`s (2001) about the benefits of learning between `near-peers`.

Table 6. ***The tutors make me feel that I belong to a learning community***

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Totally disagree	1	0,6	0.6	0.6
2	0	0	0	0
3	14	8.3	8.4	9.0
4	62	36.7	37.1	46.1
Totally agree	90	53.3	53.9	100.0 —
Missing system	2	1.2		
Total	169	100.0		

Here 91% of the tutees report that the tutors make them feel that they belong in the new

learning community. One representative statement from the interviews emphasizes that:

 The tutors strengthened me in my choice of profession. They convinced me that I will be able to work

with children. (F)

The following table makes clear the position of tutors as role models for the tutees:

Table 7. *The tutors are role-models to me*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Totally disagree	1	0.6	0.6	0.6
2	2	1.2	1.2	1.8
3	27	16.0	16.2	18.0
4	72	42.6	43.1	61.1
Totally agree	65	38.5	38.9	100.0 —
Missing system	2	1.2		
Total	169	100.0		

More than eighty percent of the tutees agree or totally agree that tutors are their role-models.

And the interview materials show as well that tutors provide tutees with a sense of belonging

already in their first semester. This might possibly have an effect on student retention since an

average of 80% of beginning students in the child protection faculty complete their studies.

Finally, it is significant that tutors who were interviewed in the third year of their education report that there were two motivating experiential factors for taking on the responsibilities of peer tutoring for first year students. The first of these involved their own positive experiences of having been tutees in their first year of study. More importantly, they reported that their experiences in learning counseling skills from their teachers during the second year seminar played a decisive role in their choice of volunteering to be tutors (Fougner 2008). The interaction they had experienced with teachers in the course of this seminar clearly had a positive effect: this is evidenced by the fact during the past 8 years, approximately 33 per cent of third year students volunteer to be tutors. The desire to be tutors, it should be noted, has constantly exceeded the number of places available and this has meant that lots have been drawn for the available peer tutoring positions.

Conclusion

A major goal throughout the eight years of the program's operations has been one of stimulating the development of more actively participating students. This goal has been achieved in great part by students who in collaborating have been motivated to explore and to discover knowledge and understandings of what it means to learn. The study also shows that giving more advanced students opportunities for facilitating the learning of less advanced students leads to increased feelings of freedom among beginning students in actively exploring knowledge. The context for these developments, the findings indicate, takes the form of a transitional learning community.   Here, students acquire standards for quality in knowledge while also gaining a sense of belonging to a community serving as a secure and solid basis for the gradual formation of a professional identity. The findings show that peer tutors possess

great inventiveness and creativity especially helpful in identifying the needs of their younger co-students. Moreover, the study demonstrates that the responsibility of peer tutors for their own learning process as well as those of other students is fostered through collaborative and dialogical processes.

The study also indicates that teachers need to reflect critically on their actions as helping students to become members of their new learning communities. Crucially, teachers should not underestimate the resources represented by students. The findings of the research reported here indicate that there is a need for radically questioning the authority of knowledge as it comes to expression in the traditional classroom still dominated by the paradigm of transfer of learning. Throughout its existence, the tutoring program has required teachers to change direction from a directive monitoring learning approach to a more dialogical approach fostering responsibility and trust between students and teachers. This has entailed making a paradigmatic shift from a "teacher's curriculum" to a "learner's curriculum" (Lave & Wenger 1991: 97). Initially, this has meant leaving traditional teaching activities in order to move into unexplored territory where many things become unpredictable. This move has also required teachers to relinquish much control and to trust as well as to give students much greater responsibility for their own learning. This however does not mean that peer tutoring can or should replace lecturing in higher education. A good lecture combined with group work giving room for practice and discussion is still a vital part of learning processes in higher education. The study suggests therefore that teachers could allow themselves to experiment more with their roles as collaborators and sharers of knowledge in exploratory learning projects with their students.

As the study presented here has demonstrated, peer tutoring and peer learning represent one

set of strategies that, if properly organized, may benefit students learning other subjects as well.

Similar programs working in this way may make a contribution to the changing landscape of

teaching in social work. However, further research is needed to show how teachers can

supervise and support students in tutoring positions and what implications these processes

have for the future roles of both students and teachers, for curricula of teaching versus curricula

of learning, and for the learning community as a whole.

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