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**TUTORING IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS:
AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON DEVELOPING
A DIPLOMA PROJECT AT COLLEGE LEVEL**

**TUTORING W ŚRODOWISKU AKADEMICKIM:
BADANIE EMPIRYCZNE DOTYCZĄCE OPRACOWANIA
PRACY DYPLOMOWEJ NA POZIOMIE UCZELNI**

The following article concerns the issue of tutoring and peer tutoring which can be applied across different academic settings. It presents the historical background of the methodology in English higher education, which developed in the Middle Ages, to be then subsequently used in other educational spheres in Britain and worldwide. Presently, due to a renewed interest in the individualisation of educational practices, tutoring and peer-tutoring methods are experiencing an increasing acceptance in a variety of didactic programmes and curricula. Hence, the article underlines the advantages of using the methodology and its techniques, as well as points to the numerous solutions basing on the original Oxford tutorial concept accepted in different academic environments. One such application of the tutoring model, patterned according to the Ghent University practices, was tested in the Seminar class in PSW in Biała Podlaska in the academic year 2019/20, where students were given extra hours to develop their diploma projects under an intense supervision of the tutor and peers. They were also questioned by several questionnaires to elicit their pre- and post-understanding of the methodology and the achieved results. Accordingly, the article discusses the outcomes of the scheme of applying tutorials in the academic context pointing, first of all, to their unique opportunities. It shows that participation in the project boosted the participants' self-confidence, increased their communication and cooperation skills, as well as heightened their social capacity.

Keywords: one-to-one tutoring, peer-tutoring, personalised education, feedback, academic settings

1. Introduction

Among numerous effective teaching methods and techniques that have gained prominence in recent times are tutoring and peer-tutoring. Being classified as student-centred approaches, they are said to significantly enhance the student's chances for success. They have been praised for ensuring that all students involved in a tutorial relationship, whether in a small or a large group, can develop their competences faster and deeper than in other forms of instruction since an in-depth relationship with the tutor or peers provides numerous opportunities for “developing personal, academic and professional capacities” (Lochtie *et al.*, 2018, p. i). Better competences in turn result in achieving goals in prospective careers and employment opportunities. Hence, much interest is shown in the academic world in reintroducing and reshaping the original idea of Oxford tutorials.

However, the questions that arise at that point relate to the methodology itself. Should it follow the original techniques of providing each student with additional time for discussing their work, advising them on better solutions and prompting more involvement, which is the essence of the schemes devised in Oxford? (Clark, 2001, p. 78). Or should it assimilate a range of other methods used in academies and professional workplace settings like coaching or counselling so that the teaching process automatically combines the skills acquired at universities with prospective working environment? (Brdulak, *et al.*, 2021, p. 9). To overcome these dilemmas, some insight is needed into the past and present understanding of the notions related to tutoring and peer-tutoring, as well as their present-day practical applications realised in individual one-to-one meetings, peer and group activities.

2. Tutorials in the past and at present

The original tutorials were devised in the medieval English universities in Oxford and Cambridge in 1167 and 1209 respectively. They formed the basis of the collegiate system in which students worked together in small groups providing “one-on-one support, advice and guidance, of either an academic or pastoral nature” (Dormor, 2016, p. 5). In a way, this collegial quality was the prime reason behind founding medieval colleges, which undertook the care of the young and able men in developing “their proficiency in study and good behaviour” (Brodrick, 1885, p. 321). With time, the evolving colleges formed a scholarly cooperative community with an extended and formalised dual system of communities of tutors and undergraduates working together to achieve common goals (Smith, 2001, p. 47).

From the beginning, the proper tutoring duty embraced two mutually interrelated spheres, i.e. academic and pastoral support (Lochtie *et al.*, 2018, p. 2). The first catered for popularising the qualities of independence, scholarship and pedagogical sophistication thus strengthening the evolving scholastic system, whereas the other one supplied help in choosing proper courses, overcoming difficulties and housing queries (Newman, 2014, p. 68). With time, the academic side of tutoring implemented the form of the Socratic Method, which advocated independence of thought and use of proper skills in critical thinking and problem-solving (Lochtie *et al.*, 2018, p. 2). In turn, the pastoral side developed into a fully-fledged system in which students could seek any assistance from senior members of the university concerning course changes, experienced difficulties with studies or accommodation issues (Counselling and pastoral care).

Ultimately, the system received much praise for possessing its own unique student-centred pedagogy that sparked intellects, fostered independence of thought and skills of argumentation (Burns, Sinfield, 2004, p. 225). It was no surprise then that, with a growing popularity and application, the tutorial scheme was dubbed “Oxford’s jewel in the crown” (Curzon, 1909, p.122), and despite some drawbacks and characteristic difficulties, was thought to provide the best academic instruction (Palfreyman, 2001, p. 6). Its uniqueness helped it survive the 1960s structural and financial reforms of British universities; however, due to the changes in financing schemes in higher education, the original concept of tutorials has been best limited. Presently, it is best preserved only in Oxbridge, whereas in other higher institutions in Britain, the system of personalised learning and teaching is less coherent and structured. It varies in its extent and happens to be separated for the mainstream educational courses (Lochtie *et al.*, 2018, p. 2-3). Still, the long-standing tradition of providing education by means of tutorials is definitely not endangered (Tapper, Palfreyman, 2011, p. 115).

The key principles of the original Oxbridge system include “creating space for reflection, fostering mentee confidence, fostering independence and role modelling” (Hopkins *et al.*, in Pommerening, 2021, p. 13). This is achieved by providing academic assistance that takes the form of weekly meetings, during which students are expected to talk in depth about their own ideas and opinions relating to the week’s reading or problems (The Tutorial System). Cambridge in turn provides the so called supervisions, i.e. one or two hour-long weekly meetings for which students are supposed to prepare by reading, writing essays or working on selected problems (Bonetti, 2021). Both tutorials and supervisions are obligatory and, in contrast to lectures, seminars, lab work or language classes, are run in small groups, usually of two or three students. The meetings are conducted by fellows, i.e. doctoral students, post-docs or specialists in required fields providing an intense face-to face

focus on individual learning, which helps mentees develop autonomous thinking. Students are encouraged to engage, enquire, challenge and defend arguments or rethink their positions, whereas fellows may guide them, correct and challenge opinions (Dormar, 2016, p. 7).

Concluding, tutoring/peer-tutoring has been part of the British higher educational system for centuries, making it an integral element of quality education in Oxbridge. Having evolved in a natural process of shifting needs, demands and expectations of the academic community, it has resulted in a scheme that, despite modern limitations and concerns about funding, provides a productive and rewarding experience for students as well as teachers/tutors.

3. Tutoring and peer tutoring: gains and pitfalls

Sides by side with tutoring methodology, there has developed peer-tutoring understood as an arrangement in which one student is recruited to provide one-to-one instruction to another student with explicitly assigned roles of ‘tutor’ and ‘tutee’. Usually the tutor who acts as an expert is more advanced than the novice although the gap in knowledge or skills might be minimal (Roscoe, Chi, 2007, p. 2). Such an asymmetrical relationship of ability is designed so as to help students achieve the same goal (Duran, 2010, p. 48).

There are several commonly given advantages of applying tutoring and peer tutoring as a methodology of conducting classes. These may affect students’ academic, cognitive, social or behavioural spheres, but most often involve some or all of the gains simultaneously. For example, numerous studies show better performance and increased competency in students following tutoring strategies, thus academic and cognitive benefits (Dash, Baral, Jena, 2015, p. 173; Ali, Answer, Abbas, 2015, p. 62). Greenwood, Carta and Hall (1988, p. 264) suggest social and behavioural advances visible in the enhancement of peer relations, improvements in tutee’s self-esteem and internal locus of control. Others, like Hedin (1987, p. 44), point to a more cooperative atmosphere (social benefits). Lastly, acquiring skills while peer-tutoring may transfer into one’s parenting behaviour. Students may just become better-adjusted adults one day, which is clearly a cognitive gain (Strayhorn, Strain, Walker, 1993, p. 2).

Furthermore, researchers point to mutual benefits as the methodology affects several abilities simultaneously both in tutors and tutees. For example, Ali *et al.* (2015, pp. 64-5) notice arising opportunities in which students (tutors) may utilize their knowledge and experience in novel and challenging activities in a meaningful way. They reinforce their own learning through reviewing and reformulating their

knowledge, thus gaining self-confidence in their ability to help and get positive reinforcement (Rosewal *et al.*, 1995, p. 281). Besides, by being involved in tutoring, students develop interpersonal and communication skills as well as responsibility, dedication, commitment and pride in being tutors (Ali *et al.*, 2015, p. 65). Tutees in turn get one-to-one attention and by getting swift feedback their anxiety level lowers. Their learning style becomes more participative despite the errors they make. They respond more often and do not get stressed while being corrected. All these aspects have immediate cognitive gains as they facilitate application of knowledge and skills (Dash *et al.*, 2015, p. 175; Topping, 1988, p. 4).

In short, one-to-one relationship in the learning process facilitates building trust in the tutor and the tutee. Students are less hesitant to ask questions, which has a positive impact on learners. Besides, the environment helps them accomplish work faster and get an insight into own ways of functioning as a student and a tutor (Gillespie, Lerner, 2008, p. 8). Last but not least, the method of more individualised teaching and learning provides students with a chance to interact directly with each other, with sufficient time and attention provided.

4. New models and solutions in tutoring and peer-tutoring in the 21st century

Due to new trends unfolding in educational systems pushing the boundaries of personalisation further and further, there have also appeared numerous initiatives engaging academic communities in novel teaching and learning strategies. An example could be the recent tutoring project conducted in the years 2019-2021 within *The Masters of Didactics* programme. Financed by the European Social Fund as an international collaboration between the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland and several leading Universities in Europe, including Aarhus (Denmark), Ghent (Belgium), Groningen (the Netherlands), London (Great Britain) and Oslo (Norway), the project aimed at exploring approaches to teaching and learning through tutoring activities to help academics across Poland to develop skills, enhance competences and expand the repertoire of teaching methods. Above all, it demonstrated that European universities enjoy their autonomy in designing courses and teaching styles by mixing proven methods and innovatory techniques.

And so, in Aarhus University (Denmark), tutoring is regarded as an integral part of learning and teaching. It concerns three interrelated spheres of individualised support. The first comprises advisory backing on academic and personal matters, in which the tutee is provided with information concerning university procedures and expectations, academic development and personal support (Grey and Osborne,

2020). The second one identifies tutoring as “a master-student relationship, which enhances the student’s academic, social and personal competences” (Brdulak *et al.*, 2021, p. 7). In this respect, the duality of tutelage administered at the institution reminds traditional Oxford’s mutually interrelated spheres of tutoring, i.e. academic and pastoral support (Lochtie *et al.*, 2018, p. 2). Finally, the third application of tutoring in the Danish context relates to extra-curricular tutorials offered to student beside their regular teaching programme (Brdulak *et al.*, 2021, p. 27). Within the three spheres, different teaching and learning activities are used, which however follow the same pedagogical principles. One of these concerns creating a useful feedback culture, both from the teacher/tutor to students, but also among students (peer-feedback). Another feature of the Aarhus teaching process is aligning teachers’ and students’ expectations, which may be achieved in a mutual exchange of opinions and following activities enforcing active participation. Lastly, a great emphasis is put on minimising traditional teacher-student relationship through encouraging “critical thinking and self-regulated learning” through developing “questioning and active listening techniques” (Brdulak *et al.* 2021, pp. 27-28).

Also, the University of Groningen (the Netherlands) applies its own understanding of tutoring in everyday practice of running classes and lectures. It assumes that the methodology of tutoring may comprise other concepts as well, including mentoring, counselling, coaching or supervising. The major aim of such a wide personalised education is catering for students’ needs who represent diverse backgrounds, academic competence and interests. Accordingly, tutoring can take place in numerous settings – in small groups or large ones, as well as individual arrangements. It is the duration of the tutor-tutee contact and the nature of mutual cooperation that clearly distinguishes typical tutoring from other types of personalised support and career development practices (Brdulak *et al.*, 2021, p. 9).

Finally, the Ghent University assumes that tutoring may take place in different arrangements - one-to-one classes, small groups or large groups. Such meetings are referred to as ‘tutorials’, and their distinctive feature is a regular and personalised contact with the tutor during which a selected topic is discussed in detail and individual feedback granted. In general, teachers are recognised as experts in their own fields, designers of both the process and educational contents of own courses, group process managers, educational technologists and many more (Gilis *et al.*, (2008). Furthermore, the Ghent programme puts much stress on the tutor’s competences, which involve three main categories – (meta)cognitive, i.e. stimulating students by asking effective questions or providing feedback and insisting on reflection; socio-communicative – building a supportive learning environment by applying verbal and non-verbal communication skills; and organisational competences involving,

for example, an ability to encourage the student to participate in the learning process or managing collaboration and mutual interactions in class (Brdulak *et al.*, 2021: 8).

In short, the competency model forwarded by the Ghent University closely pertains to any academic activity undertaken by the tutor/mentor in six interrelated areas of competence. These include competence in one or more scientific disciplines, scientific competence, intellectual competence, competence in cooperation and communication, social competence and, last but not least, strictly professional competencies. The University applies its competency model in almost all its faculties so that all programmes designed at the institution align with the model's requirements. In a way, its existence simplifies the description of the University's offer and makes external auditing more effective (Brdulak *et al.*, 2021. pp. 31-32).

Concluding, it may be said that, irrespective of the university and its model of teaching, the understanding of tutoring and peer-tutoring draws on the traditional concept that evolved in England, and then Britain, and concerns the relationship between the tutor/mentor and the tutee lasting over some time. Other elements added to tutorials or supervisions like counselling, coaching or mentoring result from the specifics of the educational context in a particular academia, its needs and concerns.

5. The study

5.1. The aim of the study

The following study concerns part of the *Masters of Didactics* project (Mistrzowie dydaktyki), which involved four students at the *Diploma seminar* course in Pope John Paul II School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska in the academic year 2019/2020, and covered two semesters starting from 01.10.2019 till 30.06.2020. By being involved in the scheme, each student received twenty five hours of tutorials in the form of personalised sessions with the tutor. As such a form of working is rarely available in Polish higher education institutions, the objective of its partial implementation was to elicit the academics' and the students' opinions on the practice. The whole scheme objective was, on the one hand, to introduce Polish teachers to the solutions offered at foreign educational centres with an aim of ensuring more personalised teaching, and, on the other hand, to grant selected students better educational conditions by being awarded extra tutoring time with teachers/tutors.

In turn, students who joined the project, apart from receiving additional one-to-one tutoring hours during which they could develop their intellectual and scientific competence in a chosen scientific field, were also involved in several other tutoring

activities like peer-tutoring or peer-collaboration in text correction and editing, the purpose of which was to enhance their competence in formal writing, reinforce mutual cooperation and communication as well as advance social competence. The tutoring hours were to respond to the students' individual interests by enabling them to spend more time on discussing the selected materials in depth, examining critical points and arguments to be included in their diploma projects as well as engaging in dialogues with the tutor. Individual consultation does take place in any seminar class; however, the teacher can grant some limited time to each student. In this light, twenty five hours of individual contact was indeed a significant qualitative change in the student-teacher interaction. The objective of successive tutoring class activities was to cater for the students' social deficiencies and weaknesses by enforcing more active participation and collaboration in class design and execution.

To design tutoring practices and activities in her class, the tutor chose the Ghent competency model to implement in her class, as it comprises all the necessary elements one needs to be aware of while working with students on their individualised projects. In short, the model forwarded by the Ghent University involves six interrelated areas of competence which closely pertain to any academic activity undertaken by the seminar mentor. These include competence in one or more scientific disciplines, scientific competence, intellectual competence, competence in cooperation and communication, social competence and, last but not least, strictly professional competencies.

5.2. Participants and materials

In line with the *Masters of Didactics* project requirements on student recruitment, the student-participants were supposed to be selected mainly from the group of outstanding students to enable them reaching higher academic goals going beyond the level of regular demands. The other conditions stressed the same or similar academic interests with their teacher-tutor, which was to soothe their mutual cooperation, and the students' willingness to be involved in the project expressed by their own decision to join. There were five persons who expressed interest in getting recruited to the project in the *Diploma Seminar* class. Those willing were then asked to justify their decision of being engaged by writing motivation letters. After the procedural qualifications involving checking the average grades and discussing initial proposals of diploma papers, four students were recruited to one-to-one personalised teaching – three women and one man, aged 22 (3 students) and 24 – one student. In practice, 25 additional hours meant for each student were to be spent with the teacher-tutor beside regular hours in the *Seminar* course. The four selected participants could all boast good average mark, and what drew them

to the project was the desire to try out a different method and, first of all, experience more personalised contact with the tutor. Afterwards, the students filled in all the necessary forms and set up a plan of individual meetings with the tutor.

At the beginning of the course, the students were given *The Background Factors Questionnaire – Masters of Didactics*, which was to elicit basic data concerning the students' self-perception, and competences. The recruited subjects turned out to be quite uniform towards their attitudes on studying, writing and their self-perception as users of English. The questionnaire showed that most of them (student A, C and D) enjoyed studying foreign languages, thought English to be 'fun' to learn (student A, B and D), regarded the language as necessary in the modern world in visiting other countries (student B) and absolutely necessary in the modern world (all students). Accordingly, their motivations were both integrative and instrumental. Besides, two students regarded themselves as strong in their ability of using English (student A and C) and the other two as medium (students B and D). However, when asked about doing additional work, they would not express much enthusiasm for searching for their new tasks. They would rather rely on the teacher's choice of extra activities and assignments, which would suggest their traditional perception of student/teacher roles in the teaching process.

As for language skills, all students regarded writing as an essential skill. Two of them (student A and B) thought it to be very important and the remaining ones (student C and D) - to be important. Interestingly, the ones who regarded writing as extremely essential, when asked about the most problematic skill, ranked writing as 'very problematic'. Students A and B in turn thought writing to be 'problematic to some extent' and 'the least problematic' respectively. Also, all students expressed their wish to enhance their language skills as they were not satisfied with their current achievement and were hopeful for 'more' progress. However, irrespective of how the students responded to the questions, it seems that they understood the importance of language skills, and writing in particular, which boded well for the seminar work as most of it caters for individual projects.

There was one more questionnaire administered at the beginning of the project – *Student beliefs questionnaire: Learning to write in a foreign language, peer collaboration and tutoring*. Its aim, apart from gathering data on students' self-evaluation of own skills, attitudes towards the English language and its elements as well as ways of working on writing tasks, was to collect information on the students' former experience with pair-work, assessment of others' work or providing feedback to peers. Some of the answers, especially the ones concerning peer tutoring/collaboration, were worth paying attention to as they helped the tutor to understand the outcomes of the project and the final responses made by the students.

5.3. Methodology and tools of data collection

The project used several tools to gather the necessary data on tutoring and peer-tutoring in the *Diploma Seminar*. These include pre- and post-course questionnaires based on Oxford's (1990) methodology and modified in some aspects to suit the local settings of the study. As indicated above, the pre-course survey, entitled *Background factors questionnaire – Masters of Didactics*, aimed at collecting general information on the project participants. Once the classes started, the students were asked to complete the *Student beliefs questionnaire (Learning to write in a foreign language, peer collaboration and tutoring)*. The aim of the questionnaire was to check whether they were familiar with tutoring and peer-collaboration, how much they understood of the methodological assumptions of tutoring and whether they had been involved in this kind of work earlier. Lastly, the *Tutoring experience survey* was implemented on the completion of the *Diploma Seminar*, in which the students would reflect on the experiences with tutoring and peer-tutoring activities and their efficiency.

Furthermore, the written questionnaires were supplemented with semi-structured oral interview surveys and unstructured interviews conducted by the teacher with individual students during tutorials, which provided the tutor with the tutees' deeper reflections and insights into the work carried out at different stages of the project. The individual contact with each of the tutee and the additional time allowed for getting to know each other better as well as understanding students' individual dilemmas, aspirations and educational attainment.

5.4. Tutoring phases procedures

The study was conducted in the *Diploma Seminar* and involved three major forms characteristic of tutoring and peer-tutoring. The first one, tutorials, understood as personalised learning sessions, involved one-to-one meetings with the teacher/tutor, the basis of which was conversation, stimulation and reflection. The aim of the individual sessions was to develop students' intellectual and scientific competence by spending additional hours on the topic, more in-depth analysis of the material chosen by the student and the tutor and fruitful exchange of arguments. Such work is also typical of any seminar class but its amount is limited. Accordingly, the meetings were in line with the so called Oxford University tutorials and their policy that fosters increased concentration on the student's topic, dual scrutiny of the selected materials to assess their usefulness, and finally provision of feedback concerning the work (Tapper, Palfreyman, 2011, pp. 103-104).

In addition to regular tutorials, students were involved in mutual peer-correction activities and editing of parts of their written texts. The basis of this activity was an exemplary correction done in class by the teacher during which students were provided with the criteria concerning checking and editing academic texts. These concerned first of all a) formal writing style (e.g. characteristic phrases found in scientific texts, avoidance of emotional and personal language or using cautious and tentative language, etc.) b) clarity of argumentation expressed in systematic introduction of points, and c) value of the arguments provided - the content of the text. Some additional remarks concerning the technical side of the work like editing mistakes and errors were also welcome. All these aspects were to alert students to discern major problems while being involved in text correction and prepare them for peer-correction tasks.

Finally, the students were presented with elements of successful presentation involving, for example, providing clear objectives before getting to the subject matter, presenting clearly featured content, including as little text as possible, or giving the speech in a well-rehearsed manner (Levrai, Bolster, 2016). Again, after an exemplary assessment of the first student presenting the chosen aspect of the topic done by the teacher, the students were supposed to provide both positive and negative comments on the successive presentations and their elements.

5.5. Results and findings

5.5.1. Group findings

The findings gathered in the questionnaire entitled *The student beliefs questionnaire (Learning to write in a foreign language, peer collaboration and tutoring)*, given in October 2019, comprised several interesting answers. It is the ones concerning peer tutoring/ collaboration that were especially worth paying attention to. They helped the tutor understand how the students approached tutoring innovations at the beginning of the course and how their attitudes altered several months later. The final responses made by the students in the *Tutoring experience survey* showed how they modified their opinions on the implemented methodology and what gains of the applied procedures/techniques they pointed to after the completion of the project. And so, when asked in October whether ‘it is important to practice a lot if one wishes to develop writing competence’, the students unanimously provided an affirmative response. There was also an agreement on the suggestion that making errors in writing assignments does not mean a hindered development of formal writing skills. All students disagreed with the opinion (A, C, D – ‘strongly disagree’ and B – ‘disagree’). However, when it comes to the questions concerning pair-work, trusting and relying on peers, the answers were more diversified or even

contradictory to one another. Two students admitted that they felt ‘timid when other people (peers) read their English assignments and critically comment on them’, i.e. by identifying mistakes or providing remarks on the content (student A and C). Out of the remaining two, one felt very intimidated by such a working style (student D) and one did not mind it at all (student B). As for the benefit of evaluation and feedback given by peers, two students ‘trusted their judgements’ (student C and D), one did not (B) and another one ‘neither agreed or disagreed’ with the opinion (student A). Finally, when asked about whether they enjoyed ‘reading peers’ writing assignments, correcting them and providing feedback, three students turned out indecisive about the activity marking ‘neither agree or disagree’ (B, C and D) and one provided an affirmative answer (student A).

The answers provided by the students might indicate that they were familiar with pair-work and experienced it in the former writing classes but were not convinced about the effectiveness of this working style. Their attitude to such an arrangement was confirmed by two other questions concerning developing writing skills. When asked whether ‘it is best to develop writing skills with a peer/peers’ for advanced English learners, two students ‘disagreed’ (student B and D), one marked ‘agree’ (C) and the remaining one ‘neither agree nor disagree’ (student A). Also, the responses to the point indicating that ‘it is best to develop writing skills on a one-to-one basis with an individual tutor’, showed that the students put more trust in their teacher. All four subjects marked the answer – ‘strongly agree’. Accordingly, the responses gathered in the second questionnaire seemed to indicate that the traditional working arrangement with the teacher/tutor taking most responsibility for the work done in class was valued more by the participants of the project than alternative solutions.

At the end of the academic year, the students who participated in one-to-one tutorials filled in the third questionnaire entitled *Tutoring experience survey*, which enclosed questions concerning their tutoring experience and the gains of being involved in the project. Their reflections on their participation in tutoring and peer-tutoring/peer collaboration activities enabled preparing four case studies, which in Karpínska and Panońko’s (2018, pp. 25-26) understanding, go well with the modern evaluation of the effects of educators’ activities and their effectiveness. Involving participants of educational events in constant reflection on oneself and others’ work fits the current assessment ways and measurement of educational processes. Being qualitative in their nature, reflection and self-evaluation seem close to the fluidity of the tutorial process. Furthermore, the students’ observations contributed to enhancing the teaching and learning styles of the class, as well as provided the teacher/tutor with valuable insights into her academic work.

Also, the activities run in class, like providing positive and negative comments on other students' presentations turned out to be beneficial for students. Although timid at first, with time the subjects got more confident and perceptive and their observations became more professional. Besides, developing assessment abilities in students, the activity positively influenced their reflection and evaluation skills, which profited their own conceptual work and writing process.

5.5.2. Individual findings

Student A

Student A was the first to apply to the project after it was announced. Her positive attitude probably stemmed from her open personality, good academic ability and desire to try out something new during the course that, without doubt, was not going to cause her any difficulty. At the first few meetings, the major work done during the tutorials concentrated on discussing books, articles and materials which the teacher selected for the student. With time, the roles reversed as it was the student who would come forward with encountered texts worthy of scrutinising. Accordingly, most of the time during the meetings was spent on analysing useful information and data in the materials, as well as the ways and the order of incorporating them in the text. It was evident from the very beginning that the student could manage the diploma project on her own without much help from the teacher. Still, the meetings helped her enhance the conceptual part of the diploma project by developing convincing argumentation.

Hence, it may be said that the student used the meetings to go deeper into some chosen aspects of her work or dispel doubts concerning some problematic issues. Occasionally, her inquisitive mind would lead her to denounce the formerly agreed-on issues, only to acknowledge later that the distrust was unnecessary. The final result turned out to be successful as the project was considered the best in the group, which did not come as a surprise. However, as both the supervisor and the reviewer of the project noticed, the student's work was well above the average expected of undergraduates in terms of its content and language. Accordingly, less time was devoted to editing and correcting the text as the student was a good writer. Also the initial problems with the application of formal requirements concerning the quality of the edited text soon gave way to undisturbed own work.

On graduating, the student had the following observations concerning tutoring and peer-tutoring. When asked about her experiences as a tutee in one-to-one tutorials and the benefits of such participation, she came forward with several reflections. First of all, the student commented on her interpersonal skills.

She observed 'general improvement' in confidence, which related to conducting conversations, asking questions, sharing doubts and beliefs in her own work. The other remark concerned academic skills. The student developed her writing know-how in using academic language, more sophisticated lexicon and grammar structures. Furthermore, she noticed 'gains in terms of style and content organisation', which made her a better writer. Noticing and correcting mistakes become easier and editing the diploma project just a 'regular' task, not more difficult than other assignments. Lastly, the student saw the tutorials as 'an opportunity', the time when she could talk about her writing both in terms of contents, grammar and style. Besides, she viewed such personal conversations as more valuable than written feedback remarks. The student did not refer to her academic development directly but all the above remarks concerning increased competence in discussing own text, sharing beliefs and doubts on the work's content prove straightforwardly that this was the case.

Also, the benefits of participating in peer-tutoring/peer collaboration tasks would appear greater than expected. The student felt good that she could help others improve their work. At the same time, as she remarked, noticing somebody's mistakes and errors made her a better writer because it became easier for her to eliminate own inaccuracies and blunders. Such an activity, when run on a regular basis, strengthens one's editing skills, grammar and style intuitions. Another personal gain was an enhanced understanding of the teaching process. The student realised that correcting mistakes was 'an important part of a teacher's work' and she understood how much time it took to analyse someone's piece of writing. Hopefully, such experiences and reflections will affect the student's postgraduate or maybe doctorate work positively.

Student B

Student B was an extremely bright student, full of ideas and ambitions. In a way, most of her activities remained outside the regular educational course at the University. She would play in a music band and spend much time with friends. It seemed that classes were an addition to her otherwise rich social and cultural life. However, being creative and hardworking, she would not lag behind with her work and ranked high in the upper band of the group.

The student's experiences as a tutee in one-to-one tutorials were positive. First of all, individual work with the tutor 'contributed greatly' to her personal development. As personalised work is more effective than the seminal group work, she thought that she did not waste time discussing all aspects of the seminar work but focused on her needs and her topic. Such an arrangement, as she noticed, brought much self-improvement, inspiration and motivation. Besides individual work resulted in several gains in developing her writing skills that affected positively numerous aspects of the work such as style and register; content organization,

coherence and cohesion; grammar; vocabulary; punctuation and spelling. Besides these technical elements, the student appreciated this kind of work as it had a positive influence on her confidence as a writer. Conversations concerning scientific theories and matters broadened her horizons and, as she concluded, ‘working with a mentor was an inspiration and motivation for me’. It helped her to develop not only writing skills but also communication skills and logical thinking. It made her ‘understand a lot’. It was ‘an experience I will never forget’.

Peer-tutoring/peer collaboration brought numerous benefits as well. What the student valued most were different opinions and ideas, which could ‘give a broader picture of the world’. Besides, the questions asked in class allowed the student to look at some matters from a different perspective. As she noticed, she herself would never ask some questions and yet they proved useful in the overall seminar work. An additional contact between students became a source of happiness and mutual collaboration in solving problems, and developed her communication and language skills. The last argument provided by the student seems crucial as she remarked on some weaknesses in her speaking ability in the pre-course questionnaire. Speaking always appeared the most difficult skill for her and she was pleased that the individualised work arrangement in class made up for some of her deficiencies in that respect.

Generally, the student seemed pleased with her tutoring/peer-tutoring experience. As she remarked, she achieved her goal of writing a diploma paper, learned many interesting aspects connected with writing, editing or arranging arguments. She valued the opportunity of working with ‘interesting people with all kinds of ideas’, of whom she would have fond memories. There were however some drawbacks of the students working together either in pairs or small groups. As she noticed, some persons regarded some tasks as too ‘obvious and easy’. The student herself would also experience such a situation. The problems she had seemed straightforward to others. Still, as she commented, ‘that’s what group work is all about’. For the tutor, such a case is a good indication that the tutoring process must be well supervised and the students must be reminded of their duties as peer-tutors.

Student C

Student C was a hard-working person with a good average in her undergraduate courses. She was drawn to the project because of its major assumption, i.e. an additional hour of one-to-one work with the tutor as well as an opportunity to develop her interests to a greater extent. As the student, she was a reliable person - punctual, active in class and conscientious. The only problem with the subject was her health condition, which made her skip many classes. When asked about the

benefits of being in the project, the student pointed to developmental and personal gains, like better coping with stress, managing time properly and improving her attitude towards younger students (student C was two years older than the others). Enhancing own self-confidence and general self-improvement were the next on the list. Among the academic benefits, the student mentioned broadening her vocabulary related to academic jargon, developing writing skills and improving work in terms of content, coherence and cohesion, vocabulary etc. As she remarked, she 'learnt to write faster and more securely than before'. Making fewer mistakes and producing a smoother text was the obvious outcome of the process.

As far as social benefits are concerned, the student mentioned acquiring additional interpersonal skills that improved her ability to work in the group. She became more patient and sympathetic towards others as well as a better listener. By working with other students, the subject learnt how to evaluate others' work and how 'to do it correctly and not mislead others through her own shortcomings'. Besides, she opened up to asking questions and asking for help as well. In short, her ability to assess her own work and the work of other students increased, giving her more self-confidence as a writer and peer-tutor. As she noted, her attitude towards her own work improved, which meant 'less uncertainty whether [she] could write'. Finally, it is worth mentioning organisational skills. Better time management; that is using time more effectively, meant stopping the process of wasting her own time and energy resources. This in turn enhanced the student's productivity in individual work and in the group. Overall, she valued the experience as she could use it at home while catering for her younger sister.

The final remarks made by student C concerned her weaknesses. She became more conscious of them but, at the same time, found some ways how to eliminate them. For example, work with other students made her realise that she was not the only person who was stressed about checking someone's tasks and that she was not the only one who had problems with the activity. Hence, the experience helped her to plan the work, apply the criteria methodically and come forward with better understanding of other students' work and her ability to evaluate it properly.

Student D

The student was an interesting case in the project as he regarded studying English philology as one of his major involvements. He enjoyed studying the language but not necessarily in a methodical way. Being curious about different aspect of cultural and social life like music, films, games and IT technology, he eagerly joined different projects and tasks. Still, he managed to go through the University in an untroubled way due to his talents and flair. However, as a participant of the

project, he was not always diligent and his responses to the questions were not always precise, sometimes lacking concrete specifics, which makes discussing his case more difficult.

Starting with interpersonal skills, student D gave seemingly mutually exclusive response. On the one hand, he admitted that a closed cooperation with other persons opened him up to people. However, right afterwards he underlined his preference to work alone, as ‘it somewhat makes [him] calmer and does not block [him] with the progress’. This should not come as a surprise, as he called himself ‘an ambivert’. Remarking on his academic gains, the student pointed to the development of his writing skills, which was visible in more ‘stabilised work’ with regard to both ‘tempo and gathering information’, its analysis as well as enhanced attention to encountered works and ideas. Likewise, the skills connected with the content organisation, cohesion and coherence of text, its grammar and style improved, which positively affected his writing and working style.

Quite a few answers were not very specific, which made the student’s assessment of the project difficult to analyse. For example, when asked whether he gained form the experience of participating in the project and in what respect, the student did not provide any precise answer. He indicated that the experience might benefit him in the future although he could not clearly specify in what way. Definitely, his experience with the use of formal language, scrutiny of encountered materials, application of the methodology of analysing data and providing conclusions on their basis improved his understanding of the scholarly world. As he admitted, he might read more academic texts in future for entertainment purposes to widen opinions and ideas about different matters. Also, when asked about the collaboration experience with other peers, he pointed to a good feeling of ‘being welcome’ although his relationships with people remained neutral.

6. Conclusions

The study presented in the article has its limitations since the subjects recruited to take part in the tutoring project were English Philology students doing their regular *Diploma Seminar* course in PSW in Biała Podlaska. Therefore, the obtained results are not representative of different higher education institutions or fields of study. What is more, due to the nature of the project itself, the number of students involved in this research was too small to permit any generalizations of the results. Hence, a larger-scale study with more participants, both teachers and students, seems recommendable with a view to further research in the area. Still, the initiative sheds

light on multiple aspects of one-to-one tutoring and peer collaboration in academic settings.

First and foremost, it must be stressed that having finished the project, both the tutor and the tutees shared a feeling of participating in something special. Everyone had an impression that they had experienced a kind of memorable adventure. Having enough time to work on own texts, talk to the tutor, discuss relevant issues, exchange views and experiences with the teacher as well as coparticipants resulted not only in a quiet, undisturbed course of individual work but also in fruitful and satisfying long-term collaboration among the tutees, leading to numerous beneficial outcomes of the year-long project. The fact that only four students participated in all the tutoring activities offered during the *Diploma Seminar* classes does not diminish the significance of the opportunities enjoyed by those who took them. The gains enumerated by the students, including first of all greater scientific, intellectual and professional competences, enhanced social collaboration and communication skills, were in the students' as well as the tutor's opinion worthy of the additional effort and time. Above all, both the tutor and her subjects enjoyed the augmented educational programme wishing it could become real for more students and academics.

The chosen tutoring model, prepared by the Ghent University, turned out to be a good inspiration for the presented study as it puts "active learning" at the centre of the educational process (Brdulak 2021, p. 29). The six interrelated areas of competence that it forwards catered for all aspects of work done at the Diploma Seminar with the selected undergraduates as well as allowed for a complete development of the students. Gaining competence in one or more scientific disciplines that enables an effective use of expert knowledge, reinforced by scientific competence of employing the proper methodology and finally enhanced cognitive ability of solving problems or analysing results met all the required criteria of successful seminar work. When one adds to the participants' boosted self-confidence, increased communication and cooperation skills as well as heightened social capacity, the gains of using the model become obvious. In short, it seems to offer both the tutor and the tutee a holistic and integrated approach to teaching and learning which stands for what getting and using knowledge really involves.

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