

Peer tutoring: strategies for improving literacy



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Kellyville High School, describes the implementation of the program and subsequent opportunities for collaboration and the use of digital storytelling to enhance student learning.

Peer tutoring at Kellyville High School

The peer tutoring model for learning has been successfully implemented as various initiatives in schools and tertiary institutions. The *Peer Tutor Program* (Figure 1), introduced to Kellyville High School several years ago, is implemented as part of the whole school literacy program. Each year, approximately twenty student volunteers from Year 10 act as tutors on a one to one basis for Year 7 students who are identified as having a low reading age. The peer tutoring literacy program has been so successful at Kellyville, that the mathematics faculty have developed an in-house peer numeracy program this year, based on the same principles, but using Year 8 tutees.

TAFE qualification for tutors

Peer tutors may enrol in TAFE and gain a certificate in Literacy Volunteer Tutoring (Schools) Theory and Fieldwork. Accreditation requires

- participation in a number of theory modules offered by TAFE
- completion of 29 hours fieldwork, undertaken during roll call throughout the year
- completion of weekly assessment tasks.



Figure 1 The Peer Tutor Program description and resource materials are available at www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/middleyears/students/

Reading resources

Year 7 students work with their Year 10 tutors to develop reading fluency, comprehension, practice spelling and improve vocabulary. The reading material required for the peer tutoring program is authentic text. Authentic text is the actual material that the students will encounter in class. This includes worksheets, assignment tasks, books, electronic resources, readings, and textbook references (Figure 2). When students encounter the text later in class, they are familiar with the vocabulary and content and encounter fewer literacy problems. This enables them to have more success engaging with the class work. Obtaining, scanning, photocopying or adapting the reading material requires planning so that resources are ready for use during roll call, with one item for each peer tutoring pair of students. All reproduction of materials complies with copyright requirements.

Collaboration

Opportunities for collaboration with members of staff arise on a regular basis when preparing the reading resources for peer tutoring sessions. Selecting authentic texts requires



Figure 2 Students familiarise themselves with the diverse range of materials that they will use in class

meeting with colleagues to discuss upcoming topics in all KLA's for Year 7 students. Liaising with staff provides a good overview of the Year 7 curriculum and where cooperative planning and programming may occur for library and resource based units of work. Additionally, this communication helps to identify any areas of the collection which may need to be developed. Collaboration does not involve just the work for students in the peer tutoring program. Take the opportunity as a time when discussion may also occur about work for the teacher's other classes for potential resource based units of work taught in collaboration with the teacher librarian in the library.

Extension and diversity

Students require a variety of reading tasks. Just as class lessons need to be varied, the peer tutoring sessions need to have diversity, with different reading activities to maintain student engagement. Additional reading materials are prepared for students who finish their set text, for the more able readers, to cater for varied learning styles and for a change from the same routine for the entire year. Some literacy-based activities developed around the authentic text include:

- worksheets to match the word, shape or picture with the definition
- crosswords with key terminology from their current topic using *Crossword wizard*
- vocabulary bingo (although time consuming to make word bingo cards, again using terminology from their topic, students have enjoyed the activity where the clues are varied and the game may be used again in future years)
- counters with letters on to make words, practise spelling and play word games (particularly appealing to the kinaesthetic learners)
- laminated paragraphs from a page of text for students to re-assemble the text. This is good for getting tutors to frame questions for their students to examine text cues.

CarbonKids

Last year, Kellyville High School was selected as a pilot school to implement and evaluate the Australia-wide CSIRO developed *CarbonKids* program materials. For peer tutoring, the curriculum materials were adapted as interactive literacy based activities focusing on living sustainably.

Digital story telling

Attending the School Libraries and Information Literacy's one day workshop, *Teacher librarians supporting connected learning*, provided inspiration and ideas for even further opportunities for collaboration and



Figure 3 A University of Western Sydney student prepares a collaborative story with My storymaker at the start of the writing activity

literacy development. University of Western Sydney students are doing tuition in our school for their professional experience component of their Masters course. Some interested students were approached and they

As well as participating in a demonstration presented to the whole class, each peer pair was given a laminated sheet, prepared with step-by-step instructions for how to use *My storymaker* on one side and the structure and scaffold guide for narrative text type on the other (Figure 4). Students were also to work on using punctuation such as exclamation marks and apostrophes.

My storymaker was a wonderful interactive story creation tool to use during roll call as results may be achieved in this short time. Students were so involved in their story writing (Figure 5). Some even came in their own time to write – quite something

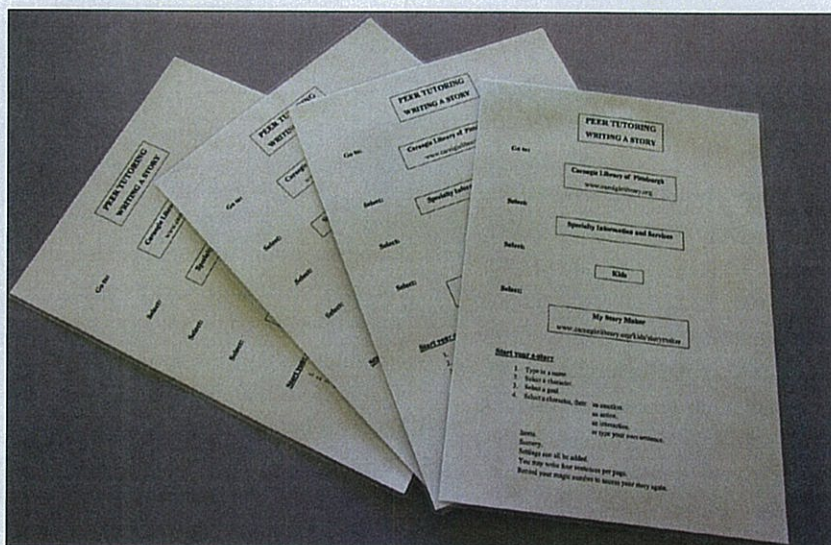


Figure 4 Instruction sheets for My storymaker for each pair of peer tutoring students



Figure 5 Students are involved in story writing and can achieve a great deal in a relatively short time

were happy to be involved in these peer tutoring sessions. They used the IWB to demonstrate the features of the *My storymaker* software and then collaborated with the group to write a story (Figure 3).

for readers and writers who usually need assistance! Evaluation comments were all positive and both tutors and tutees really enjoyed the experience. Students' comments included:

It was fun and different!

I liked it because all the little figures were cool and I want to do it again.

I liked the animals and people and how they interacted. I didn't like how they didn't have names.

We created a digital story. It was fun to play around with, although we didn't have enough time to complete the story.

There was a limited choice of characters, emotions and settings.

I liked that your story could come to life and you could change the items and backgrounds.

I liked that it was different to reading for a change, creative and fun.

When the Year 10 tutors leave at the end of the year, the peer tutoring time will allow Year 7 student to spend more time on digital storytelling. Students will be shown the *Storybird*

site as well. This digital authoring tool will be used as well so that the students are able to edit their stories over a number of sessions.

Now, to get them back to reading authentic text! ■

[Editor's note: Check *Technology tips* <www.schools.nsw.edu.au/raps/fearless10/technopage.htm> for models of and instructions for using digital authoring tools. *Teachers' digital toolkit* in *Links4Learning* in *My library* has a great selection of online tools for resource creation.]

References and further reading

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- Storybird: a collaborative storytelling for families and friends*, Storybird, Ontario, <storybird.com>. SCIS 1435726