

**‘CONVERSATIONS’ WITH POSTGRADUATE WRITERS
UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE PEER TUTOR**

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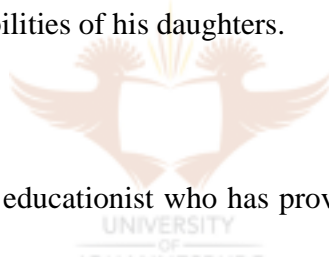
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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all who over the years have believed in my abilities even though it has taken a long while for those to emerge:

My late father, George William Dowse, a quiet, dependable, upright man who saw strength of the family unit, and believed in the abilities of his daughters.



My mother, Joyce Dowse, a true educationist who has proved to be a role model not only to her daughters and grandchildren but to all the pupils she has taught over the years.

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ABSTRACT

With transformation in higher education institutions in South Africa, writing centres were established in the early 1990s to cater for the diverse educational, social and cultural needs of students. Transformation and the call for teachers to become lifelong learners, has motivated many mature professionals to enter postgraduate study. The Faculty of Education's Postgraduate Writing Support Centre at the University of Johannesburg was established in 2002 to offer writing support to such students. Through a multi-faceted case study, this paper explores the importance of collaborative conversations within a community of student writers in constructing knowledge. It seeks through the narrative of three different tutoring contexts, to understand the role of the peer tutor in facilitating these conversations with postgraduates in support of their writing. The findings of this study suggest to faculty that a tutor training programme needs to be developed to ensure effective and successful writing support, and in addition the postgraduate programme should be reviewed to incorporate support and continued supervision through all stages of study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
CHAPTER 1 : OVERVIEW	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Research Problem	4
1.3 Context	5
1.3.1 Participants	5
1.4 Research Aims and Objectives	6
1.5 Rationale	6
1.6 Research Design	6
1.7 The Structure of the Research Paper	9
1.8 Ethical Statement	10
1.9 Validity	11
1.10 Reliability	11
1.11 Conclusion	11
CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	12
2.1 THE ROLE OF THE PEER TUTOR : Conversations within a community	12
2.2 THE PEDAGOGY OF PEER TUTORING : Collaboration and the construction of knowledge	16
2.2.1 The process of tutoring	18
2.2.2 Goals, effects and benefits of peer tutoring	20
2.3 MODELS OF PEER TUTORING : Conversations and collaborative learning	22
2.3.1 The Process of Writing : collaboration in constructing knowledge	28
2.4 THE TRAINING OF PEER TUTORS	30
2.4.1 Reflective Practice	36



2.5	CONCLUSION	37
CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN		39
3.1	INTRODUCTION	39
3.2	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	40
3.2.1	The Role of the Researcher	40
3.3	THE CASE STUDY	41
3.3.1	Case study boundaries	42
3.4	DATA COLLECTION TOOLS	42
3.5.1	Observation	42
3.5.2	Questionnaires	44
3.5.3	Interviews	45
3.5.4	Document Analysis	47
3.6	'THE CASE'	47
3.6.1	The participants	48
3.6.2	One-on-one sessions	48
3.6.3	Group workshop	51
3.6.3	Online Tutoring	52
3.7	CONCLUSION	55
CHAPTER 4 : DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS		56
4.1	INTRODUCTION	56
4.2	DATA ANALYSIS	56
4.3	ANALYSIS OF 'THE CASE'	59
4.3.1	A description of one-on-one tutoring sessions with analysis of the data	59
4.3.2	A description of the research proposal workshop	63
4.3.3	A description of online tutoring	76
4.4	THEMES EMERGING FROM THE DATA	81
4.4.1	Developing and experiencing a community	83
4.4.2	Conversations with members of the community	85



4.4.3	Collaboration within the community to construct knowledge	86
4.4.4	Social Constructivism in the process of writing	88
4.4.5	The feminist approach	91
4.4.6	Concluding remarks	92
4.5	VALIDITY, RELIABILITY AND TRIANGUALTION	92
4.6	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	95
4.7	CONCLUSION	95
 CHAPTER 5: SYNTHESIS OF EVIDENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS		 97
5.1	INTRODUCTION	97
5.2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK vs FINDINGS	97
5.2.1	The disjuncture	98
5.2	SUMMING UP AND RECOMMENDATIONS	103
5.2.1	Tutor Training	103
5.2.2	Postgraduate programme	103
5.2.3	ESL Students	105
5.4	AN OVERVIEW	105
5.5	CONCLUDING REMARKS	107
 LIST OF REFERENCES		 108
 APPENDICES		
	Appendix A Consent of Participation	115
	Appendix B : Student visit record sheet	116
	Appendix C : Tutoring questionnaire	118
	Appendix D : Letter of permission to Director	120
	Appendix E : Letter of permission to Tutor	121
	Appendix F : Interview questions	122
	Appendix G : Outline of Research Paper	123
	Appendix H : Proposal template	124



Appendix I : Pre workshop questionnaires	127
Appendix J : Post workshop questionnaires	129
Appendix K : Interview transcripts	141
Appendix L : Ethical Clearance Number 053 19/09/05	153

FIGURES

2.1	The iterative process of writing	29
3.1	Iterative research design	40



'CONVERSATIONS' WITH POSTGRADUATE WRITERS

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE PEER TUTOR

CHAPTER 1 : AN OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Peer tutoring, as collaboration between tutor and writer, was introduced, largely at undergraduate level, in the United States of America (USA) to address a perceived need to develop academic writing, a discourse to which students had difficulty adapting when entering higher education, as they resisted conventional help given by lecturers (Bruffee in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:206-207). This process of collaborative learning, indirectly driven by the lecturer's expertise, leads the peer tutor and writer to "converse" with the writer, bringing the "conversation of knowledge" to this collaborative table and the peer tutor, the "conversation of the conventions of discourse" (Bruffee in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:210-213). In many universities in the USA, peer tutors are identified as either "good" students, with an ability to write, or are chosen from volunteers (Gillespie, 2002:111.3.2). In neither case are tutors just selected and then thrown "into the deep end" with little or no guidance. Bruffee (in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:216) argues that peer tutors need to undergo an effective training course which develops in them the ability not only to cope with the demands of academic discourse but which also enhances their own academic development (Bruffee in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:216).

Within the South African context, writing centres were established in the early 1990s to cater for the diverse educational, social and cultural needs of the students who make up "the mosaic peculiar to the new South Africa" (Johnston in Goodlab, 1995:67). Peer tutors, with no formalized accredited peer tutoring programme offered at tertiary level, have since established varying relationships with other lecturers and tutors, either within a specific faculty or acting for all faculties. Working as a peer tutor in the Postgraduate Writing Support Centre in the Faculty of Education of the University of Johannesburg, having not been trained in "a coherent course of study" (Bruffee in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:216), I have been motivated to inquire into what constitutes the role of the peer tutor in a writing centre, the debates surrounding this role and,

consequently, the effect that the peer tutor has on the development of conversations of knowledge. Therefore, this research will initially investigate the role of peer tutors in general, and will draw on current research both in South Africa and globally.

Many issues, however, are raised by the idea of a 'peer' tutor. Trimbur argues that the term 'peer tutoring' is a contradiction in that, as a peer, one does not have the necessary qualifications or expertise to tutor, and yet when one has been trained, one is consequently set apart from peers by the acquisition of skills (Trimbur in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:290). Trimbur continues to explore this paradox by writing that peer tutors are usually identified as "highly skilled academic achievers" and "independent learners", which reinforces the gap between a peer tutor and a student (Trimbur cited in Bushman in Wallace & Simpson, 1991:32). Bruffee, however, posits that the peer tutoring process is valuable as a student is far more open to interaction with a peer than a lecturer. Models of peer tutor training highlight the balance between emphasizing the tutor's role as a peer and a co-learner, and emphasizing the peer tutor's role in producing "experiential knowledge of the process of peer critiquing and co-learning to write" (Trimbur in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:292).

This fine balance is also to be maintained in the collaborative process of tutoring. True collaboration takes place when both peer tutor and tutee are "part of the same discourse community and meet as equals" (Clark, *Writing 21* cited in Shamon & Burns in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:226). Active student participation is thus encouraged, but Brooks argues that peer tutors should take on a secondary role with "a minimalist, hands-off approach" when tutoring (Brooks in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:290), so as to keep the writer focused on his/her own writing and ensure that he/she is the "active agent" (Brooks in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:224). In maintaining control over his/her writing and retaining ownership in the process of a consultation, the writer learns from the process to develop as a writer (Ryan, 2002:31-41), an ideology which North reinforces by saying that "our job is to make better writers, not better papers" (North cited in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:204).

However, discussion has revealed that although this type of peer tutoring has become the norm in writing centres, alternate forms of tutoring needed by writers at various stages of writing development, either as in a novice, intermediate or advanced writing stage, should be considered.

For example, Shamoon and Burns in their article “*A Critique of Pure Tutoring*”, discuss such alternatives, which they refer to as “directive and public” (rather than collaborative and private), and lean on “imitation, modelling and emulation”, which are consequently opposed to current orthodoxy (collaborative, interactive conversation) (Shamoon & Burns in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:230-237).

Added to this question of which type of peer tutoring is most effective in a particular context, is the debate of whether a peer tutor should be a “generalist” peer tutor or a “domain-centred” peer tutor (Kiedaisch & Dinitz in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:260). Research in the USA has shown that, as a result, there are arguments for and against peer tutoring based on the issue of a ‘generalist’ peer tutor versus a ‘domain-centred’ peer tutor. An argument against peer tutoring is that writing centre peer tutors are not, and cannot be, experts in a variety of fields. For instance, according to Samson (in Wallace & Simpson, 1991:232), a peer tutor, not well versed in technical terms or technical fields, will know very little about what the tutee is writing and, thus, a peer tutor should be ‘domain-centred’. On the other hand, research has shown (Samson in Wallace & Simpson, 1991:232-242) that students from certain faculties, such as English, Communication and Education, with specialist tutor training, can become effective peer tutors in, for example, technical, psychological or legal fields. Such tutor training, including training in understanding basic concepts in the new discipline and its special writing requirements, needs to be undergone.

It is thus, to understand this tension that various models of peer tutoring, as well as a variety of strategies employed in writing centre practice, which have already been researched and critiqued, are looked at in more depth. Models of peer tutoring developed by authors such as Bruffee and Haring-Smith were investigated in this research to understand how each model impacts on the ideology of peer tutoring, as well as alternate methods and techniques. Traditional peer tutor training manuals written by Harris *Teaching One-to-One Conference*; Bruffee’s *A Short Course in Writing and*, Clarke’s *Writing in the Center: Teaching in a Writing Center Setting*, tutor training programmes developed by Gillespie and Lerner, Murphy and Sherwood, and Ryan, as well as training manuals for tutors formulated by certain American universities, were studied in an effort to understand what constitutes the role of the peer tutor, the implications for the writing centre and, consequently, the development of conversations of knowledge.

Crucial to the above debate are ethical issues such as plagiarism, ‘owning’ of texts, collaborative learning and imitation. Clark and Healy query how ethical are the increasing amounts of assistance from peer tutors, and thus writing centres, with regard to students’ work (in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:242). The use of collaboration between peer tutor and writer is an added contentious issue with regard to both collaborative learning and its application to the writing (Harris in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:272-185), as well as the idea that over-collaboration could lead to writing centre dependency (Walker in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:316-325).

Finally, since the writing support centre in which I am working is apparently unique in South Africa in offering support exclusively for postgraduates, it is not surprising that little specific literature has been found on the topic, nor that there is any training programme in place for postgraduate peer tutors. The study attempts to extrapolate useful data from the studies of undergraduate centres in its attempt to define the role the peer tutor plays. On the other hand, it is recognised that the respective levels of education have distinctly different characteristics of writing and that generalisations applicable to undergraduate centres will not necessarily apply to the postgraduate ones. Therefore, not only should the knowledge gained from the research be used to inform my role as a peer tutor in the postgraduate writing support centre, but it should also increase my understanding of the effect of peer tutoring on the development of academic discourse. More significantly, it is intended that the findings will help fill a gap in the research into peer tutoring in writing support at postgraduate level.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Based on the above, the research question can be posed as follows:

- **What is the role of a peer tutor in developing conversations of knowledge in postgraduate writing support?**

Secondary questions, thus, need to be answered:

- **What are the various models of peer tutoring and are they applicable at postgraduate level?**
- **What constitutes a conversation of knowledge at postgraduate level?**

1.3 CONTEXT

This study took place in the context of the Faculty of Education's Postgraduate Writing Support Centre at the University of Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa, where I work as a peer tutor.



THE POSTGRADUATE WRITING SUPPORT CENTRE

1.3.1 Participants

The prime participants in my research are the postgraduate students in the Faculty of Education whom I tutor in the writing of research proposals, research papers, mini-dissertations, dissertations and theses. The experienced tutor is also considered an integral part of this research.

1.4 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research paper is to understand the functions of peer tutoring at postgraduate level, the process of tutoring as well as the tensions and debate which surround the idea of a ‘peer’ tutor and how it impacts of the development of the ‘conversations of knowledge’ needed in academic writing.

I would like to argue that there is a need for such research on the academic writing process at postgraduate level, the role that collaborative learning plays in peer tutoring and the impact that this has on the development of the academic writing of students. These findings should highlight the necessity of the development of a peer tutor training programme, which in time could be submitted for accreditation.

Therefore, the aims of this study are:

- To define the role of a peer tutor in a postgraduate writing support centre.
- To adapt the various models of peer tutoring to become applicable at postgraduate level.
- To increase the understanding of the effect of peer tutoring on the development of postgraduate academic discourse.



1.5 RATIONALE

I will argue that a need for such research on the academic writing process at postgraduate level exists, particularly the role that peer tutoring plays in advancing the practice, taking into account the seemingly lack of competence of some postgraduate students with reference to the lack of basic writing and literary skills (Esterhuizen, 2001; Quinn, 2002; Rhodes, 2005), as well as the understanding of academic discourse.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research took the form of a case study in the context of the Postgraduate Writing Support Centre of the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg. A case study, according to Merriam (1998:19), is used to gain in-depth understanding of a particular situation and meaning

for those involved, interest being in the “process rather than the outcome, ... in discovery rather than confirmation”, a “description of *how, where, when and why* things happen (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004:41; Yin, 1984).

This case study thus investigated the phenomenon of peer tutoring, with postgraduate students, the unit of analysis, or object of investigation (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:37), being the interaction between the tutors, both experienced and peer tutors and the postgraduate student writers during the writing of research proposals, research papers, mini-dissertations and dissertations. The study took place over a period of a few months.

A case study may either take the form of quantitative research or qualitative research (Henning et al., 2004:32). This case study, however, took the form of qualitative research into natural and everyday life, with the aim of studying a phenomenon, in this study the role of the peer tutor, holistically in their everyday context of university academic writing support (Esterhuizen, 1995:10).

I was the peer tutor/researcher who understood the aim of the research and could consequently respond and adapt to a situation when collecting data (Merriam, 2002:5), drawing on my own experience and familiarity with the setting (Melia in Miller & Dingwall, 1997:26), and being aware of the “emic perspective” (Merriam, 1998:6). Working as a peer tutor developed and enhanced this “emic perspective” through contact and interaction with students, and facilitated the collection of data using a variety of tools.

An understanding of this phenomenon of peer tutoring began with observing both the experienced tutor and the students in their one-on-one tutor sessions (Merriam, 1998:95), where I was the participant observer, and the active participant in tutoring one-on-one sessions. A research proposal workshop was held to offer support to students finding difficulty in the writing of this important paper. Online tutoring, with students who live a distance geographically away from the university, was also undertaken, as well as tutoring on WebCT. This formed the “sample” as described by Henning et al. (2004:71), as people who “travel on the journey” with me as “desirable participants” and lead to a better theoretical understanding of the phenomenon.

Being an active participant in this study, as the peer tutor, allowed me to put into practice what writing centre manuals and peer tutoring guides authored by Gillespie and Lerner (2004), Ryan (2002) and Murphy and Sherwood (2003) have advocated as the role of a peer tutor and the method of tutoring. Thus, in this study, I saw my role as valuable as I was able to construct knowledge from the point of view of the researcher, the peer tutor as well as a student, writing my own postgraduate research paper with the support of the writing centre.

Being an observer, a participant observer/researcher in the writing support centre led me to record my observations, thoughts and understandings as they occurred through the research process in descriptive notes (Patton, 1990:201 cited in Merriam, 1998:95) from both observed and tutored sessions in a research journal (Harris, 2001: accessed online) and at the same time, engaging in self reflection (Schön, 1991). This unit of analysis (Henning, et al., 2004:71), the conversational interaction between student and tutor, through comprehensive detailed field notes, rendered “thick description” (Merriam, 1998:151) and was aided by the filling in of an administrative information form, required by writing centre policy, by each student who visits the writing support centre.

After the session, the tutor recorded salient points about the student’s writing and the support given, as well as recording advice. On a separate form, the student was requested to fill in an assessment questionnaire of the session. Document analysis (Merriam, 1998:120) followed, which should have lead to an understanding of the writing support needed by students, as well as their responses or re-actions to the process and the effectiveness of peer tutoring. Henning et al. (2004:99) state that documents, even hand-written ones, are a valuable source of information and should be included in the design.

Data collection and analysis, according to Merriam (1998:152), are simultaneous activities in qualitative research and consequently analysis should begin with the first observation, interview or document that has been read. This process of data collection and data analysis is “interactive” (Ibid.151), “iterative” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:31) “recursive and dynamic” (Ibid.155), where emerging ideas and insight directs the next phase. Data analysis is the “process of making sense out of the data” (Merriam, 1998:178), starting with the reading of the first piece of literature, the field notes from the first observation or the first document studied. This reading from the literature, field note observations and a wide range of documentary materials (Merriam,

2002:143) and intuitive understandings in the field (Merriam, 1998:7, 156) lead to category construction (Ibid. 181). These categories are developed from what the participants frequently mention, from the audience deeming it important, by being unique and by revealing something that has not been considered (Ibid. 185), and are the answers to the research questions.

All data should fit into these categories (Ibid. 183-184), which will then be used to develop meaning and understanding of the phenomenon studied (Merriam, 1998:8) and will thus become the building blocks for the writing of the text (Henning et al., 2004:82), reported in the research findings section of this paper.

Because the aim of the study is to understand the role of a peer tutor in developing ‘conversations’ in postgraduate writing support, I have motivated my methodology of using a case study, citing Merriam’s reasons for case study use (1988 cited in Jarvis 1999:79) as being *specific, descriptive, heuristic* and *inductive*, and the concomitant data collection and analysis as the most suitable for my research.



1.7 STRUCTURE

The format of this research paper is as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the concept of peer tutoring in writing centres in higher education institutions both in the United States of America and in South Africa. It also highlights the tensions surrounding the idea of ‘peer’ and looks at debates concerning the role of tutoring.

Chapter 2 develops a theoretical framework of peer tutoring through a review of the literature. This theoretical framework will aid in the design of the research and described how this will impact on the methodology employed in the collection of data.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design, describe the research methodology and the data collection methods and tools used and, how they were employed to gather relevant data

Chapter 4 explains how the data was then correlated and then analyzed. The analysed data will then be used a narrative to describe ‘the case’. A summary of the finding will also be given.

Chapter 5 synthesizes the findings to give an understanding of the implications for the continued use of peer tutoring at postgraduate level and consequently the need for the development of peer tutoring training programmes. This chapter also offers recommendations and gives an overview of the study.

1.8 ETHICAL STATEMENT

I have endeavoured to comply with the ethical standards, by addressing the following issues:

- The participants were volunteer postgraduate students who visit the Faculty of Education's Postgraduate Writing Support Centre and were not restricted in terms of race, sex and age range.
- The participants were asked if I may observe them in their one-on-one consultations with the experienced tutor, their one-on-one consultations with me as peer tutor and their participation in the research proposal workshop. (see Appendix A) However, if the participants no longer wished to be part of the study, they were allowed to withdraw without reprisal.
- The participants were asked to complete the administrative forms required by writing centre policy as well as a questionnaire on completion of the tutoring session/s and workshop. (see Appendix B and C)
- Permission for the observations, questionnaire completion and document analysis was requested from the Director of the Postgraduate Writing Support Centre and the experienced tutor. (see Appendix D and E)
- My research, as a peer tutor, was explained face-to-face with the participants prior to their tutoring sessions.
- Anonymity ensures confidentiality and in reporting the findings of the study, the participants were given pseudonyms.
- Participants were asked to read over the field notes in an attempt to maintain reliability and thus validity of the study. Interviews were used at a later stage to provide better triangulation (see Appendix F) and interview participants were asked to read over the transcripts.
- Ethical Clearance (Number 053 19/09/05) for undertaking this study was given by the Faculty Academic Ethics Committee (Appendix L).

1.9 VALIDITY

Internal validity of this research was shored up by triangulation using a combination of multiple methods of data collection so that data collected in an observation can be checked against that of document analysis such as the questionnaire (Merriam, 2002:25) and open-ended interviews with selected writers. The argument, according to Van der Mescht (2002:49), should be “for completeness rather than confirmation”. Participants were also asked to read over “tentative findings” to find out whether the findings “ring true” (Merriam, 2002:26).

To enhance external validity, Merriam (1998:211-212) suggests that researchers should provide “a rich, thick description” to allow the reader to make decisions regarding transferability because of the detailed description of participants or setting provided.

1.10 RELIABILITY

Reliability refers to what extent these research findings can be replicated in another setting, in another study and whether the results are consistent and dependable (Merriam, 2002:27).

1.11 CONCLUSION

This first chapter sought to give an overview of peer tutoring at postgraduate level in higher education institutions and the tensions and debates that surround it.

The following chapter will look at the relevant literature in order to draw a theoretical framework to gain an understanding of the role of the peer tutor in postgraduate writing support.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND STUDY OF THEMES

The aim of this literature review¹ is to develop context with a brief history of writing centres in the United States of America and in South Africa. It seeks to understand the role of the peer tutor, taking into account the people making up the community, the pedagogy of peer tutoring, models for tutoring, how a peer tutor is trained in developing strategies, and the tensions underlying the practice of peer tutoring. Writing is also investigated as a socially constructed process through the practice of collaboration and as a way to enter the academic community.

2.1 THE ROLE OF THE PEER TUTOR : Conversations within a community

North (1984:39) in *The Idea of a Writing Center*² writes:

Maybe in a perfect world, all writers would have their own ready auditor – a teacher, classmate, a roommate, an editor – who would not only listen by drawing them out, ask them questions they would not think to ask themselves. A writing center is an institutional response to this end.

Working in a postgraduate writing centre has led me to undertake research into the way tutoring, and, more particularly, peer tutoring, impacts on the writing of research papers with knowledge constructed during collaborative conversations. Aligning with North, is Carino (in Pemberton & Kinkead, 2003:96) who describes the idea of one-to-one interaction of peer tutoring taking place in “the non-hierarchical and non-threatening collaborative environment” such as the writing centre.

According to the writing centre manual from Montreat College in the U.S.A (online), only a few writing centres existed before the 1970s and those that did exist attempted to help higher education deal with the dramatic increase in college enrolments. Higher education was ill equipped to deal

¹ Writing centre research dates back as far as the 1920s (Bouquet, 1999). Modern writings have resulted in articles and small text being published in academic journals or writing laboratory newsletters and these earlier (1970s) writings have more recently been published in collections. Very few individual editions have been published under one author. Although I have attempted to find the original texts (these reflect very early dates), in this literature review I have generally referred to the collections. Consequently, I have chosen to reference the author and the compilation, so referencing at times may seem cumbersome.

² American spelling and terminology

with 'new' types of student, such as children of urban immigrants in the 1930s or returning World War II veterans in the 1940s (Lerner, 2003). These writing centres were mainly language laboratories found under the auspices of English departments at tertiary institutions which prepared freshmen students for the rigours of academic reading and writing or which provided a service of remediation.

However, during the 1970s, universities in the USA declared that there was a 'literacy crisis' as students, entering their institutions during this open admissions period, were labelled 'ineffective readers and writers' (Clark, online). This then provided the catalyst for the creation of writing centres, as did the return of Vietnam soldiers who were then allowed and encouraged to enter universities, but who were felt to be under-prepared students. Linked to the establishment of writing centres is writing centre research which dates back as far as the 1920s (Bouquet, 1999). Modern writings have resulted in articles and small text being published in academic journals or writing laboratory newsletters, such as the *Writing Lab Newsletter* established by Harris in 1976 and the *Writing Center Journal*, established by Brannon and North in 1980 (Jones, 2001), and latterly *The Dangling Modifier* (online), as from the early 1970s, the writing centre had become "a ubiquitous feature of American universities, colleges and high schools" (Jones, 2001).

Within the South African framework, academic development programmes at higher education institutions were initiated in the 1980s (Quinn, 1998:15) to address various skills, of which writing was one. In the early 1990s, writing centres were established in a number of institutions (Nichols, 1998:84) to provide a resource for the diverse educational, social and cultural needs of the students who make up "the mosaic peculiar to the new South Africa" (Johnston in Goodlab, 1995:67) as the admittance to universities, colleges and technikons of English Second Language (ESL) students necessitated the need for academic and writing support. Transformation in higher education has also seen many students, highly motivated adult students, returning to postgraduate studies. These students tend to be "thirty-something students" (Haynes-Burton in Murphy, 2003:216) either activity-orientated, goal-orientated or learning-orientated (Houle, 1961 cited in Gravett, 2001:9-10) or a combination of all three orientations. Added to these aspects appearing in higher education institutions in South Africa, Nichols (1998:84-95) felt that writing centres would be a good place to "shift the authority" to students who were accustomed to maintaining silence about their work, whereby they could benefit through taking control in tutorial sessions and do most of

the talking.

It is for this specific type of student that the Postgraduate Writing Support Centre was established in 2002 at the Rand Afrikaans University, now known as the University of Johannesburg. At present, 2006, the websites of 20 universities and tertiary institutions in South Africa indicate the existence of writing centres or writing-respondent programmes which are considered an integral part of higher education institutions both in South Africa as well as elsewhere in the world.

Discussions referred to on the South African listserv (write-now@mail3.sun.ac.za), and in various global texts and publications indicate that writing centre personnel feel that there is a misconception about the role that the writing centre plays in higher education institutions (SAADA, 2004). Perdue and James (1990, cited in Harris, 1992) write that because the work of the writing centres tends to be unquantifiable, the writing centre is seen as “invisible” and this invisibility makes writing centres vulnerable to uncertain budget constraints, staffing and locations. Most importantly, they are vulnerable to misunderstanding that marginalizes writing centres not just within the institutions, but even within writing programmes in individual departments. North, in a response to perceptions about the role of writing centres, explains that a writing centre is not a “remedial center”, a “skills center” or a “fix-it shop” for grammar and spelling, nor is it a place where a paper can get “dropped off” and collected an hour later after it has been “cleaned-up” (1984:31-46). Rather, he states, “Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing” (Ibid. 37). This takes place during tutorial sessions, developing general patterns of thinking so that the writing takes place as much as possible during the activity and tends to focus on the activity itself. North (Ibid. 43) writes that “We are here to talk to writers”.

This “talking” encapsulates the essence of the role of the peer tutor, and according to Bruffee, is the active engagement of students in conversation at as many points in the writing process as possible, ensuring that the conversation is similar in as many ways as possible to the way they should eventually write (2001:210). What initially originates in conversation and takes place in public between people becomes internalized into thought, but, firstly in order to learn to think better, one needs to converse better and “to learn to create and maintain the sort of social contexts, the sorts of community life, that foster the kinds of conversations we value” (Bruffee, 2001:206-209). Bruffee thus states, “If thought is internalized conversation, then writing is internalized conversation re-

externalized” (Ibid. 209).

Clark, in a later writing (online), continues this line of thinking by stating that writing is no longer considered a “solitary act” but is a socially constructed process, a “social artefact” (2001:211). The role of the writing centre is thus pivotal in developing the conversations and consequently the writing, which leads Clark to describe the writing centre as a “pedagogical concept as well as an actual place” (online). Writing centres, as physical spaces, in the view of Nichols (1998:89), are democratic in that they cater for the needs of all students, regardless of language, race or culture, providing services such as one-on-one tutoring, writing workshops, writing-respondent programmes and handouts. Writing centres are run under the leadership of a writing centre director, with permanently appointed tutors as well as student peer tutors. But the significance of Clark’s claim that the writing centre is not just a physical space but also a “pedagogical concept” – a method of constructing learning in a different manner is explored by Perdue and James:

The teaching in writing centers runs counter to the conventional notion of teaching: students, not teachers, set the agenda. The tutor responds and suggests rather than directs. The students may or may not take the suggestions ... because the teaching that occurs in writing centers is often informal, collaborative and egalitarian, it is invisible (1990, cited in Harris, 1992).

In working with a [post]graduate writer, Keyzerman (2002: online) posits that as outsiders reading the text, a peer tutor’s job is to make suggestions which can thus show insight into aspects of the writing that the writer may not have noticed. Because the [post]graduate writer should have enough knowledge of their field, he/she is then able to make informed and responsible choices about the suggestions. However, if the [post]graduate writer does not agree with the peer tutor’s suggestion, this opens a dialogue, a conversation, between them which could lead to further constructive thinking.

It is these conversations which take place between the members of the writing centre community which Bruffee (1993) deemed so important, which has led me, as peer tutor, to question firstly my role and secondly the training that should be undergone.

2.2 THE PEDAGOGY OF PEER TUTORING : Collaboration and the construction of knowledge

The process of tutoring is considered an important educational intervention (Bell, 1797 and Lancaster, 1804 cited in Goodlad, 1995:2) and the system of peer tutoring, also an old practice traceable as far back as the Ancient Greeks (Topping, 1996) in which learners help each other and learn by teaching, is considered one of the most effective methods of promoting student-centred learning (Goodlad & Hirst, 1989 cited in Tan, 1997-2003). Learning strategies refer to methods that students use to learn, and various learning theories are thus seen in student-centred learning. Some learning strategies involve changes to the design of instruction, for example, in the use of questions before, during or after instruction, increasing the degree of understanding. “Situated learning” takes place when the student becomes a participant in a socio-cultural practice, where the learning skills and the social process work together. The degree of ‘situated-ness’ depends on the environment that simulates the collaboration (Kumar, online).

Learning within the environment of the writing centre as Bruner (online) states, is an active process undertaken with the peer tutor, in which the student writer constructs new ideas or concepts, based upon past or currently acquired knowledge. The student writer selects and transforms information, constructs hypotheses, and makes decisions, relying on a cognitive structure, consisting of schema and mental models, to do so. This conversation, in which the student and the peer tutor engage, helps develop within the student writer a deeper understanding of the knowledge that he/she is trying to convey in writing, which Bruffee (2001:211) describes as “an act of conversational exchange” to the reader and allows the student writer to continually build upon what he/she has already learned. The paradox of learning a new competence is that a student cannot at first understand what needs to be learned; rather, it only occurs through educating oneself, and this process involves beginning to do what he/she does not yet understand (Schön, 1987:93). The resultant understanding is then scaffolded by the conversations entered into with the peer tutor.

Conversation Theory developed by Pask (1975), displays the fundamental idea that learning occurs through conversations about a subject matter which serves to make knowledge explicit, and “this active involvement makes talk [or conversation] integral to writing” (Harris, 1992:369). In the

wider, more general spheres of writing, conversations can be conducted at a number of different levels, namely natural language (general discussion), object languages (for discussing the subject matter), and meta-languages (for talking about learning/language).

Peer tutoring interaction is qualitatively different from that between a teacher and a student, and according to Topping (1996), involves advantages and disadvantages. Peer tutoring may be defined as an academic support programme that involves the utilization of academically successful students, advanced in their understanding of subject matter or in their development of academic skills, providing learning assistance to less advanced students (Cuseo, online), thus offering an effective way to help students learn actively and meaningfully.

An added definition states that peer tutoring consists of "people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers helping each other to learn and learning themselves by teaching" (Topping, 1996). However, Gillespie and Lerner (2003:5) explain that the many concepts surrounding tutoring seem to be in opposition. They see tutoring as a continuum with contrasting concepts, such as tutor/editor, novice/expert, process/product, control/flexibility and tutor/teacher, existing at either end of the continuum. Thus, a peer tutor should understand the complexities of the process of tutoring and become aware of where on the continuum the tutoring session is positioned.

Writing centres are staffed by peer tutors, named the "the middle person" by Harris (1995: 27), whose primary responsibility is to work one-to-one with student writers providing a unique aspect of tutorial interaction. Harris (1995) defines the peer tutor as the middle person, someone in between the student and the lecturer, working in a writing environment and offering an opportunity for the student writer to remove him/herself from the classroom situation, providing "a haven for student writers where individualized needs are met" (Harris, 1995:28). This individualized interaction takes place in a one-to-one 'conversation' with a 'peer' who thinks alike (Krapohl cited in Samson, 234 in Wallace & Simpson, 1991). The student writer's work is discussed; he/she gains confidence, knowledge and understanding, seeking to take the writing to a higher level of competence.

As the conversation progresses, the student writer talks more freely and honestly which allows the

tutor, through questions, to lead the student writer to offer information that he/she did not know needed clarifying in the writing. Through talk and questioning, the conversation is free to roam about the writing itself or writing habits and processes and with the student writer's responses, this can lead to other avenues to explore. This flexibility and interaction in a one-to-one tutorial allows "some light to enter" (Flower, 1990 in Harris 1995). Harris, thus, extrapolates by saying "when meeting with tutors, student writers gain kinds of knowledge about their writing and about themselves that is not possible in other institutionalized settings, and it is this uniqueness of the tutorial setting that [is so valuable]" (1995: 29).

Bruffee (2002:82-83) suggests that the educational effects of peer tutoring are contingent upon the degree to which the peer tutor and the student writer are really peers. He states that a peer is a person who has equal standing with another, such as in rank, class or age, and he emphasizes that a peer is an equal, not a superior. In the realm of peer tutoring, equality means two things: both tutor and student believe that they bring important skills and information to the session, and they both believe they are institutional status equals, or students.

As stated in Chapter 1, Trimbur argues that the term 'peer tutoring' is a contradiction in that, as a peer, one does not have the necessary qualifications or expertise to tutor, and yet when one has been trained, one is consequently set apart from one's peers by the acquisition of skills (Trimbur, 2001:290). Added to that is the idea that peer tutors are generally "skilled academic achievers" and "independent learners" (Trimbur cited in Bushman in Wallace & Simpson, 1991:32), which could widen the gap between peer tutor and student writer. However, Trimbur does purport that the idea of 'peer' should be fostered.

2.2.1 The process of tutoring

Murphy and Law (2003) divide the tutoring process into three stages, all of which take on specific roles and have special characteristics and difficulties which need to be addressed, namely, the pre-textual stage, the textual stage and finally the post-textual stage.

The pre-textual stage of the tutoring process (Ibid, 8-16), where there is contact between peer tutor and student writer for the first time, is of importance as it is here that the interpersonal relationship is begun. Because learning is viewed as a social process of constructing meaning within a context,

the quality of the interpersonal relationship is paramount. The peer tutor should be aware of and react appropriately to various personality and learning styles, as well as develop sensitivity to gender, age, ethnicity and cultural and educational backgrounds. The peer tutor should display empathy towards problems and feelings and aim at cultivating a shared dialogue to foster reciprocal learning, which will break down barriers which could impede learning and instead lead to fruitful collaboration. Because of the diversity of the academic community, authors such as Freed, Sherwood, and DiPardo (cited in Murphy & Law, 2003) suggest taking on a non-directive principle of tutoring, remaining neutral on issues political and social.

The development of a good interpersonal relationship in the pre-textual stage allows for a smooth transition to the textual stage. The textual stage of tutoring (Murphy & Law, 2003: 16-20) describes the stage where the student writers at all levels of abilities, bring their writing with all its textual problems such as grammar, style, syntax, logic, organization, tone, diction and focus (Ibid. 17) to the writer centre to be assisted in making long term improvements to their writing. As previously described, Brooks (in Barnett & Blumner, 2001: 218) suggests a “minimalist approach” at this stage, focusing on global issues such as “thesis, structure, diction, tone and the logical development of ideas” (Ibid. 17). However, this is where peer tutors and student writers do not see eye-to-eye. Student writers want and need peer tutors actively to help them revise their papers providing proofreading and editing services, and addressing lower order concerns. This conflict in the tutoring process is highlighted by the limitations of minimalist tutoring (Shamoon & Burns and Powers cited in Murphy & Law, 2003, 18-19) particularly with student writers who may display barriers to effective writing such as ESL learners and those with certain learning disabilities. These authors suggest that the tutor needs to move along the tutoring continuum and take a more directive stance determined by the needs of each tutoring situation, with the prime aim being the use of conversation in the development of critical thinking skills. Murphy and Law advise focusing on the student writers’ strengths and weaknesses, by suggesting ways to enhance these strengths and minimize their weaknesses and ensuring that they understand that the writing is a work in progress (2003:19-20).

The sentiment of a student writer’s work being “a work in progress” is carried over into the post-textual stage of tutoring (2003: 20-22). This stage completes the writing process with the main objective of “encouraging progress by fostering potential” (Ibid. 20), by ensuring that the student

writer has developed the confidence to work independently. This is done through conversation, discussion and questioning about content, as well as being open to correction both small and major, in thinking and in style. To foster independent learning and writing, the peer tutor should encourage the student writers to work independently, reminding them that any challenges they have conquered, they have done on their own with minimal help. It is important for the peer tutor to praise the student writers for their own work, ensuring that they credit themselves with their increasing independence (Ibid. 21-22).

2.2.2 Goals, effects and benefits of peer tutoring

Research on peer tutoring, according to Gartner (online) referring to Cohen, Kulik and Kulik (1982); Hedin (1987); Goodlad and Hirst (1989); Greenwood, Delquadri, and Hall (1989); Benard (1990 and Swengel (1991), indicates that the intervention is relatively effective in that it improves both the tutees' and the tutors' academic and social development. Behm (1989:6) reiterates the effectiveness of tutoring with benefits for both peer tutor and student writer by stating that "I [as a peer tutor] have learned as much or more than the student, either about myself, about my writing, or about writing in general". However, some studies caution that effectiveness may be moderated by similarity in age and achievement level of tutors and tutees (DePaulo et al., 1989), academic deficiency of tutors (Willis & Crowder, 1974), and lack of long term maintenance of tutee gains (Atherley, 1989 all cited in Gartner, online).

Bruffee (1998:80) states that the educational effects of peer tutoring with issues such as reading of texts, documents and word-problems and writing of papers, lab reports and even exams are dealt with socially and intellectually, with both peer tutor and student writer involved in each other's development. Bruffee (1998:88-89) also found that peer tutoring fostered a deeper insight into higher education and the students themselves. But this led to some surprising results. Students seeking writing support were not only those of average ability or those experiencing difficulty in writing, but included better students who were striving to increase their mark. Some students needed help understanding and assimilating the subject material. Others, who professed weakness in writing, in fact uncovered weaknesses within themselves – an anxiety which created a barrier to learning – “intellectually paralyzed” – but through the conversations during peer tutoring were able to talk, and uncovered knowledge they were unaware they possessed. Consequently, the students could begin to identify and examine issues on these subjects, adopt their positions, argue and

explain their understanding.

Peer interaction has also led to a dramatic improvement in the peer tutors' own writing as writing problems of the student writers' seemed to mirror their own. This allowed the peer tutors to identify and resolve the problems in their own thoughts and writings. Harris (1992), referring to research conducted by Gere and Abbot (1985) and Gere (1987), describes the benefits of peer tutoring as improving critical thinking, organization and appropriateness of writing, improving usage of, increasing the amount of revision and reducing apprehension in both student writer and peer tutor.

In addition to this, Berkenkotter (1984) and Gebhardt (1980 cited in Harris, 1992) endorse peer response in all forms which, they write, helps the student writer develop a better sense of audience; exposes him/her to a variety of writing styles, motivates him/her to revise his/her own work, and develops of sense of community. Student writers thus, experience writing and revising for a less threatening audience, learning to discriminate between useful and non-useful feedback. Often peers are able to offer emotional support and constructive feedback giving rise to the evolution of ideas. In peer response, the difficult art of proofreading one's own papers is developed through continuing editorial work - editing, proofreading and correcting peers' texts. However, it is important to understand that the long term goal of peer tutoring according to Davidson (1996) is to foster independence of practice when a student writer is faced with writing tasks which in reality will demand functioning as a critical learner.

Beyond working with individuals, an important dimension in the writing centre is seen in its relationship with the broader academic community working as an agent of change, referred to above with regard to Nichols's statement (1998). Murphy (online) in the past has called for writing centres to become the primary agent of change by focusing on programmes that support and restructure literacy education and to ensure that all writing centre efforts are focused towards redefining literacy instruction and what is meant by the power of literacy to empower individuals and to transform social institutions. A college report document (quoted in Bruffee, 1998:81) describes the collaborative nature of the writing centre being an agent of change by going to the very root of the educational process, challenging traditional roles of the authority of teachers and the authority of knowledge (Ibid.82). This could bring about possible aspects of change, such as

changes in relations among students, among teachers, and between students and teachers, changes in the prevailing understanding of the nature and authority of knowledge and the authority of teachers, changes in curriculum and even changes in classroom practice (Ibid. 82). This forms part of another debate which is not within the context of this literature review.

2.3 MODELS OF PEER TUTORING : Conversations and collaborative learning

Two models of peer tutoring, developed in the USA during the 1970s, have been of particular relevance to peer tutoring ideology. Bruffee's Brooklyn Plan, also known as the writing centre model, relies on students voluntarily 'dropping-in' or making appointments to work with a peer tutor. In contrast, Haring-Smith's Writing Fellows Program is a curriculum-based model which developed from the idea that if peer tutoring is beneficial to those who seek it for remediation, it should become 'the norm' for all courses or programmes. Thus, a peer tutor, known as a writing fellow, is trained to serve as a first reader for papers written in selected courses throughout the curriculum. The peer tutor comments on students' work, noting where he/she, as reader, is confused and then he/she provides written or oral face-to-face responses to these early drafts.

Kail and Trimbur (1995), in discussing the benefits of each model in which peer tutors are used to "deliver the knowledge it takes to learn to write well" (Ibid. 204), describe the curriculum-based model, from an organizational point of view, as being more effective, as it ensures that peer tutor and student come together or "connect" (Ibid. 204) and thus develop communication between the faculty and the students. But, Kail and Trimbur see the curriculum-based model as a "gen/tran" model (Ibid. 205) whereby knowledge is generated by faculty and then transmitted by peer tutors who become another point in the "transmission lines" (Ibid. 205) of knowledge. Being in this position also elevates the peer tutor from peer-status, which could prohibit peer tutor and student from communicating and collaborating as peers. However, this model in combination with the Swarthmore model of peer tutoring (online), has, over the intervening years, been refined and further developed to include collaborative learning and has, consequently, become the foundation for Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programmes seen in operation in many USA universities, supported by Writing Fellows (refer to Brown University and University of Richmond as just two examples).

In contrast to the early curriculum-model of peer tutoring, Kail and Trimbur (1995) emphasize that

peer tutoring based in the semi-autonomous space of the writing centre draws on collaborative learning. At higher education level, students have already tapped into this type of learning by coming together in informal study groups to help them deal with the demands of academic work. Collaborative learning offers “an alternative to the dominant hierarchical model of teaching and learning, an alternative based on voluntary social interaction among students” (Ibid. 207), through the use of conversation (Behm, 1989; Bruffee, in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:214).

However, Kail and Trimbur (1995) expose the tension contained in peer tutoring and collaboration. This tension highlights the “crisis of authority” (Ibid. 297) which questions whether students are ready to learn on their own, freed from the authority of faculty without constant measuring and certifying. It also calls attention to the fact that at higher education level, the lecturer cannot be the sole conveyor of knowledge. Knowledge is not an absolute entity that can be transferred from one head to another, e.g. from the knowledgeable lecturer to the ‘empty vessel’ student, described by Friere (1971) as ‘the banking system of education’. Instead knowledge can be socially constructed (Dewey, Abercrombie, Mason, Friere, cited in Ede in Murphy & Law, 1995). Lunsford (in Murphy & Lay 2003:47) further explains that there has been an epistemological shift from viewing knowledge and reality as things exterior to or outside of use, something that is immediately accessible, individually knowable, measurable and shareable to viewing knowledge and reality as mediated by or constructed through language in social use, as socially constructed and contextualized. Bruffee (in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:214) draws on Kuhn’s notion that knowledge is generated and maintained by “communities of knowledgeable peers”. Accordingly, knowledge becomes the product of collaboration during a process of socially justifying beliefs generated by peers, which is confirmed by Petraglia (cited in Murphy in Mullin & Wallace, 1994:26) that “knowledge is created, maintained and altered through an individual’s interaction with and within his/her discourse community”.

This idea of collaborative learning then offers a new model for learning which involves the “re-acculturation” (Bruffee, 1993:20) of a student through conversation with peers wanting entrance into a new community, such as the academic and professional disciplines of higher learning. Collaborative learning directly involves the students’ action and attention, with students conversing among themselves with the lecturer standing on the sidelines, teaching indirectly. This empowers the students, who actively question and synthesize what the lecturer says (Bruffee,

1993:31), into combining listening, reading, talking, writing and thinking skills simultaneously (Fitzgerald in Mullin & Wallace, 1994:12; Lunsford, in Murphy & Lay 2003:49;) and in building their own understandings through self-discovery, thus reinforcing that the most important things cannot be taught but must be discovered and appropriated for oneself (Rogers cited in Schön, 1987:92).

Writing, too, is not to be considered a solitary act of putting pen to paper or fingers to keys, but should be seen as a social, collaborative, constructive conversational act (Bruffee, 1993:54), using language as a “community construct” (Ibid.54). When the student writers write, they talk to themselves (socially constructed) and to others (socially constructed) about the subject (socially constructed) they are writing about (Ibid. 57). Thus, the student writer’s goal in writing is to celebrate acculturation in speaking the language of the community, and making him/her acceptable to that community (Ibid. 56) or as Jackson, Leverenz and Law state “acculturating students into the paradox of professionalization” (in Pemberton & Kinkead, 2003: 140).

Accordingly, the writing centre model of peer tutoring (Bruffee, 1970s), drawing on collaborative learning, sees writing as social, collaborative and constructive. Thus peer tutoring encourages students to engage in constructive conversation about writing, constructing knowledge through conversation. Conversation is vital in the process of writing, from finding a topic, reading and deciding what to say about it, developing an argument for or against and evaluating what has been written, and then re-writing. The short term purpose of collaborative peer tutoring is to improve students’ writing, with the long term purpose being permanent internalized conversation about writing (Bruffee, 1993:58) reinforcing North’s mantra “Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing” (1984: 37). However, Bruffee does warn that the writing is only as clear and incisive and effective as the conversation has been, both about the topic and about the writing (Bruffee, 1993: 58).

Building on the model of the writer centre, Bruffee (1998) describes two types of peer tutoring. Monitor-type peer tutoring makes use of more advanced older students to teach, drill and review. Chosen from the “best students”, these peer tutors are well-trained and act as surrogate teachers reverting to traditional teaching, which thus compromises the peer status peer tutors normally enjoy (Bruffee, 1998:83-84). The second type of peer tutoring, described by Bruffee, and found predominantly in writing centres, is collaborative peer tutoring. Peer tutors, having undergone a

collaborative peer tutoring training course, (Ibid. 86), tend to see the higher education institution from the same viewpoint as the students and work within the same institutional constraints. Collaborative peer tutors do not mediate between student and teacher but work with student writers on any aspect of their writing that gives problems.

The main aim of peer tutoring is to guide and support by engaging in conversation, helping to translate the knowledge into the discourse, and helping the student writers make the transition into the academic community. This interaction helps the student writers internalize the conversation of the community with the aim of continuing internally and independently (Ibid. 87). “Collaboration encourages students to accept authority of helping one another learn and to acknowledge the authority of other students – their peers – to help them learn themselves” (Bruffee, 1998:87).

In developing a collaborative environment, goals should be defined, where everyone engages and works equally building a theory of collaboration and thus a theory of group dynamics, as Lunsford warns that, even though she advocates a true model of collaboration in the writing centre, collaborative work may be misconstrued (Lunsford, in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:50). She advocates that “the idea of a writing centre should be informed by a theory of knowledge as socially constructed, of power and control as constantly negotiated and shared” (Ibid. 52). This then impacts on and challenges how the writing centre is organized from the training of tutors and working with the lecturers to the methods and techniques used in tutoring the students.

Expanding on the idea of the social dimension in the writing centre, Davidson (1996, online) describes how the technique of modelling is utilized when inexperienced meets experienced writer. He draws on Resnick (1987 cited in Flynn 1993:8) who claims that modelling, offering critique to thinking out aloud and supported by the experienced writer, motivates the student and lends validation to his/her writing where he/she has attempted to put his/her thoughts down on paper. Harris (in Mullin & Wallace 1994:96) writes that student writers at times have difficulty in entering this academic discourse successfully, but argues that student literacies are different and not necessarily deficient, as their difficulties stem from the social and cultural differences inherent in their writing. As a means for working with such students in the writing centre, Harris (1983) developed the techniques of protocol analysis and modelling.

Protocol analysis helps the student writer think aloud during the writing process, providing a

valuable diagnostic tool for the tutor. Thinking aloud encourages the student writer to pinpoint higher order concerns such as coherence and argument, as well as lower order concerns such as concord and transcription of his/her work. Harris has found that the protocol analysis gives a student the opportunity to “think aloud” by talking his/her way through the writing process. Re-reading his/her work aloud during the composing process in order to eliminate mistakes reinforces this. However, Harris writes that the real power of protocol analysis is observing students using what they have learned during the composing process (Harris, 1983: 75-76). In addition to protocol analysis, Harris uses the technique of modelling, whereby the student writer is able to use concepts, through discussion, from someone else’s writing and transfer this to his/her own. Harris writes that modelling “focuses the observer’s attention on processes to be used in the act of writing” (1983:77). Shamon and Burns, as described in Chapter 1, also advocate modelling as well as imitation and emulation as a technique to be used in tutoring (in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:230-237).

The successful use of the techniques of protocol analysis and modelling rely on the intervention of an experienced tutor, so each technique may not be an appropriate one for peer tutor usage. However, all the models of peer tutoring discussed above have led to a concern within higher education institutions with regard to how much interaction, intervention collaboration and help should be given to student writers in the writing of their papers and thus how ethical this practice is. This then raises the question of whether a student writer should not just be judged on what he/she himself/herself writes so that his/her true ability can be assessed.

Brooks (in Barnett & Blumner, 2001: 218) picks up on this idea by explaining that for a number of reasons, student writing seldom reflects their writers’ full capabilities; it is in such a case that the tutor should work with the student writer, ensuring that he/she understands the value of his/her written piece. The idea is that the less done to the paper the better, as the primary objective of the tutorial is to show the student writer how to fix his/her own paper, thus allowing the student writer to become the active agent. Brooks recommends three strategies to develop the student writer’s ability to work through the process of his/her writing. Firstly, he suggests that success of the paper should receive attention, building on the strengths by analysing the text. Secondly, it is important to get the student to talk about his/her writing by asking leading questions so that through discussion the student is pointed to the errors rather than the errors being pointed out. Brooks then

suggests encouraging the student writer to work on the aspect/s of the paper just discussed while he/she is still in the writing centre, which allows for continued guidance through conversation.

However, during the writing process, a student writer may find that minimalist tutoring is not sufficient, so the peer tutor needs to move down the tutoring continuum and consider a more directive method of tutoring, especially if the peer tutor displays more knowledge than the student writer does (Carino in Pemberton & Kinkead, 2003:110). Shamon and Burns discuss directive alternatives, which could be opposed to current orthodoxy, because one tutoring approach does not fit all situations. As the student writer moves from novice through intermediate stages to expert, he/she will draw on a continuum of directive or non-directive tutoring depending on his/her needs and knowledge-about-content and knowledge-about-writing. As a result, directive tutoring can be seen as accepted and fruitful practice (Shamon & Burns in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:230-237) although Harris describes tutoring as “a sensible mixture of nondirective and directive methods” (cited by Carino in Pemberton & Kinkead, 2003:112). However, Trimbur reminds us that training peer tutors in nondirective questioning methods preserves the peer relationship as much as possible, which encourages collaborative learning rather than hierarchical teaching (cited by Carino in Pemberton & Kinkead, 2003: 96).

The fine line that peer tutors tread brings to light ethical issues. Clark and Healy, querying how ethical the increasing amounts of assistance from peer tutors are (in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:242), discuss the debate, alluded to previously, of theorists such as North, Sullivan, Brooks, Lunsford, Trimbur and Harris, and conclude with a set of new ethics. This set of ethics envisages the writing centre as being proactive, exercising a broad encompassing vision of individualized writing instruction. Jacoby emphasises that “there is an ethical sharing of responsibility and decision making between writer and tutor” (in Murphy & Lay, 2003:142) during the collaborative development of conversation in writing centre tutorials, which emphasises Healy’s recommendations (cited in Walker in Barnett & Blumner, 2001: 318) that writing centres redefine the work they do, provide nourishment for writers and infect them with “the bug to collaborate”, a postmodern idea of authorship whereby no single author is fully responsible for any text. This again leads peer tutors to find and maintain the balance between student writer dependency and independency.

2.3.1 The process of writing : collaboration in constructing knowledge

The idea of writing, which is at the centre of teaching and learning at higher education (Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis and Swann, 2003:2), underwent a change during the 1970s and was rediscovered as a way of making sense of one's experience and how it controlled one's learning. At the same time educational psychologists influenced the way of teaching writing by studying cognitive processes that were involved when writing (Gillespie & Lerner, 2003:13). Researchers such as Emig, Sommers, Britton, Flower and Hayers (cited in Gillespie & Lerner, 2003:13) studied the way students wrote and concluded that writing was a recursive process which took into account rhetorical stances such as purpose, audience and content (Ibid. 13). Consequently, around the world approaches to writing have been re-evaluated. In South Africa, where changes in higher education followed the democratization process of the 1990s, "teachers and researchers are critically reconceptualising the purpose and nature of student writing in the academy" (Coffin, et al. 2003:6 see Angelil-Carter, 1998; Thesen, 2001).

The writing process, through which the student writer progresses, is described as recursive or iterative or cyclical (Henning, et al., 2002; Coffin, et al., 2003; Gillespie & Lerner, 2003). The student writer may visit the writing centre at any time during the process of his/her writing for some kind of aid. Prewriting or drafting involves strategies such as brainstorming and freewriting which can help student writers understand their topic, question purpose, find ideas, collect ideas, ascertain what they know and organise their thoughts. The concept of brainstorming allows student writers to 'spark' ideas off each other or the peer tutor with the goal of generating a wide range of divergent ideas. All ideas are recorded without censor. Freewriting is messy, unplanned writing where the student writers write uninterrupted for a period of time, putting down on paper as much as they inherently know about the topic. Following on from here the student writers may use visual representations such as clustering, mind mapping or branching to organise their ideas. Added techniques to assist with the planning of writing, are exploratory reading and detailed reading (Henning, et al., 2002:3) and conversations with fellow student writers (Coffin, et al., 2003:34-35; Gillespie & Lerner, 2003:15).

The drafting stage of the writing process asks the writer to get down on paper thoughts gathered in the planning stage (Gillespie & Lerner, 2003:15) as well as notes taken during reading and note-making. This stage in the process has been termed "quick and dirty drafting" (Henning, et al.,

2002:3). A fundamental approach to the process of writing is its iterative nature in that at each stage the student writer may reflect on his/her writing and revise (Coffin, 2003:41), or he/she may converse with a peer tutor and revise. In conversing with peer tutor, students are given the opportunity to revise from response feedback and critique of their work (Coffin, et al.,2003:40). However, the peer tutor should take into account the fact that writing is a process in which the student writer has control yet flexibility, and that it develops best in the socially constructive context with interaction with others (Gillespie & Lerner, 2003:13). The student writer may also ask for peer critique and revise, reinforcing what Lunsford, (cited in Gillespie & Learner, 2003:13) says, that we need to view writing as “knowledge and reality as mediated by or constructed through language in social use, as socially constructed, contextualised, as, in short the product of collaboration”. The student writer may also seek additional resources, read and then revise. The part of revising in the process of writing, according to Murphy and Law (2003: 17) is crucial in “separating successful writers from less successful ones” and the student writer should pay attention to the higher order concerns of writing such as coherence and argument.

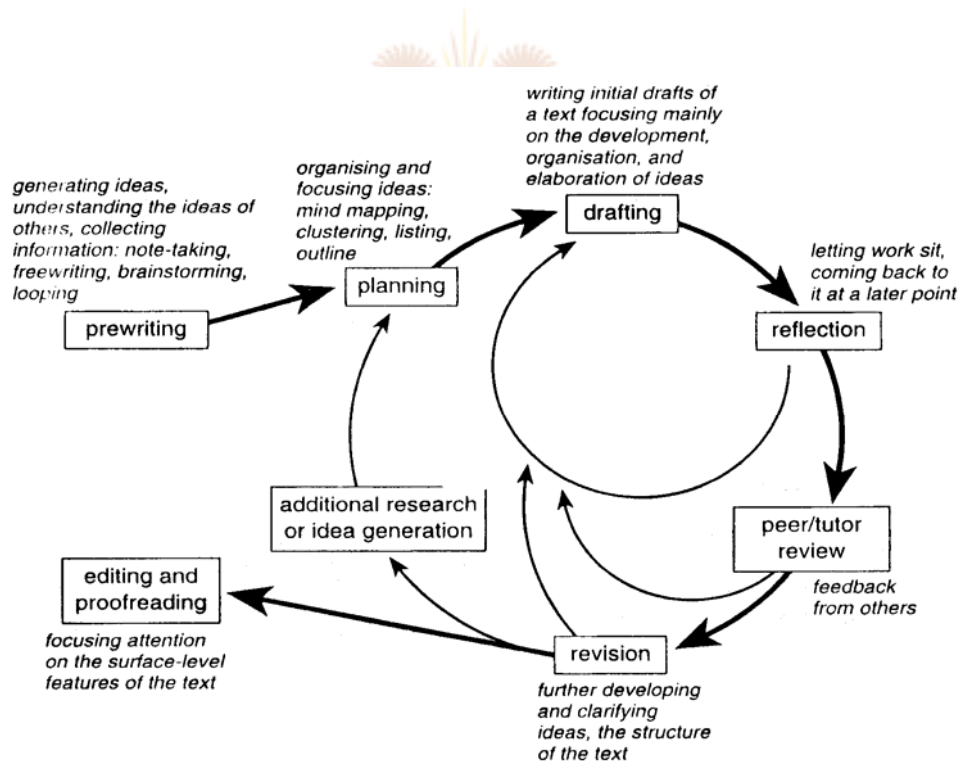


Figure 2.1 The iterative process of writing (Coffin, et al., 2003:34)

The iterative process of writing (illustrated above) allows the student writer to revisit sections of

the writing at any stage and rework them until he/she feel that it is time for editing, proofreading and polishing (Coffin, et al., 2003:41-42). In editing and proofreading, the student writer is then able to attend to the mechanics of writing such as punctuation, spelling, formatting, references and footnotes. The student writer can approach a peer tutor or a peer to review his/her work or he/she may use a computer spelling check programme or a checklist for self-assessment.

Coffin, et al., (2003) describe their approach to the teaching of writing as sociocultural in which they view language as a system of signs or symbols for making meaning. This represents a toolkit to draw on making meaning in different contexts to gain access to a particular way of using language and thus participating in specific social and cultural context where a certain type of language is required. Therefore, they posit it as necessary to introduce student writers into this particular way of using language so that they are able to identify the specific kind of the language needed to write successfully, which will enhance their learning and writing and finally allow them to build on existing knowledge of and use of language (Coffin, et al., 2003:12).

2.4 THE TRAINING OF PEER TUTORS

Peer tutors are identified as either “good” students, with an ability to write (Bruffee, 2001:216) or are chosen from volunteers (Gillespie, 2002:111.3.2). However, Essid, head of the University of Richmond's writing centre, writes, "The best writers do not always make the best tutors". Students tend to be chosen for their potential to be the best tutors who display very strong organizational skills, good interpersonal skills, good (not necessarily “phenomenal”) writing skills (cited in Annett online), are good listeners and intelligent students who would allow other students to talk and develop their own thoughts (Nichols, 1998:87). These selected students are then trained systematically (Nichols, 1998), in a “coherent course of study” (Bruffee, in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:216), either with frequent meetings or credit-bearing courses (Bruffee,1987:85-86) or through national certification (Devet, 2003) where they learn both the theory and the practical side of effective peer tutoring which leads to “an informed tutoring practice ... drawing on experience, informed by insight and developing personal philosophy [which] can bring to the tutoring session the technical skill and creativity needed to teach writing successfully” (Murphy & Sherwood, 2003: 7).

Rimm, in a reflection of her tutoring training, a 'learn by doing' philosophy at Georgetown University, writes that peer tutors initially had to negotiate their own way through tutoring sessions. However, through collaborative reflection during tutor meetings questions, strategies, problems and tricky situations were discussed and shared. In addition, peer tutors were given readings drawn from contemporary research in composition studies, which draws attention away from the goal of helping student writers improve particular papers and rather focuses on the goal of developing their skills as writers over the long term, which also sharpens the peer tutors' critical sense of reading. Every peer tutor was required to document his or her writing process over the course of a paper finding ways to translate theories of teaching writing into tutoring practice, becoming sensitive to different approaches to writing and responding to these needs in dialogue with student writers. She states:

I have begun to appreciate the circuitous route by which I have arrived at an understanding of my work as a tutor. Certainly, it allowed for confusion, doubt, and some bad advice in the beginning; but as I started to shape a tutoring style informed by practice and reflection, I realized that learning by doing opens the tutoring process to experimentation and to the development of individual styles that a more rigorous training method might otherwise shut out (Rimm: online).

Arkin, as far back as 1981, documented training programmes for peer tutors in the USA which have included formal methods such as a peer-tutor course, pre-service orientation, in-service training meetings, training handbooks and tapes and proficiency workshops as well as informal methods such as senior tutoring committees, materials acquisition and preparation and the tutoring log (1981:30-32). However, she states tutor training "cannot be a mere teaching of techniques and strategies" (Ibid.25). She posits that in training, peer tutors should be exposed to techniques and strategies that make them "excited" about playing a unique role in a student's learning process as well as becoming part of a learning community with invaluable training opportunities where everybody learns (Ibid. 25).

Ryan (2002: ix) describes a peer tutor as someone who can "help writers sort through their ideas, clarify their thoughts and then communicate them effectively to an audience". Thus, a peer tutor's main tool is that of guided questioning. Research has suggested that "Socratic dialogue" (Murphy,

2003:3) should be entered into, where the student writer is prompted with a series of questions about the domain (the writing), to which he/she reacts with a hypothesis or a question of his/her own (Kumar, online). For questioning to be effective in a tutorial, there needs to be an understanding that a tutoring session is a learning experience and not an editing session. Questioning should elicit ideas that might not yet be clear in the writing but will help student writers think about their ideas in order to devise their own strategies for revision which will result in the student writer communicating his/her ideas effectively. Constructive questioning allows peer tutors to learn the student writer's intentions and in turn allows the student writer to think through ideas in new ways and draw their own conclusions. Most importantly it equips the student writers with questions which, in turn, will help them revise their writing independently and put them in control of their own writing (Greenfield, 2002 online).

Working as a peer tutor, Ryan (2002) advises, one needs to maintain professionalism and certain aspects of the role of peer tutoring need to be clarified. The student writer, research has shown (Gillespie & Lerner, 2003:22-23), should retain ownership of his/her work and consequently the peer tutor must ensure that no part of the paper is written for the student writer (Ryan, 2002). Professionalism is maintained by avoiding discussing possible assessments for papers, or criticising assessments given by lecturers, or commenting negatively on lecturers, policies and practices. In addition, the tutoring process and relationship, built on mutual trust (Gillespie & Lerner, 2003:8), should remain confidential (Ryan 2002:1-3).

The development of a good relationship between peer tutor and student writer is important. Research has shown (Bruffee, cited by Trimbur in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:292) that student writers are far more open to entering into a tutoring situation with a peer than with a person 'in authority'. Though one should not consider a peer tutor to be a replacement for the lecturer, some student writers work best in the absence of authority and thus this relationship needs to be fostered to ensure that the tutorial interaction, an interaction equally shared between peers, is valuable (Ibid. 292), as collaborative learning is meant to be a chance for the student writer to gain knowledge and skills via a learning technique that is very different from the traditional classroom setting. As Piaget (online) pointed out, collaborative learning has a major role in constructive cognitive development. His theory is consistent with other popular learning theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Fox & Karen, Thomas & Funaro, 1990, online) in emphasising the importance of collaboration.

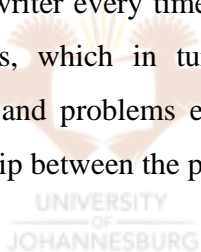
Murphy and Sherwood (2003:1) outline the principles of peer tutoring as contextual, collaborative, interpersonal, and individualized. Tutoring is contextual in that it takes place within a number of socio-cultural and interpersonal contexts. Collaborative tutoring draws on an interpersonal relationship with a body of knowledge and various techniques with two people working towards a common goal. Interpersonal behaviour impacts on and affects the development of a good tutoring relationship built on trust, insight and rapport (Gillespie & Lerner, 2003:8). To develop this relationship, Ryan (2002) suggests that peer tutors use, in combination, the powerful tools of active listening, facilitating by responding as a reader and learning to remain silent, allowing a writer time to think. Active listening involves understanding and giving feedback to the student writer by paraphrasing what has been said, thereby clarifying ideas, checking perceptions and then asking open-ended questions which will allow for expansion of ideas. Body language, gestures and eye contact during this intervention also communicate interest and involvement (Ryan, 2002:17-22).

Murphy (in Murphy & Lay, 2003:96-100), on the other hand, highlights the fact that many student writers come to the writing centre at the request of their supervisors/lecturers or they, themselves, have identified that they need help with writing. The peer tutor takes on a “supportive and affective” role (Ibid. 97) where concern, empathy and a ready desire to help is displayed. Murphy compares the student writer in this scenario to that of a client in therapy (Rogers as cited in Murphy in Murphy & Lay, 2003:97) where the student writer is “hurt” and shows insecurities about his/her writing, “exhibit[ing] behaviour patterns of anxiety, self-doubt, negative cognition and procrastination”. The importance of developing an interpersonal relationship is vital to ensure that the student writer feels “safe, secure, free from threat, and supported” (Murphy, in Murphy & Lay 2003:98), with the peer tutor communicating “warmth, genuineness, and accurate empathy” (Ibid. 98).

Facilitating by responding as a reader, the peer tutor is able to invite the student writer to respond to questions which request more information or clarification, to develop critical awareness by taking into account audience and purpose, to rethink and refocus the writing and even prompt the student writer to continue a particular line of thinking or take into account an added dimension (Ryan, 2002:17-22). Giving ‘time-out’ to the student writer by remaining silent, which could be a problematic one for some peer tutors, allows the student writer effective thinking and reflective

time, or as Bruffee (in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:208) describes it, time to “internalize conversation”. If a question takes a student writer by surprise he/she may brush it aside or respond to it by reflecting. This “reflection-in-action” is a critical function, which questions the assumptional structure of knowing-in-action and he/she may restructure strategies of action, understandings of phenomena or ways of framing problems. Reflection gives rise to on-the-spot experimentation to trial a new action, to test tentative understandings and affirm moves he/she has invented to improve the situation (Schön, 1987:28). Thus, pedagogical advantages of peer tutoring include more active, interactive and participative learning, immediate feedback, swift prompting, lowered anxiety with correspondingly higher self-disclosure, and greater student ownership of the learning process (Ryan, 2002:17-22).

Peer tutoring should take into account various learning styles as well as understanding that each tutoring session is unique and individual in that no single method or approach will work effectively for every student writer (Ibid. 17-22). However, Keyzerman (2002, online) writes that the peer tutor, working with the same student writer every time, allows the development of a relationship where they learn each other’s styles, which in turn can help develop trust and facilitate communication. All of the situations and problems encountered in tutoring sessions can, thus, benefit from a close working relationship between the peer tutor and the student writer.



An understanding of these aspects of interpersonal behaviour is crucial in the developing of a peer tutor and forms a part of an accredited training programme. My research into USA writing centres or writing programmes has revealed that they have been in existence since the 1970s, and consequently in the majority of universities where writing centres are part of the institution, writing and thus peer tutoring/tutoring programmes are developed and run as part of the English faculty. These courses are accredited, such as the programme at Marquette University which is designed to help explore and understand the processes involved in writing and to help students become peer tutors at the Writing Centre, applying the knowledge gained in the course to help other students improve their writing. To accomplish these goals, papers from researchers and theorists about writing as well teaching in a conference setting, is examined. Within the ideology of “reflective practice”, peer tutors reflect on these theories, observing, examining, and reflecting upon their own experiences as writers and tutors, as well as the practice of writing, learning and tutoring through dialogue in staff meetings, a case study and personal reflective writings.

Training for the Writing Across the Curriculum programme at Brown University has the writing fellows following a full credit course called “Seminar in the Theory and Practice in Teaching Composition”. Theoretical aspects such as the role of the peer tutor, the issue of authority in education, the ways in which an academic audience and academic evaluation practices can affect developing writers, various methods of investigating and describing differences among the disciplinary discourse, and the influence of gender and culture on the peer tutoring and writing processes are addressed. The practical component includes working as a writing fellow in the Writing Across the Curriculum programme.

Described above are just two examples of programmes currently being offered at universities (online). As Bruffee (cited in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:216) has stated, tutors should undergo an effective training course which generally tends to be collaborative (Bruffee, 1998:86). Most of the courses examined (see bibliography for full list) seem to consist of a theoretical aspect which includes readings taken from texts such as *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference* (Harris); *A Short Course in Writing*; (Clark); *Teaching in a Writing Center Setting* (Bruffee); *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Ryan); *The St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* (Murphy & Lay); *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring* (Gillespie and Lerner); *The Writing Teacher’s Sourcebook* (Tate, Corbett, and Myers); *Revising Prose* (Lanham), as well as texts from discourse and writing theorists. The practical aspect of the programme includes observations of tutoring as well as a stipulated period of peer tutoring. Assignments could include reflective responses, tutoring logs, recording of class observations, case studies, communication on the web, and narratives.

In comparison, South African writing centres are still in their infancy [when a Writing Centre Forum was organized in 1998, most writing centres were only about four years old, which means that at present, 2006, writing centres are just over a decade old (Nichols, 1998:91)]. No accredited tutor training programmes have as yet been developed but communication on the South African listserv. (write-now@mail3.sun.ac.za) has resulted in the Western Cape writing centre personnel attending a contact session on 26 August 2005 to discuss tutor training, which was the forerunner for discussion sessions at the South African Academic Development Association (SAADA) in December 2005.

Nichols (1998: 86-87) at the University of the Witwatersrand, has developed a six week training course for her writing centre tutors. She adapted what she had learned in the USA to the South African context. Two sessions are undertaken each week. One session is devoted to reading and theory to help understand, internalize and monitor practice. The second session is the practical component involving either role play or writing. Nichols posits that by going through the process of either writing or consulting, the tutors become better writers and tutors

Other aspects addressed in Nichols' tutor training programme include the introduction to ideas of the social nature of language, the idea of language as thinking, the principles and goals of a writing consultation, the role of audience, the activities of a consultation with an emphasis on the role and nature of effective questioning, strategies of tutoring, including the discussion of error analysis, questions of cultural translation, discussion of evaluation and the promotion of self-evaluation. Important, too is a discussion of ethics and logistics. Tutors are also requested to attend a weekly staff meeting, reporting on tutoring sessions thus ensuring self-monitoring (1998: 86-87). Self-monitoring through reflective practice seems to pervade writing centre practice at all levels.

2.4.1 Reflective practice

Peer tutors are encouraged to develop different levels of reflective practice. Knowing, Schön (1987:26) states, leads to spontaneous knowing-in-action and helps us recognise, decide and adjust without having to think about it, but he suggests that reflection-on-action, or critical enquiry, should be used in evaluating peer tutoring experiences. Developing Schön's idea, Yancey (2002) suggests engaging tutors in reflective letters, e-mails on writing centre practice, tutor logs, formal writing assignments that build on reflective activities and portfolios that include a cumulative, reflective text. This personal reflection should then lead to discussion in staff meetings and inform writing centre practice as described in the models of peer tutoring practice (Rimm, online; Ryan, 2002; Gillespie & Lerner, 2003; Marquette University, online; Brown's Writing Fellows, online) outlined in this review, as well as others listed in the bibliography, but not described in detail.

Abascal-Hildebrand (1994 in Mullin & Wallace) drawing on the writings of Gadamer (1975),

suggest that peer tutors develop the kind of understanding which is needed in the interpretation and translation for students' writings as a means to learn. Abascal-Hildrebrand proposes that tutoring is based within "a philosophical hermeneutic perspective" (1994:173) and consequently new tutors should eagerly embrace the practice of reflecting more readily whilst more experienced tutors will, through reflection, easily move toward higher levels of understanding. This leads to reflective tutors interpreting and translating more consciously, which develops their thinking and allows them to interpret what they believe the students are attempting to write by trying "to get inside the other person in order to understand his point of view..." (Ibid. 174). This resultant understanding then allows the student writer and the peer tutor to move forward in conversation, described by Bernstein (1983) as "true" conversation.

When tutors and students create conversation about the assignment and the course it reflects, they engage in a linguistic realm where they interpret and translate for one another; it is a realm in which they do not specifically plan their thoughts and actions. Their conversation centers around relevant meanings that are both tacit and acknowledged, and that are based on the relationship they create by virtue of their sitting and talking together. These conversations are guided by the participant's rationality concerning one another and the writing process (Abascal-Hildrebrand, 1994:177).



By talking the same language, the peer tutor and the student writer get to the very heart of the act of tutoring, talking about the writing, reflecting about the writing, questioning, responding, clarifying and re-learning. This process of reading, interpreting and translating enlarges the horizon of understanding for both the tutor and the student by their interaction (Abascal-Hildrebrand, 1994:180-182).

2.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have attempted to develop a theoretical framework for peer tutoring. In understanding the iterative nature of the writing process, and the need to gain entry into the academic community of the higher education institution, the peer tutor, within the community of the writing centre, through conversation and in collaboration, socially constructs knowledge which scaffolds the student writer through this process of writing.

In Chapter 3 I describe my research design and the research methodology embarked upon and the tools used to collect data.



CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the research design, which is an arrangement of conditions, or “an action plan for getting from here to there” (Yin, 1984:28) for the collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to “combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure” (Selltiz, et al. 1960:50 cited in Mouton & Marais, 1996:32) is described and discussed. Henning, et al. state that there must be “design logic” which shows “the coherence of epistemology, research questions and methods of inquiry” (2004:141). My research is located within a broad interpretivist research paradigm which implies that I have looked at “different places and different things in order to understand a phenomenon” (Henning, et al. 2004:20). Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:6) state if the researcher “believes that the reality to be studied consists of people’s subjective experiences of the world, he may adopt an inter-subjective or interactional epistemological stance toward that reality and use methodologies such as interviewing and participant observation” referred to by Creswell (2003:8) as the goal of research “rely[ing] as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied”.



As the purpose of this study is to understand the role that the peer tutor plays in developing conversations with postgraduate writers, I argue that the research fits into an interpretive-descriptive paradigm used by Belenky (1992, cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:123) where the “methods of inquiry should ultimately lead to interpretation (*verstehen*)” (Henning, et al. 2004:142). This study falls into the qualitative research paradigm and takes the form of a multi-faceted case study.

The design process should be iterative (Henning, et al. 2004:143) constantly checking to ensure that the gathered data is eliciting the findings or type of information that is necessary for answering the research questions (see Figure 3.1).

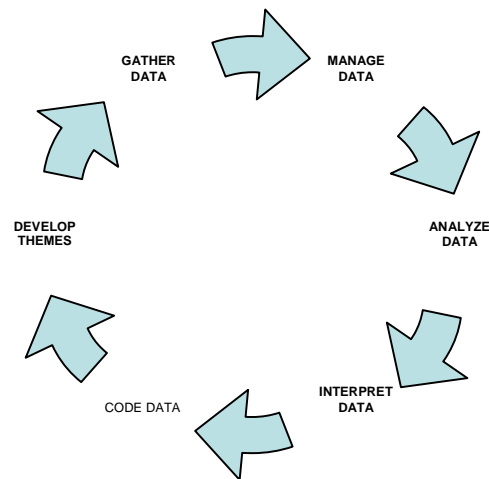


Figure 3.1 : ITERATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

A case study may either take the form of quantitative research or qualitative research (Henning, et al. 2004:32). This case study, however, takes the form of qualitative research which takes place in natural and everyday life with the aim of studying a phenomenon, in this study the role of the peer tutor, holistically in the everyday context of university academic writing support (Esterhuizen, 1995:10). Qualitative research is a “quest” for understanding (Henning, et al. 2004:3) a phenomenon from a participant’s perspective as he/she makes meaning of his/her world (Merriam, 2002: xv) and involves collecting information in the form of words about human experiences. Qualitative research, a methodical study of socially organised settings (Miller & Dingwall (1997:3), depends on the collection of narrative-type, detailed data to result in a richly descriptive report of words and pictures which conveys what the researcher has lived, felt, undergone or learnt (Merriam, 1998:6, 2002: 5) or from which the researcher’s meanings or motives can be analysed.

3.2.1 The role of the researcher

As the peer tutor/researcher who understands the aim of the research, I was able to respond and adapt to a situation when collecting data (Merriam, 2002:5) drawing on my own experience and familiarity with the setting (Melia in Miller & Dingwall, 1997:26), and being aware of the “emic perspective” (Merriam, 1998:6). The “emic perspective” will be enhanced when, according to Merriam (1998:8), a researcher spends a considerable amount of time in the setting of the research

and in addition has “intense” contact with, or “gets very close” to the participants (Jarvis, 1999:79). In addition Jarvis explains that the practitioner-researcher’s “innermost feeling, values, beliefs and sense of identity all form part of the research as well as the learning and practical reasoning processes that the practitioner-researcher undergoes” (1999:76). Working as a peer tutor with postgraduate writers in the writing support centre developed and enhanced this “emic perspective” through contact and interaction with students, and facilitated the collection of data using a variety of tools.

3.3 THE CASE STUDY

The design of this research project takes the form of a case study in the context of the Postgraduate Writing Support Centre of the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg. A case study, according to Merriam (1998:19), is used to gain in-depth understanding of a particular situation and meaning for those involved, interest being in the “process rather than the outcome, ... in discovery rather than confirmation”, a “description of *how, where, when and why* things happen (Henning, et al. (2004:41). Thus, a case study is an investigation of a phenomenon, found in a “bounded system” (Stake, 1995:2) which may be a set of people “bounded by parameters and that shows a specific dynamic and relevance, revealing information that can be captured within these boundaries” (Henning, et al. 2004:32). Stake (1995, cited in Creswell, 2003:15) explains that in a case study the researcher “collects detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” and Yin (1984) points out that the choice of a multiple- or single-case study approach or an exploratory, descriptive or explanatory strategy depends on the aims and objectives of the specific research study.

This study explored the case of the role of the peer tutor in developing conversations of knowledge with postgraduate writers through one-on-one tutoring, workshop tutoring and online tutoring, and consequently a multi-faceted study method was identified as the most logical research strategy. Henning, et al. (2004:40) suggest that a researcher using specific questions should set those boundaries which would define ‘a case’ by identifying the people, the unit of analysis, the phenomenon to be studied, the time involved, the activities and events to be included and the research methods to be used.

3.3.1 Case study boundaries

This case study, “the main means that practitioner-researchers employ in seeking to research ... ephemeral events” Jarvis (1999:75), thus investigated the phenomenon of peer tutoring, with postgraduate students. Henning, et al. (2004:4) explains that in research the most important element is not the setting but rather the people themselves, “who can travel ...on the journey towards more knowledge about the topic”. Consequently, there is a need to select participants who can “shed optimal light on the issue” under investigation. In the search for understanding the role that the peer tutor plays in developing conversations with postgraduate writers, the unit of analysis then is the interaction between the tutors, both experienced and peer tutors and the postgraduate student writers during the writing of research proposals. Tutoring of student writers during the process of writing their research proposals took place in a one-on-one situation, during a workshop and online over the course of about 12 months. During this time data was collected by means of observation, the filling in of questionnaires, individual interviews and analysis of ‘before’ and ‘after’ research proposals, as described in 3.5 of this chapter. More about the actual case study will be narrated in Chapter 4.



3.4 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Collection of data arose from what I saw, heard or read (Melia in Dingwall, 1997:34) in contact and interaction with the postgraduate student writers, the tools being observations through participant observations and active participation in the tutoring process, questionnaires completed before and after tutoring sessions or workshops, interviews with selected student writers and the analysis of documents such as the ‘before’ and ‘after’ research proposals as well as the literature in an attempt to understand the role of the peer tutor in writing support.

3.5.1 Observation

“Observation is about using your eyes first, ears second”

(Kelly, cited in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:395)

An understanding of the phenomenon of peer tutoring began with observing both the experienced tutor and the student writers in their one-on-one tutor sessions (Merriam, 1998:95), being the participant observer, attempting as Maykut and Morehouse (1994:69) explain, to enter the lives of

those he/she is researching or using Polanyi's term: "indwell", in tutoring student writers. This formed the "sample" as described by Henning, et al. (2004:71) as people who "travel on the journey" with me as "desirable participants" and lead to a better theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. Kidder (1981:264 cited in Merriam, 1998:94-95) states that observation serves a formulated research purpose when it is deliberately planned and recorded systematically. The researcher, in the observation process, focused on certain aspects described as "a prepared stage for acting" (Henning, et al. 2004:81) as an initial broad focus of inquiry but through the ongoing process of observing and participating in the setting, recording what is seen and heard, and then analyzing the data which will inform further observations (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:69).

As the participant researcher, "functioning as a member of the community undergoing investigation and an investigator" (Glesne, 1999:44), I focused on understanding the role that the peer tutor plays with regard to various tutoring approaches by taking note of the physical setting, the participants, the activities and interactions, the conversations, any subtle factors as well as the researcher's behaviour and how it affects the scene (Merriam, 1998:97-98). Participant observation allowed the opportunity for learning firsthand how the actions and behaviours of the participants contrasted with their words (Glesne, 1999:43), and as the approach to this study is interpretive, the phenomenon was studied in as naturalistic a setting as possible (Terre Blanche & Kelly cited in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:134). The main outcome of participant observation was an understanding of the research setting, its participants and their behaviour (Ibid. 45) or as Erickson (1973 cited in Glesne, 1999:46) explains "seek[ing] to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange".

Critics, however, have stated that participant observation tends to be "subjective" and is deemed too selective based on human perception (Maykut, & Morehouse, 1994; Merriam, 1998:95, 2000; Creswell, 2004), but Henning, et al. (2004:82) suggest that the researcher observes and records in such a way as to focus on what he/she is researching. In the case of a participant researcher, Henning, et al. (2004:85) found the experience of value allowing the researcher to construct knowledge in a similar manner to which the participants are experiencing it. Being a full or active participant observer in this study, as the peer tutor, allowed me to put into practice what writing centre manuals and peer tutoring guides authored by Ryan (2002), Murphy and Sherwood (2003) and Gillespie and Lerner (2004), have advocated as the role of a peer tutor and the method of

tutoring. Thus, in this study, I saw my role as important as I was able to construct knowledge (Creswell, 2004:18) from the point of view of the researcher, the peer tutor as well as a student, writing my own postgraduate research paper with the support of the writing centre.

Being an observer in participant observations and an active participant led me to record my observations in descriptive notes separating detail from trivia aimed at a disciplined recording of field notes (Patton, 1990:201 cited in Merriam, 1998:95) from both observed and tutored sessions in a research journal (Harris, 2001: accessed online). Terre Blanche and Kelly (cited in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:137-139) suggest focussing on the research question but remaining open to unexpected information and unusual happenings. However, Glesne, (1999:46) reminds the participant observer to constantly analyse the observations for meaning, reflecting on ideas which may be developing about the phenomenon under study (Terre Blanche and Kelly, cited in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:138). This unit of analysis (Henning, et al. 2004:71), the conversation interaction between student and tutor, through comprehensive detailed field notes, rendered “thick description” (Henning, et al. 2004:85) which resulted in a descriptive study (Durrheim cited in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:39).

3.5.2 Questionnaires

Apart from observations, the development of a rich, thick description (Merriam, 1998:151) was aided by the filling in of an administrative information form (see Appendix C), required by writing centre policy, by each student who visits the writing support centre. General information such as the course for which he/she is registered, the specialisation, supervisor/tutor, gender, age range and reasons for visit are recorded by the student. After the session, the tutor records salient points about the student’s writing and the support given as well as noting suggestions for further revisions. On the reverse side, the student were requested to fill in an interpretive assessment questionnaire of the writing session requesting a description of what occurred during the sessions, what was most useful about the visit, and what was the most surprising aspect of the tutoring session (see Appendix C). Questionnaires are considered useful tools for collecting data from a large number of respondents (Hinds cited in Wilkinson, 2000: 42) especially a particular group or people in a particular situation such as the tutoring session in the writing support centre. Gillham (2000:1) states that used in conjunction with other methods of data collection, questionnaires “have their place as one method of most value”.

These questionnaires were adapted for use during the proposal workshop, containing both closed and open-ended questions (Gillham, 2000:4). The student writers were requested to fill in a pre-workshop structured questionnaire (Gillham, 2004:3) containing closed questions which asked for basic background information and then led them to focus on the reason for their attendance at the workshop and what they hoped to achieve in the week. At the end of the week's workshop, the student writers were again requested to fill in a questionnaire, this time a semi-structured post-workshop questionnaire (Gillham, 2004:3), which asked for further background information then it required the student writers to identify the stage of writing of their research proposal they found themselves pre-workshop. A checklist of writing skills with which the student writers were expecting support was also completed. Further questions involved the student writers recording their own ideas about the usefulness of the workshop, the most surprising aspects of the workshop, a description of their experience in writing their proposal in this manner and finally any suggestions that they could offer to inform further workshops. A restricted amount of space (5 lines) was allowed for the responses which ensured that the student writers focussed on what they needed to say (Gillham, 2000:22). Data collected from the questionnaires was used with the observations and interviews to help triangulate the data.

3.5.3 Interviews

“If you want to know how people understand their world and their life,
why not talk to them?”

(Kvale, 1996 cited in Esterhuizen, 1995:79)

Informal interviews or conversations may often take place when one is a participant observer (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:79) even though at the time one may not realise it. However, to gain in-depth knowledge and thus understanding from the participant's perspective, an interview or a “conversation with a purpose” (Berg, 1989; Dexter, 1970; Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:79) may be arranged. Merriam (1998) explains that interviewing tends to be the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals especially if the researcher wishes to “move beyond the surface talk to a rich discussion of thoughts and feelings (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:80). To accomplish this aim, I interviewed three participants all of whom attended the research proposal workshop and filled in

the pre- and post-workshop questionnaires. Each participant was at a different level of education: Bachelor of Education, Master of Education and a Doctorate in Education which helped develop an understanding “at a deeper level, their [the student writer’s] perceptions related to the phenomenon under study” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:81).

The interviews were scheduled and were conducted individually, with the interview being recorded on tape. The semi-structured interview (Merriam, 1998: 72-74) was chosen as this ensures that particular questions are defined beforehand, giving a basic framework for the interview, yet there is flexibility for open-ended questions and probing questions (Merriam, 1998:80) based on the response of the participant during the interview leading to further exploration. Merriam (1998) cautions that in order to elicit good responses, good questions need to be asked.

Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin (1981, cited in Merriam, 1998: 76-81) have formulated a list of four main categories of questions which could be used in an interview to stimulate responses from a participant. *Hypothetical questions* ask the respondent what they might do in a particular situation and usually begin with ‘What if ...’ hoping to elicit information of what it was actually like for the participant. *Devil’s advocate questions* are useful if the topic is controversial and participant’s opinions and feelings are wanted. Questioning could begin with “Some people say what would you say?”. *Ideal position questions* ask the respondent to describe an ideal situation to elicit both information and opinion and *interpretive questions* provide a check on what has already been said with a view to reinforcement of understanding. Using this framework of types of questions (Merriam, 1998: 76-81), as well as an understanding of the idea of probing and the value of “silences” (Merriam, 1998:80), I developed my interview guide building some element of data analysis into the data collection process itself, for example by using some pre-coded questions in the interview schedule. Questions such as *How did you hear about the writing workshop?; How well prepared were you for the week’s work?; What were your expectations for the week?; What if you had not had the opportunity to attend the workshop. What progress do you think you would have made on your own?; Some people say that students should manage on their own without the support of the writing centre or a tutor What would you say?; Thinking back over the time you have spent on your studies, what would be an ideal situation for students?* I have also included questions that have emerged from the analysis of data collected

through observation and questionnaires as well as ideas and queries developed through reflection on my role as a peer tutor over a period of time and asked questions such as: *Can you briefly describe your experiences during the week?; Can you elaborate on how you see the role of tutor?; What was interesting, most enjoyable, most valuable about writing your proposal during a workshop?; Can you personally analyze what you gained from the week. Positive/negative?; What do you see as the role of the tutor in the writing of research proposals?* (Appendix F).

3.5.4 Document Analysis

Document analysis (Merriam, 1998:120) includes materials of the broadest sense of communication (Ibid, 112), and included the research journal, student writers' writing ('before' and 'after' research proposals) and any seemingly insignificant data collected during interactions with student writers. Analysis followed which should have lead to an understanding of the role that the peer tutor plays in giving the writing support needed by students as well as their responses or reactions to the process and the effectiveness of the tutoring. Henning, et al. (2004:99) state that documents, even hand-written documents, are a valuable source of information, and should be included in the design. Document analysis consists of using skills and intuition to find and interpret data from the documents by thinking creatively about the problem and asking a variety of searching questions related to the research problem (Merriam, 1998:120-121).

Data collection and analysis, according to Merriam (1998:152), is a simultaneous activity in qualitative research and consequently analysis should begin with the first observation, questionnaire, interview transcript or document read. This process of data collection and data analysis is "interactive" (ibid.151), "iterative" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:31), "recursive and dynamic" (Merriam, 1998:155) where emerging ideas and insight directs the next phase. Data collection through varied tutoring approaches is described in 3.6 'The Case' and analysis of data is described in Chapter 4.

3.6 'THE CASE'

This case study looked at various approaches to tutoring during the writing of research proposals at postgraduate level in the Faculty of Education. Therefore, a multi-faceted case study was developed by investigating the role of the peer tutor during

- ❖ One-on-one sessions
- ❖ Group workshops and
- ❖ Online tutoring.

3.6.1 The participants

Most of the student writers who visit the Postgraduate Writing Centre are working on their research proposals, theses or dissertations, the culmination of their postgraduate experiences. However, before any research may be undertaken, a research proposal must be submitted for approval by the Higher Degrees' Committee and the Faculty Academic Ethics Committee. These student writers who seek to ensure that their work appears in the most readable format for approval by such a committee and later perhaps, their research for publication purposes, visit the writing centre at various stages during the writing process, constitute my sample. Using purposive sampling, according to Merriam (1998:61-62) enabled me to “discover, understand and gain insight” and allowed me to select a sample from which “the most can be learned”. I elected to use postgraduate student writers who are involved in writing their research proposals. Keyzerman (online) states “in my experience, [post]graduate students are usually involved and receptive to suggestions for improvement because they have more invested in their work than, for example, a freshman composition student would. This involvement makes the consultation experience rewarding for the student and the consultant”.

On the other hand, the sampling is random, in that those student writers who voluntarily “drop-in” for a consultation, attend the workshop or send their proposals via e-mail are not purposively selected.

3.6.2 One-on-one sessions

At the beginning of my postgraduate studies, the Postgraduate Writing Support Centre at the University of Johannesburg was recommended where group or individual consultations about written work could be obtained. During the course of my first year I visited the writing centre regularly for support as I was a ‘returning, mature’ student who was not really confident with writing and not at all sure of what was expected of written assignments. Those one-on-one tutoring sessions became the first ‘observations’ for my research, although I did not realise it at the time.

Observations according to Merriam (1998), help understand our world and when planned deliberately and recorded systematically, can be used as a research tool (Kidder 1981, cited in Merriam, 1998:95). Having been “thrown into the deep end” (Bruffee cited in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:216) with no tutor training, I needed to understand how to tutor a one-on-one session. I began with observing the tutor in his tutoring sessions first as an observer, later as a participant observer and, as I gained in confidence, as an active participant in one-on-one tutoring sessions.

Henning, et al. (2004:85) as previously stated, find the experience of being a participant/active observer extremely valuable as it allows the researcher to construct knowledge in a similar manner to which the participants are experiencing it and Merriam (1998:96) writes that time, money and energy should be devoted to the observation process. The positive in my case is that I was able to observe over an extended period of time (from October 2004 to November 2005) as I was employed as a peer tutor in the Postgraduate Writing Support Centre. Merriam (1998:97-98) provides a checklist to help in the observations which include the physical setting, the participants, the activities and interactions, the conversations, subtle factors which come into play as well as the observer’s own behaviour.

My first observations included the physical environment in which the tutoring was to take place and the equipment it contained:



THE POSTGRADUATE WRITING SUPPORT CENTRE

Set within the Faculty of Education this reasonably sized room is equipped with a conference table and chairs, five computers, desks and chairs and some reference material. Being a small centre, only one tutor is employed, with myself as the peer tutor.

Postgraduate students visit the centre by appointment or sometimes on a 'drop-in' basis. Consultations are initially carried out around the table and are begun with the tutor introducing him/herself and then asking the student writer to fill in the Student Visit form (Appendix B). The student writers visiting the centre are postgraduate students who are full-time teachers completing either their Master's or Doctorate Degrees part time. Although the random selection of students who make use of this support facility are of varying ages, both genders and of many cultures, the general characteristics of the student writers seem to be mature students who are English 2nd language speakers needing support with their writing. However, the exception to the rule is that a "good" student may "pop-in" and ask for his/her paper to be read just for validation and confirmation that what they have written has achieved the criteria for that particular aspect of their assignment.

A one-on-one session will begin with the tutor asking the student writer to explain the reason for the visit. In some cases the student writer has no idea where to start and needs guidance in reading the assignment question, understanding it and then formulating what is required of them although the tutors should not be expected to know the answers to these questions that they ask. Greenfield (online) states that tutorials are a learning experience in which the tutor helps the student writer, through questioning, sort out his/her ideas that might not yet be clear and even elicit new or fresh ideas. Constructive questioning allows the tutor to learn student writers' intentions without imposing his/her own interpretations; it allows the writers to think through ideas in new ways and draw their own conclusions; it equips the writers with questions that will help them to revise on their own and devise their own strategies for revision; it puts the student writers in control of their tutorials; and it provides opportunities to discuss the content rather than just the grammar (Greenfield, online).

Tutoring involves either working with a hard copy of the student writer's work or an electronic copy. Either way, the student writer and the tutor interact and become involved in a conversation about the writing and content of the writing. A conversation is a two-way interaction with

someone speaking and someone listening thus the most effective tutorials are those in which the tutor and the student are both comfortable and willing to communicate with one other. Merriam (1998:97-98) suggests that other subtle factors to observe during a tutorial include non-verbal behaviour and non-verbal communication either by the student writer and the tutor or between the two. As tutorials do not follow a set pattern, sometimes informal unplanned activities take place which will aid understanding in the tutorial. Something I had to take into consideration according to Merriam (1998) was my own behaviour as tutor during a tutorial and my thoughts during the observations.

The tutorial usually extends over a period of 30 to 45 minutes and depending on at what stage the student writer is with his/her work, the tutorial could become a conversation with the student writer and tutor discussing issues, or if the student writer has managed to progress with the writing, the tutorial could develop with both tutor and student writer sitting at the computer reading and revising.

The collection of data from one-on-one tutoring sessions resulted in observations being recorded in my research journal, questionnaires completed by students before the start of a tutoring session and once tutoring is complete and lastly incidental data collected in my research journal. These data are analyzed and discussed in Chapter 4.

3.6.3 Group workshop

A unique opportunity to conduct a week-long workshop with a group of 16 postgraduate students, who had yet to complete or revise and successfully submit their research proposals, was offered to me. This workshop, which involved the students collaboratively working on their proposals, formed a case study and became an investigation of a phenomenon, found in a “bounded system” (Stake, 1995:2). Jarvis (1999:77) explains that a case study is both about the process of learning about and researching the specific phenomenon under investigation and about the product of that learning and research. He states that case study research is primarily conducted by practitioner-researchers in relation to their own practice

The students participating in the workshop consisted of three PhD. students, ten M.Ed. students

and three B.Ed. students from the Faculty of Education, and were thus considered a group of people “bounded by parameters and that shows a specific dynamic and relevance, revealing information that can be captured within these boundaries” (Henning, et al. 2004:32). The outcome was that at the end of the week, the students would be able to submit complete and revised proposals to their supervisors.

The research proposal workshop, conducted with the mentorship, support and collaboration of the experienced tutor of the Postgraduate Writing Support Centre, was planned daily. Initially explanations were given on understanding the importance of the research proposal in providing focus for the research, understanding the processes and procedures as well as the format of the proposal (University of Johannesburg, nd.). Use was made of Mouton, (2001) *How to succeed in your Master's & Doctoral Studies* and Creswell, (2003) *Research Design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* in the preparation of the workshop. The first two days were spent in the writing centre with the student writers involved in discussions with their peers and then with the writing of the beginning sections of their proposals (Appendix G and H).

The remaining three days were spent in the computer laboratory with the student writers working on their research proposals but with the support of the tutors as well as collaboration, when needed, with their peers. A full description of the workshop is given with analysis from the data gathered from a pre-workshop questionnaire, a post-workshop questionnaire and my observations recorded in a research journal and is discussed in Chapter 4.

3.6.3 Online Tutoring

Online Tutoring, designed for a distinct purpose, according to Dawson (online), has the unique challenge of pioneering a new area in peer-tutoring. Student writers may send their writing via e-mail or post their writing on Web CT and the peer tutor will respond. Writing centre authors such as Trimbur state that there is a limit to the amount of feedback that online tutoring can offer because this feedback is mostly of a general nature (cited in Dawson, online). However, Gillespie and Lerner (2004:161) state that initially there seems to be a contrast to the face-to-face tutoring where questioning and listening are utilized and a conversation is developed, but when the same principals of one-on-one tutoring are applied, online tutoring can be successful, even if the

turnaround time is often delayed (Dawson, online)

This type of cyber-tutoring can offer a format for "individualized instruction" (Dawson, online) and even though face-to-face contact is non-existent, the peer tutor can build up a relationship through conversing with the student writer, encouraging maximum interaction or 'conversation' (Archer, 2005). Crump (cited in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:243) explains that writing centres steeped in print culture thus move into a new dimension where living, conversing writers create their space of a virtual writing environment "captur[ing] the chance to be immersed in conversation, to generate energy, and to capture the moment".

Responding to the student writer for a variety of purposes is a way of starting a discussion about the content of the paper, or react as a reader or as an expert offering specific knowledge (Gillespie & Lerner, 2004:162). A peer tutor, responding online to the writing as a reader should use effective in-depth questioning and avoid the temptation to revert to 'edit-mode' and spend excessive time revising the paper. The student writer should learn through the process of writing by being able to take the peer tutor's responses and work with them (Gillespie & Lerner, 2004:163).

In addition to the postgraduate student writers who attended the research proposal workshop, there were two other groups involved in the process of writing their research proposals at varying stages. The research proposals were e-mailed to the writing centre and then using either the 'track changes' tool on the computer to highlight areas needing change or to identify changes made, the 'insert comment' tool or a self-devised tool, comments were made and suggestions given to help the student revise his/her own paper. Once the paper has been responded to, it is saved with the original, in the student's file on the computers in the writing centre and then sent back via email or posted on Web CT.

As approaches to developing writing at tertiary level have changed and writing at this level is viewed as part of the thinking process in exploring and constructing knowledge (Quinn, 1999:210), student writers benefit greatly through constructive feedback (Quinn, 1999; Carless, 2006). Feedback, which is central to student learning, has been seen as playing a decisive role in learning and development (Carless, 2006) giving the student a far clearer idea of how they are doing and where they need to improve (Hounsell 2003, cited in Carless, 2006). Carless (2006)

does write that student writers seem more interested in the mark rather than the remarks which the lecturer offers; however, at postgraduate level when the student writer is involved in writing a research proposal for admission to further study, constructive feedback may greatly help the student writer revise his/her proposal.

However, the development of a discussion forum between writers and the tutor on Web CT or a discussion interaction between the student writer and tutor is important. Both tutors and student writers should “rely on these forums to engage and interact with one another in ways that potentially promote content understanding, higher order thinking skills, cooperative and collaborative learning” (Kaur, online). Examples of feedback could include the planning of their proposal could be given as well as having the format or structure of the proposal explained more clearly taking into account introductions, conclusions, and clear links between ideas. Conventions of academic writing being made explicit will help the student writer express his knowledge although some student writers may need help with sorting out their ideas, realising what is important to their specific topic in order to provide an explicit and clear context for the ideas which they present. Feedback could also be given on how to provide evidence for statements or assumptions in their writing. Fundamental questions of when to quote and when not to, and clarification of what is considered plagiarism, and why, rather than the mechanical aspects of referencing can also be included. The understanding of how to formulate and develop an argument, as well as the use of cohesive devices such as signposting, and the linking of paragraphs may need to be addressed. Student writers should be helped to develop the balance between allowing their “voice” to be heard as well as ensuring the author’s opinion is being expressed. Student writers also need to be encouraged to see writing as a process where their thoughts and ideas are clarified and extended (Rhodes, 2003).

Responding to student writing, it is hoped, will make the writer more aware of what is expected using the set criteria to self-assess and to become critical readers of their own writing (Rhodes, 2003; Quinn, 1999: 23-24; Carless, 2006, 2). However, Carlson and Apperson-Williams (cited in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003: 232-242) write about the concerns of peer tutors who value the face-to-face interaction with students and find it difficult to build a similar relationship with their online students. Another issue raised by these authors is the difficulty of responding in text which is explicit and descriptive enough for the student writer to make the necessary revisions to the

writing, without misunderstanding the peer tutor's intent, which was the case in one cited incident.

In this study, the first group referred to previously consisted of student writers who due to time constraints and distance from the university, could not attend the proposal workshop and elected to work online. The second group of postgraduate writers, with their supervisor, had elected to use Web CT as a communicating medium and regularly post their proposals on the web for peer comment and the Writing Support Centre was invited to participate, which we did regularly.

The data collected from online tutoring were the electronic interactions between the student writers and myself, as a peer tutor, as well as my observations, all of which are recorded in a research journal and will be discussed in Chapter 4.

3.7 CONCLUSION

In order to understand the phenomenon of peer tutoring, I investigated a multi-faceted case study consisting of one-on-one tutoring, workshop tutoring and online tutoring involving postgraduate student writers in the process of writing their research proposals to gain access to further studies. The tools used for collecting data have included observation, participative observation, the completion of questionnaires, interviewing of selected participants and the writing up of a research journal.

The data gathered through the data collection tools was analyzed and the findings discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4 : DATA ANALYSIS AND EXPLANATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I describe how the data collected through observations, questionnaires and interviews was analysed and then using an interpretive framework, I discuss how the data is then interpreted in an attempt to understand the role of the peer tutor in developing conversations with postgraduate writers. As stated in Chapter 3, data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity in qualitative research and consequently analysis should begin with the first observation, questionnaire, interview transcript or document read (Merriam, 1998:152). Because of this “interactive” (ibid.151), “iterative” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:31), “recursive and dynamic” (Merriam, 1998:155) process of data collection and data analysis, emerging ideas and insight direct the next phase.

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is dynamic, a “process of making sense out of the data” (Merriam, 1998:178) “to understand more about a phenomenon of interest” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:121) starting with the reading of the first piece of literature, the field notes from the first observation or the first document studied. Qualitative research, seeking to understand the world through people’s words and actions and through participant experience, helps create an understanding through words. The task of the researcher in data analysis is to find patterns within those words and then present those patterns for inspection while at the same time trying to remain as close to the construction of the world as the participants experienced it (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994: 18). Qualitative data analysis, thus, is “fundamentally a non-mathematical analytical procedure that involves examining the meaning of people’s words and actions” (Ibid., 1994:121).

There are a variety of methods that researchers can use when analyzing their data (Henning, 2004:102), with three approaches being described by Strauss and Corbin (1990 cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:122). The first approach to data analysis involves presenting the data without analysis or interpretation. Descriptive narrative is the second approach which researchers use, which allows for the reconstruction of the data into “a recognizable reality”. The third approach

deals with data analysis for theory building leading to grounded theory. In my study of understanding the role of the peer tutor, my approach to data analysis will be Strauss and Corbin's second approach that relies on "description, recognizing that some interpretation is necessarily involved in the data analysis process" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:123). The term "interpretive-descriptive", used by Belenky (1992, cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:123) characterizes the procedures for data analysis. However, prior to analysis researchers are advised to become "tuned-in" to themselves as the instrument, but taking on the process of *epoche*, described by Katz, (1987:36-7, and cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:123) where the researcher "engages to remove, or at least becomes aware of prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation". This process is significant in that it allows the researcher to view the research from a fresh perspective and "see the experience for itself". Conversely, being aware of how one's biases and preconceptions may influence what one is trying to understand but tends to be paradoxical to the idea of "indwelling", as discussed in Chapter 3.

General guidelines on data analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Merriam, 1988, 1998, 2000; Creswell, 2000; Henning, et al. 2004; online) advise that as analysis is an integral part of the research design process, one needs to think about how to analyse the data when devising the research design. Henning, et al. (2004: 127) maintain that, when analysing data, "we do not use as evidence the frequencies or the quantities with which something occurs, but rather elicit meaning from the data in a systematic, comprehensive and rigorous manner...". If the researcher is proactive (i.e. waiting until all of the data has been collected) rather than reactive about data analysis, conducting analysis "as an early and ongoing research activity" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:123) then he/she may finish up with a mass of material that will be very difficult to process, sort and interpret within a limited time span.

It is therefore important to reduce data to a manageable form by sorting it according to value, relevance and its relationship to other data. Readings from the literature, field note observations and a wide range of documentary materials (Merriam, 2002:143) and intuitive understandings in the field (Merriam, 1998:7, 156) through the process of content analysis, transform disparate bits of information into data. Henning, et al. (2004:138) explain that content analysis begins with the reading or studying of the data to form an overview and "to apprehend the context". For example, the researcher will read the answers to questions on a questionnaire or the transcription of an

interview and mark up the sentences and passages that seem relevant to his/her research question. The next phase involves working with the data, the simultaneous coding of the raw data, by coding segments of meaning, leading to category construction (Merriam, 2002:181). These categories develop from what the participants frequently mention, from the audience deeming it important, by being unique and by revealing something that has not been considered (Ibid. 185), and tend to be the answers to the research questions. These categories into which all data should fit (Ibid. 183-184), will then be used to develop meaning and understanding of the phenomenon looking for connections between different bits of data (Merriam, 1998:8) and seeking the relationships between categories to form thematic patterns Henning (2004:138) and will thus, become the building blocks for the writing of the text (Henning, et al., 2004:82) reported in the research findings section.

The aim of the research was to understand and then define the role of a peer tutor in postgraduate writing support taking into account various models of peer tutoring and adapting them so as to become applicable at postgraduate level. A further aim was to increase the understanding of the effect of peer tutoring on the development of postgraduate academic discourse. Findings developed from analysing the data point to four themes: the peer tutor working within the *community* of the writing centre enters into *conversation* with the student writer and through *collaboration, constructs* knowledge.

In order to begin this intensive phase of data analysis for this study, all the information collected from observations of participant and active tutoring and online tutoring, tutoring questionnaires as well as the pre- and post-workshop questionnaires from the research proposal workshop, and the notes detailed in the research journal were “organis[ed], reduc[ed] and describ[ed]” (Henning, et al., 2004:127) so that it was easy to retrieve. Once the data was edited, redundancies sorted out, parts pieced together and coded, it became the case study database, which was then further analysed by annotating thematically. From the whole range of data I was then able to draw some relative generalisations by looking at the kinds of responses that keep repeating; if there were deviations from these; identify the themes emerging or if there were any contradictions that appeared; and highlight quotations to illustrate my findings. Labelling the important issues as they appeared helped to draw different responses together into themes so that categories could be constructed, and connections and relationships made. The goal of data analysis, according to

Rubin and Rubin (1995:226-227 cited in Mouton, 2001:198-199), is “to integrate the themes and concepts into a theory that offers an accurate, detailed, yet subtle interpretation of the research arena”.

Postgraduate courses are writing-intensive, involving the writing of a research proposal and then a research paper, dissertation or thesis. Student writers are often not familiar with the academic discourse, or are not English first language speakers or are not well-equipped with the necessary writing skills or confident as writers, and find that support is needed in this phase of higher education. The support offered is through the writing support centre and thus, in this section, the interaction between the tutor and the student writer in three different tutoring approaches will be analyzed in order to gain an understanding of the role of the peer tutor in developing conversations of knowledge in support of postgraduate writing and the development of postgraduate academic discourse.

4.3 ANALYSIS OF ‘THE CASE’

4.3.1 A description of one-on-one tutoring sessions with analysis of the data

In Chapter 3 a description was given of the physical context of writing support centre as well as the usual format of a tutoring session. However, each tutoring session cannot be prescriptive, the scene remains the same, but each session is different (Boquet, 2002:70). Consequently, the session unfolds as the needs of the student writer become apparent and tutoring styles vary with each student writer (Gillespie & Olson, in Silk 1998: III.3.5). Therefore, in this context of one-on-one tutoring the aims are to define the role of a peer tutor in postgraduate writing support, to adapt the various models of peer tutoring in order for them to become applicable at postgraduate level and to increase the understanding of the effect of peer tutoring on the development of postgraduate academic discourse.

Student writers on the advice of their lecturers or supervisors, visit the writing support centre but often do so feeling “*apprehensive and lacking in confidence*” (Anita) as they experience feelings of insecurity, incompetence and sometimes failure. It is thus important for the peer tutor to help the student writer overcome these fears by ensuring that the student is “*heartily welcomed*” (Dan) and “*attended to in a friendly manner*” (Munro), reinforcing what Gillespie and Olson term

“mak[ing] the human connection” (in Silk 1998: III.3.1) by establishing and maintaining rapport.

My first observation of the tutoring process was participating in a tutorial in the writing support centre with my very first piece of M Ed. writing. As it had been many years since I was required to write in an academic manner, I arrived at the allotted time for my appointment with much trepidation. I knew that I would receive support but was not quite sure how my work would be received. I was immediately set at ease by being invited to take a seat on a comfortable chair at the table and asked to explain my assignment. During the lengthy explanation, questions which made me think twice and even leave me puzzled, were asked here and there. But surprisingly, no reading of my writing had as yet taken place, and as I had expected that my writing would be proofread for spelling mistakes and to check grammar and vocabulary, I was not at all convinced that this tutoring process was of much help. I seemed to be doing all the work, by talking. However, at all times I felt as though I was the knowledgeable one and the tutor ‘needed to understand’ and this he did with skilful questioning or “Socratic dialogue” (Murphy, 2003:3) where the student writer is prompted with a series of questions about the domain.



ONE-ON-ONE TUTORING

Over the weeks of observing the tutoring process, I was able to understand that the tutor does not have to be expert and is not trained to proofread but will respond to writing through conversation making writers want to keep on writing (Gillespie & Olson, in Silk 1998: III.3.7). The tutor admitted when he did not know the answer to a student writer’s question but guided the student

writer to find the answers in handbooks, dictionaries, online resources and from other writers, modelling this search for the necessary information.

A tutor rarely has the time to read through the whole paper but with the student writer retaining ownership of the writing, will address particular areas of concerns, high order concerns before low-order concerns. It is however, necessary to set priorities based upon where the student writer is in the writing process, which will reflect what is valued in writing. Thus, the idea of peer tutoring is that the less done to the paper the better as the primary objective of the tutorial is to show the student writer how to fix his/her own paper and thus allow the student writer to become the active agent helping them become better writers: *“the tutor and I talked, he challenged me and this made me reflect on what I had written. I was then able to rework my ideas”* (Dan). Brooks (in Barnett & Blumner, 2001: 218) recommends three strategies to develop the student writer’s ability to work through the process of his/her writing. Firstly, he suggests that success of the paper should receive attention, building on the strengths by analysing the text: *“even though I always felt that I was not really a good writer, the tutor highlighted areas and made me feel as though I had something important to say”* (Anita). Secondly, it is important to get the student to talk about his/her writing by asking leading questions so that through discussion the student is pointed to the errors rather than the errors being pointed out, as a most successful tutoring session occurs when the student writer discovers a way to improve his/her writing: *“we did a lot of talking about what I had written and Cilla asked a lot of questions which made me think more deeply about what I was writing”* (Paddy). Brooks (in Barnett & Blumner, 2001: 218) then suggests encouraging the student writer to work on the aspect/s of the paper just discussed while he/she is still in the writing centre, which allows for continued guidance through conversation *“I enjoyed working in the writing support centre as the tutors were there to guide me through the writing of my work, helping me answer my questions* (Munro).

It was thus through the resultant discussion with the tutor that I was able to reformulate the purpose of my own assignment and through the tutor’s response, questioning or rephrasing of what I had said, I was able to clarify certain points which were of concern to me. I also realised that I retained ownership over my paper and it was my voice that was being heard. Over the course of months, I observed the experienced tutor during tutoring sessions and later began to participate in these sessions. The tutor provided another voice of response to the writing always reading for

meaning first, a voice of honest reaction first to ideas and thoughts, then to structure and organization, and finally to prose style and sentences. In each case conversation seemed to be the predominant aspect of the tutorial session with questioning and the to and fro-ing of ideas and questions between the student writer, the tutor and the peer tutor which “promote[ed] active and collaborative learning” Gillespie & Olson (in Silk 1998 : III.3.1), however, taking note of the fine line between fair collaboration and unfair influence.

As described in Chapter 2, Pask (1975) explains that learning occurs through conversations about a subject matter which serves to make knowledge explicit, and “this active involvement makes talk [or conversation] integral to writing” (Harris, 1992:369), *“the helping with the structuring of thoughts and expression of them in a logical manner”* (Anita) ensuring that student writers listen (active) rather than just hear (passive) (Boquet, 2002:38), understanding that writing is a process while keeping the product in mind.. The tutor’s goal, however, is not to produce a perfect text by micromanaging and commenting; instead, it is to intervene in the process with intelligence and compassion, and in so doing to help student writers better understand their own processes and develop the skills needed to perfect their own writing products. *“I knew what I wanted to say but I had difficulty putting it into words. Talking through my ideas helped me put it all down in writing”* (Anita).

But tutoring is seen as a continuum with contrasting concepts, such as tutor/editor, novice/expert, process/product, control/flexibility and tutor/teacher, existing at either end of the scale. As each student writer’s needs are unique, depending on the stage of writing, so too is the type of tutoring required. As a result the peer tutor should become aware of where on the continuum the tutoring session is positioned bearing in mind that a tutor’s role is to “help writers sort through their ideas, clarify their thoughts and then communicate them effectively to an audience” Ryan (2002: ix). Thus, the tutor needs to assess every writer and each piece of writing with an eye toward helping writers discover which habits and ways will work best for them *“It was a fantastic experience – gaining the extra knowledge in the subject as well as in the manner of writing”* (Anita).

One-on-one tutoring tends to be the norm with writing support, however, where a specific group needing similar support is identified, group tutoring is undertaken. The faculty identified a group of postgraduate students who were finding difficulty in writing and completing their research

proposals, and as the research proposal is crucial to a student progressing with his/her research, a workshop approach was suggested.

4.3.2 A description of the research proposal workshop

As previously described in Chapter 3, a week-long workshop with a group of 16 postgraduate students, was conducted. A different context to one-on-one tutoring, the workshop took on an interactive approach where student writers discussed, learned, experimented and finally wrote. The workshop, as part of “The Case”, also aimed at defining the role of a peer tutor in postgraduate writing support, adapting the various models of peer tutoring to become applicable in the context of a workshop and then increasing the understanding of the effect of peer tutoring on the development of postgraduate academic discourse, in this instance the writing of a research proposal.

Reasons for conducting the workshop were revealed in pre-workshop questionnaires: 56% had yet to begin the writing process, 12% had made a start and 32% were well into the writing. The majority of the student writers wrote that they wanted “*help*” in writing a “*good*” proposal ensuring that the format was correct with “*verification on the correctness of the proposal*”, that the research question was “*formulated*” and “*relevant to the research problem*” and that the topic is “*researchable*” as well as “*confirmation on the need for such research*”. Some expressed a wish to “*finalise the proposal*” by “*finding focus*”. However, Paul explained, “*Before starting on Monday morning I did not know whether I was going or coming*”.

Addressing fears and confusion about writing is important as “*every one of us was tense and maybe with a bit of frustration and maybe I was the worst because we didn’t really know - exactly understand*” (Paul) and “*When I came here I was lost and discouraged*” (Nev). Research has shown that student writers should be encouraged to develop their own approach to the writing process but with the support of a tutor who draws out the content knowledge of the student writer through conversation and at the same time working within a framework to help focus on the organization of the paper and the learning processes (Writing Centre Manuals, online). Many, if not all the students who attended the workshop could be considered “mature” students with 100% over the age of 26, with their own perceived barriers to learning: “*I thought a research proposal is a difficult procedure – I did not know where to start*” (Rosie), including that

of using a computer: ***“I know there were people who it seemed had never touched a computer before”*** (Paul). Some student writers (18%) had experienced failure in that their proposals had been rejected either by their supervisors or the Higher Degrees’ Committee; some had begun the writing but were experiencing difficulty in completing it; and some had yet to begin. Postgraduate students are often found to be under-prepared in the skills and techniques which will enable them to communicate the findings of their research effectively, as many of them have never been taught how to write (DeLyser, 2003:169). In addition, with this particular group of postgraduate students, English was not their mother tongue/home language: ***as English is my second language sometimes it is hard to put an academic paragraph*** (Matt), which also impacted on their research skills.

After introductions, I explained my role as a peer tutor to the group, asking their permission to include them and the workshop in my case study. I asked that they complete the letter requesting permission (Appendix A) and the ‘Student Visit’ sheet (Appendix B), which would help focus the students on the problems or difficulties that they were encountering in the writing of their proposals. It was also explained that at the end of the week, they would be requested to fill in the ‘Tutoring Questionnaire’ (Appendix C), which would give vital information about how the students saw their progress through the writing and collaboration process.

An overview of the structure of the research paper or mini-dissertation (Appendix G) was discussed so that students would know what was expected as the outcome of their research, ***“the whole layout made me realise how my dissertation will be structured”*** (Patrisha). Annie, Lindiwe, Nora and Odette stated that they wanted clarification on ***“how to write [a] dissertation successfully, how to write [a] mini-dissertation, ways of going about research, and assistance on the research as a whole”***. DeLyser, when teaching writing seminars to [post]graduate writers, explains that she breaks down big tasks into small manageable topics (2003:169), however it is important to give structure which the student writers could use as a framework as ***“structuring your work especially research problem, was so understandable after all – steps to follow were discussed”*** (Debbie).

The first task was to ascertain what the students were wanting to research (Maxwell, 1996; Creswell, 2003:50) by writing a sentence beginning “I want to find out” and converting this

'want' to a question. Students were then paired off to enter into a conversation about their research and to ascertain whether their "I want to find out.." statement matched their question (Creswell, 2003:4-6). It was interesting to observe how the conversations in some cases took place through the medium of English but at other times, students used their African mother tongue to gain a deeper understanding of what was being written in English. Initially Odette said "***I think we spoke in English***", but then corrected herself by saying "***Oooooo but we ended up speaking of our languages because when you talk to people in other – a language which is not your mother tongue and not their mother tongue then you have a problem. But when you speak in your own languages, you are able to get information easily and fast***". This interaction described by Bruffee as collaboration, "encourages students to listen to each other accepting the authority of helping one another learn and to acknowledge the authority of other students, their peers and in turn helping them learn themselves" (1998:87). ***Friendship, working and helping each other*** (Anton), ***interaction with other researchers*** (Odette), [and] ***you divided us into groups and we were moving around ... when we spoke in groups and some of us, we didn't understand ... those things were clarified there*** (Paul) also reinforces the value of collaboration.

The next step, therefore, was to begin the body of the proposal by writing a general statement leading to a specific statement (Henning, et al., 2005:64) which would immediately give the audience, in this case the peer reader, an idea of the content of the research (Creswell, 2003: 73-86). Using the statement of "I want to ..." as a springboard to the writing of this general statement proved difficult and it was found that generally the students' thinking did not stretch beyond the borders of South Africa. It was thus decided to bring all the students into a group conversation. ***"It was good because we had to form our groups and talk to each other but whenever we had problems we had to call you to come and help and it was very fruitful"*** (Odette). Each student read out their general statement whereupon the rest of the group were asked to comment, give suggestions, query and question and hopefully give focus or direction. Generally an initial reading was insufficient, and thus a second reading of the general statement was needed. However, in some cases, questions were asked to gain clarification on what the writer was attempting to convey. In these conversations the speakers were able to get clues from one another as to whether the general statements had been understood, and if not, they were then able to collaboratively give suggestions. As Paul explains "***... and the group work as well – I think what happened there is – we shared experiences and ... once we sat in that meeting you called it was very clear to us –***

and it helped and we could share". Kuriloff states that it is important to "socialize students into discourse communities" in order for them to enter the academic writing community (cited in McLeod & Soven, 2000:136), and this group conversation of *"listening and formulating ideas with peers"* (Katie) was just the first step.

Students were, at first, hesitant to contribute, *"I learned there that that's the danger that we as students ... sometimes you are afraid - as well to let other people learn about what you are doing - sometimes maybe they will see that we don't know much* but seemed to gain in confidence, and discussions soon became heated and very valuable: *the interaction is super ... we are still learning but in that meeting when we came together - we interacted"* (Paul) as the students often presented a very different point of view to that which the writer was expecting. Interesting was the fact that as clarification was gained, a wider overview statement and even a global statement was then able to be written. It was thus seen that collaborative learning through conversations, *a hundred of times we learned from one another - from each other you know, and even sharing ideas* (Paul), scaffolded the students' learning which in turn motivated the writing. Once clarity on the general statement was gained, revisions were made which resulted in the writing of improved opening statements.

The next step toward developing 'the funnel of academic research' was to become more specific with developing context for the opening general statement. Focus was given to historical context but the students found it difficult as their thinking was narrow and restricted by pre- and post-1994. Geographical context helped narrow down to the framework in which the study was to be undertaken (Henning, et al., 2005:62). Again, the concept of the reader as audience (Tate pg.233-243) was discussed with the group which encouraged the peer reader to question and query until a clear contextualization was achieved as *"discussions with other people were fruitful"* (Debbie). Motivation for the study was the next phase to be explained, to ensure that the student writers understood this aspect, taking into account personal and professional motivation as well as academic motivation.

Once again, conversations were entered into. This time the students were asked to pair off with someone with whom they had not worked before and preferably someone whose discipline (environmental education/curriculum studies/teacher education) differed to theirs. The pairs were

involved in reading the general statement and then progressed to the specific statement and the motivation for the research. The conversations involved discussions as to whether there was a good link between the two statements and the motivation, ensuring coherence, depending here on peer critique (Bruffee, 1993:61) to lead the learning: ***“It was a shock to me to see how much effort and time the proposal took especially the general and specific statement”*** (Katie). DeLyser (2003:180) explains that an essential element of a writing workshop is peer critique where student writers read, edit and comment on each other’s work. However, it was found that although the students thought they had written clearly, it was only through “out aloud thinking” (Harris, 1983: 75-76) discussion and explanation, that the partner understood what was trying to be conveyed. In Harris’s model of protocol analysis, the student is asked to read out aloud and thus think out aloud which helps highlight problem areas. After diagnostic conversation, revision and rewrites had to be undertaken to ensure coherence. Understanding that writing is an iterative process (Ryan, 2002:8 DeLyser, 2003:172; Coffin, et al., 2003:34), and not just a once-off, was slowly beginning to dawn on the students ***“I discovered that writing is not a simple process but if you share information, ask others’ opinion and writing the gathered information, there will be progress”*** (Lynne) as well as “a recognition of recursiveness in writing” (Perl, 1980; Gillespie & Lerner, 2003:13) where there is “a forward-moving action that exists by virtue of a backward-moving action” (Perl, 1980: 150) where re-reading while writing and constant revision, a crucial factor in successful writing (Gillespie & Lerner, 2003:17), is needed throughout the process.

An added realisation was that writing cannot be readily undertaken until reading and research by ***“finding relevant literature”*** (Connie), has developed a good foundation from which one can draw in order to write. Kuriloff explains that student writers need to use writing as a tool for learning and thus create their own knowledge and not just rely on existing knowledge (cited in McLeod & Soven, 2000:136), which reinforces the aims of an in-depth literature search prior to writing. He says research has shown that critical reading and writing are closely connected. This realisation resulted in a discussion on the vital use of the library as well as electronic resources to develop that foundation. Students were advised to visit the library, find out ***“how to find information for the mini-dissertation”*** (Nora) and bring with them any relevant books and resources that they would need for the following days’ writing. Queries about ***“how to quote authors”*** and ***“reference correctly”*** (Matt) were dealt with, resulting in ***“gain[ing] a better understanding of referencing, quoting and structuring in general”*** (Rosie).

During the following three days, the workshop was conducted in the computer laboratory. MS Word discs with the relevant research proposal template (B.Ed., M.Ed., Ph.D.) had been prepared for each student. The first day, Day 3, involved completing the cover sheet, and typing out the general statement, the specific statement followed by the motivation for the research. Technical issues came into play and informal lessons and collaboration between the more experienced computer-user and the novice took place with *“learn[ing] a lot of the technology on an informal basis”* (Katie). However, it was interesting to note that many of the students were not competent in using the computers but during the week, *“I also learn to type by myself”* (Annie). A model of a completed cover sheet and a framework (Appendix H) was displayed on the board as a reference. During this period of computing, the tutor and peer tutor moved around the class interacting with the students, giving advice and encouragement and sometimes ‘hands-on’ help.



INTERACTING WITH A STUDENT

“I was surprised by the way [the tutors] helped us equally without being biased” (Paul).

Students were encouraged to read each other’s work as this would help create an audience which it was hoped, would comment constructively *“you [the tutor] said – this is what that person has done, you know, ... and that person, you know, can share with us how he or she has approached the topic or a piece of writing that we were doing there and so on. It helped us a lot – a lot”* (Paul). Bruffee (1998:90-91) states that group solidarity allowed the peer tutors to

develop critical reading skills which allowed them to critique their peers' writing in a "reasonable, temperate and constructive" (1998:91) manner, in other words, they developed "academic judgement".



A FIRST TIME AT THE KEYBOARD

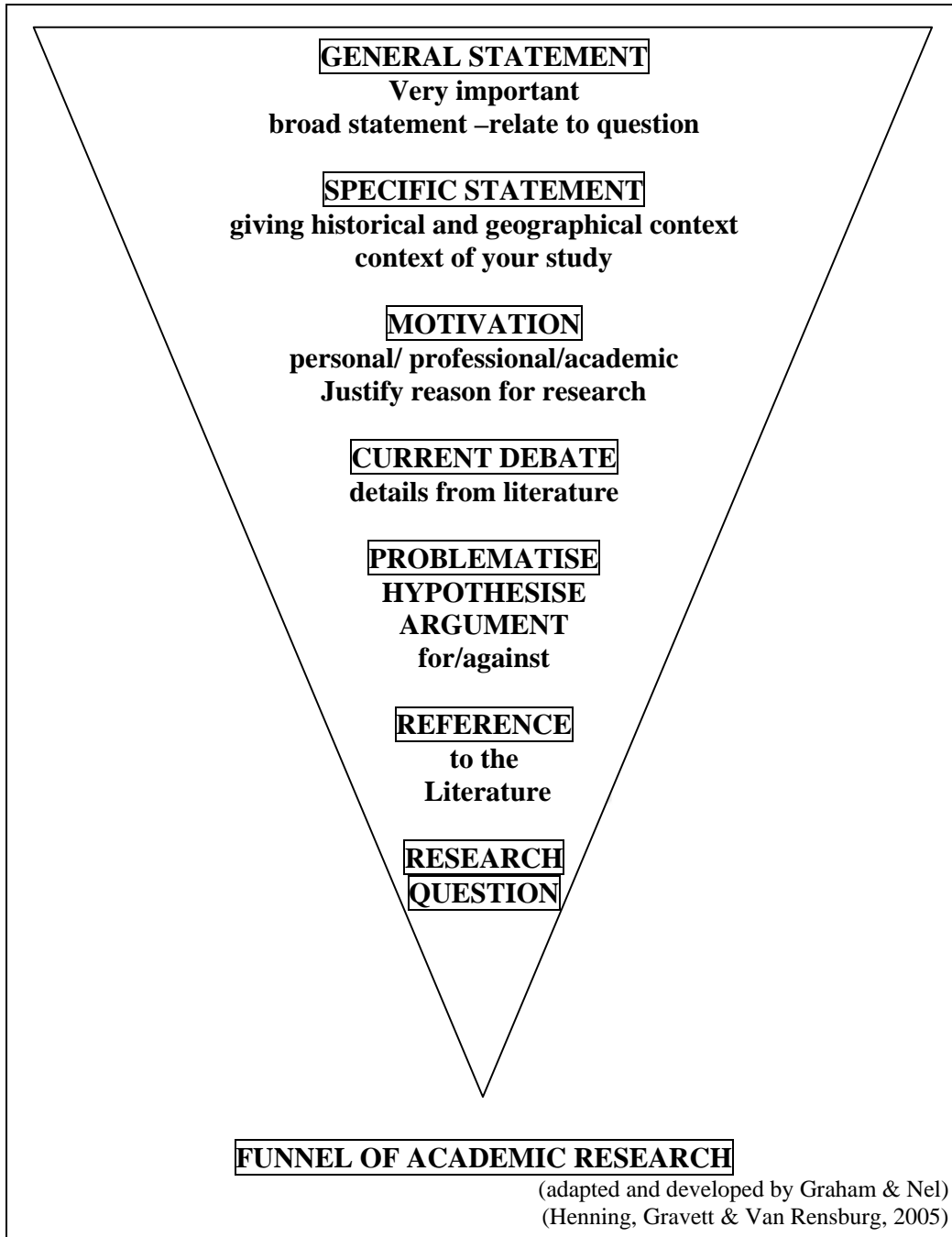
"Cilla was too impressed seeing me typing very well" (Annie)

However, by the afternoon the students were tiring, and after constant reminders to save on the hard drive as well as their discs, this was not done. Whether it was lack of expertise in saving in two areas or just lack of understanding or fatigue, added to the fact that Andrew and I did not know that the computers were 'wiped clean' each night in preparation for the following day, very little of Day 3's work was saved.



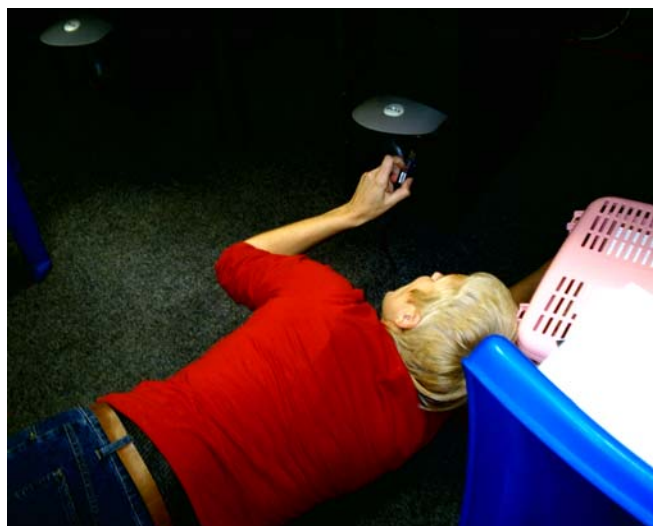
HAVE I REMEMBERED TO SAVE?

Discussion of research problem and motivation for study substantiated by ample reference to literature (Regulation A.11.1.7.4)



The following day, when some students found firstly that nothing had been saved on their discs, and then nothing was left on their computers, tears sprang to eyes and frustration was felt all round. This could have become a major stumbling block. However, I am quite a quick touch-

typist, so I put fingers to keys and had the students dictate what they had written on hard copy and within a few hours most students were up and working once again. Although the technical problems that we experienced with the computers could have led to barriers to learning, the students rallied and were determined, as they saw their proposals unfolding. What we all learnt was to invest in a USB or a “*tamagotchi*” as Katie described it.



Where does it go? (Katie)

Day 4 was spent writing the body of the proposal, giving details of the current debate, putting forward an argument of pros and cons, but always referring to the literature (Creswell, 2003: 34-35). At times, students identified gaps in their reading, “*first thing students should take books from the library*” (Anton), and informal lessons on using the Internet and electronic databases were given which resulted in current cutting-edge information which could be used in the research proposal but in the process students “*learned a lot about computers and accessing Internet*” (Connie). During this very busy day, some collaboration and conversation took place between the students as they searched the Internet and databases together “*There was this lady – the topic was very similar to mine. So we exchanged books, we exchanged a lot of information*” (Odette). But mostly students were glued to their computers attempting to put down on ‘paper’ the conversation that had developed in their heads or as Tiny explained “*I learned to listen to every idea coming while I am busy writing and to put it on paper and later will be edited*”. Esterhuizen (2001: 25) in her discussion on academic writing, explains that once a student has read, accessed information and knows a great deal about a topic, it becomes easier to retrieve and generate ideas and the

more the English 2nd Language (ESL) student writer reads, the more his/her English develops. Thus, writing becomes automatic.

The conversations that now took place were between the tutors and the students: *“that the facilitator[s] have stayed or spend every minute of every day with us giving support”* (Debbie) and *“They [the tutors] made you feel relaxed and help build your confidence in what you are writing”* (Matt). Andrew and I moved around the lab reading what the students had written and discussed with them issues that were perhaps a little unclear, making suggestions and whenever a student left their computer, Andrew and I immediately took their place and responded (Quinn, 1999; McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001; Carless, 2006) to the writing by typing in colour-coded constructive comments and suggestions so that when the student returned, apart from being horrified, he/she was able to reflect on these which Schön (1987:28) explains, gives the student, at that moment, time to experiment and try out a new action, or to test tentative understandings and affirm what he/she has implemented or changed, thus reinforcing Harris and Silva’s idea that “a major goal of a tutor is to help students find their own solutions” (1993:532). Anton explains *“Before I know nothing about to write logical but Cilla taught me how to do it but somewhere I made a lot of mistakes”* and *“The bright colours on my screen gave me a fright, but once I knew what they meant, I was able to read the suggestions and work through the revisions myself. I was proud of what I was able to do”* (Nev). *“These suggestions and questions that Cilla put on my paper helped me make my work good”* (Patrisha) reinforce the sentiment of Silver (1978:435 cited in Elbow in Pemberton & Kinhead: 2003:104) who argues “probably the single most important condition for teaching writing is the willingness on the part of the student writer to accept criticism and grow as a result of it”.

By mid-afternoon the students were ready to move to the final stage of the body of the research proposal. After re-reading the body of their proposal for the umpteenth time, the student began to formulate a research question. Again we came together as a group to discuss formulating a research question that would encapsulate the research that was to be undertaken, emphasising that it should be in question form but could have subsidiary questions that might need to be answered. Writing and much rewriting followed as well as interaction with other students as each student read his question out to a peer and waited for comment leading the students to *“gain experience and learn from others”* (Connie). *“My way of thinking has developed and I am able to develop*

more ideas” (Lindiwe). Perl (1980:153) explains that it is through writing that “meaning is crafted and constructed” in that once the ideas have been written down on paper, the student writer is able to re-read and find out if the language “adequately captures what [was] intended”.

Once the question was typed in, aims, objectives and the purpose for the inquiry was attended to.

Aims, objectives or purpose of the inquiry
Introductory sentence
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• main aim
Secondary sentence
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• subsidiary aims

This area was addressed quickly, as the students were immediately able to understand what they wanted to find out with their research. If they had had only a vague idea previously, working with their collected and constructed information had led them to understanding what they wanted to find out: *“It was not that difficult to come up with a proposal although it’s a very challenging exercise”* (Lynne) and *“I was able to open my mind concerning writing”* (Nora).

At the end of the day, technical problems were nipped in the bud, by requesting, and then ensuring, that all work was saved on the student’s own disc and my USB. Ensuring that all work was saved on disc allowed the students to work at home, if they so wished, revising what they had written that day. With the students’ work on my USB, I was able to respond to their work by reading what they had written and then using the “track changes” tool on the computer, I inserted comments and suggestions for the students to work with the following day (Quinn, 1999; Carless, 2006). DeLyser (2003:174) explains that it is important for student writers to receive constructive feedback beginning with positive points.

All writing manuals emphasise the need for peer tutors to remain distant from the student writer’s work to ensure that control is maintained by the writer him/herself. However, in this instance, I felt a more directive tutoring approach was needed, referring to Carino (in Pemberton & Kinhead, 2003:110) who suggests that a more directive method of tutoring could be used especially if the peer tutor displays more knowledge than the student writer does.

Day 5, the last day of the workshop, dawned with the knowledge that it was going to be a long and busy day as the major area to address was the research design and methodology sections. Andrew and I decided on a different strategy. Firstly, we had, the previous day, asked the students to bring in any work they had done towards their research design as well as any reference materials. I, in turn, brought in my student file organised into types/genres of research as well as a section describing various tools for collecting and analysing data. Secondly, on each of the student's proposal, I had pasted what was required to complete this section and on the computer projector I had placed my research design from my own research proposal for the students to read. The students could use their own previously written work, refer to the reference books they had brought, page through my student file, or read through my research design and model (Harris, 1983) their work on mine, using the template on their computer.

Research design
<p>HOW? WHAT? WHEN? WHO? WHERE? WHY?</p> <p>At each point describe with reference to the literature and explain how it relates to your study or how you will use it in your study.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quantitative (objectivity) or qualitative (subjectivity) research or a combination of quantitative and qualitative 2. Research Paradigms – positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism, critical social science, post-structural 3. Research Design - the approach or genre – experimental, quasi-experimental, ethnography, phenomenology, hermeneutics, case study, action research, participatory research, discourse analysis 4. Research Methodology – Sampling – participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collection techniques Quantitative: Questionnaires and surveys Qualitative: Interviews, observation, document analysis Mixed Methods –combination of quantitative/qualitative Data analysis – methods and processes - how you work with the collected data 5. Reliability, validity, triangulation

As we walked around reading what the students had written, we encouraged them to firstly give a description with reference to the text and then to apply that to their own study. By this time, the students were all comfortable with working on the computer (saving regularly) as well as working independently with the reference works they had brought with them. The conversations they had entered into over the week had scaffolded their learning and led them to independently work with the internalized conversation. ***“I gained a lot especially structuring – it actually answered all my concerns on coming up with research questions, aims and methods to be used. I would see the pattern in all the aspects”*** (Debbie). Every now and again, questions were raised or problem areas needed some discussion, but the day proceeded smoothly.

The last aspect of the research proposal to be completed was the **ethics section**, which I once again had pasted onto their template. All issues, outlined in the University of Johannesburg’s Ethics booklet, were to be addressed.

Compliance with ethical standards (specify)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of who will be participating in the study (in terms of race, sex, age range, institutional affiliation, and other special criteria) and how participants will be selected • A descriptions of what the respondents (participants) will be expected to do, or what will be done to them • An indication of whether permission has been received (or permission has been asked) to conduct this research from the relevant authority • A description of how the research will be explained to participants, and how their informed consent to participate will be obtained e.g., writing, face-to-face explanations etc. • An indication of how the researcher will go about ensuring confidentiality and anonymity to respondents • A description of how consent will be obtained in cases where subjects who are minors (under 18), mentally infirm, or otherwise not legally competent to consent to their participation. • A description how full consent and participation will be ensured in cases where the research is not conducted in the mother-tongue of the subjects or in a language in which the subjects feel competent. • An indication of whether participants risk any harm—physical, psychological, legal, social—by participating in the research. If so, what safeguards will be taken to minimize the risks? <p style="text-align: right;">(UJ Ethics booklet, 2005)</p>

By the end of the day, with some proposals completed and others having some areas still to finally complete, students were asked to spend 10 minutes completing my post-workshop questionnaire which should give some indication on what the students felt that they had gained from the workshop.



“This is an experience of a lifetime” (Odette)

Themes developed from the post-workshop questionnaires and subsequent interviews are discussed in Section 4.3 of this chapter.

4.3.3 A description of online tutoring

The emergence of the World Wide Web and related technologies has led to the inclusion of the use of the computer and consequently the development of online tutoring as part of writing centre support. “As a virtual, computer-mediated environment with no physical existence, the online writing center challenges traditional concepts of ‘space’ and ‘community’” (Bernstein, Hill and Moore, n.d.: online). Online Writing laboratories or OWLs, found in American universities, may refer to a writing centre that houses one or more computers (or is simply preparing to purchase them), one with some sort of Web page, one in which tutors sit beside students seated at computers, one in which tutors and students interact asynchronously (generally via email), or one in which tutors and students interact in real time in MOOs without any face-to-face contact (Law, online). McDonald (2002, cited in Kaur, et al. online) claims that “online education is emerging as a new educational paradigm due to the changes in student interaction and independence that telecommunications and computer media can potentially introduce”.

The first group referred to previously, consisted of student writers who due to time constraints and distance from the university, could not attend the proposal workshop and elected to work online, a model in which tutors and students interact asynchronously (via email). The second group of postgraduate writers, with their supervisor, elected to use WebCT as a communicating medium to regularly post their proposals on the web for peer comment and the tutors from the Postgraduate Writing Support Centre were invited to participate.

In this study, which aims at developing an understanding of the peer tutor in writing support and increasing the understanding of the effect of peer tutoring on the development of postgraduate academic discourse, all communication in online tutoring conversely occurs asynchronously, through writing alone. This tends to disrupt the face-to-face writing centre’s fundamental purpose and approach, which includes encouraging the writer to talk about his/her writing, and, in discussion with the peer tutor, to develop new skills and strategies that improve the way he/she writes (Bernstein, et al, n.d.: online). But online tutoring does allow for discussions not fixed in time or space (Kaur, et al. online) or the continuation of conversations begun in class (Cooper cited in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:54) as student writers can log-on at any time and at any Internet-connected computer even if “... in this faceless, disembodied world ... the lack of personal contact may seem to dehumanize a setting that writing centres have traditionally viewed

as personal and warm” (Carlson & Apperson-Williams cited in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:240), but peer tutors should ensure that the responses are as human as possible.

An advantage of online tutoring is that it allows the student writer to process and reflect on tutors’ comments at his/her own pace, printing out the comments and referring to them throughout the revision process. The peer tutor, in responding to the writing is ‘saved’ from the temptation to ‘take over’ the session. Just because the tutoring format changes, does not mean that the pedagogy does. As in face-to-face tutoring, responding to an online draft means asking lots of questions and responding as a reader but not editing by fixing grammar, correcting punctuation errors, or writing on (or in between) students’ texts. However, the online tutoring tends to be less confrontational than one-on-one tutoring, and allows the student writer time for more reflective interaction as responses are not immediately needed. In addition, online tutoring is a timeless medium where text-based observations and insights are recorded. Over a period of time, student writers are able to monitor contributions by other students and tutors, access diverse resources and collaborate in groups to deepen their understanding, sharpen their judgement and extend their knowledge (McConnell, 2000:73-76 cited in McGugan, 2002:online).

The first group consisted of 17 student writers whose proposals were in varying stages of completion, with a few having submitted their proposals which the Higher Degrees’ Committee had rejected. I worked with both the rejected proposals that the supervisor e-mailed to the writing support centre as well as the incomplete proposals. My role as peer tutor respondent was to offer the student writers constructive feedback on their writing as according to DeLyser (2003:174), constructive feedback beginning with positive points is important for student writers who would use these comments (both positive and negative) to revise their work or “support students’ writing development” (Coffin, e al., 2003:104) in order to better understand and organise their thoughts in writing. This process would help the student writers learn the content, concepts and ideas in their discipline through the process of writing. I used the same method of responding to the text (Quinn, 1999: 23-24; Rhodes, 2003; Carless, 2006) for all the proposals by suggesting that the student writer follow the “funnel of academic research” template (see Appendix H) often re-ordering the original version, deleting certain aspects and then offering suggestions using colour codes and/or using the ‘insert comment’ tool on the computer.

The comments and the template, I hoped, would give some structure and support and once

responded to, the proposal was then e-mailed back to the supervisor who worked with the student writer on the content.

Online informal discussions allow the student writer to participate and enter into the dialogue encouraging interaction which then leads to constructing learning (Kaur, et al. online) which Alley and Jansar (2001, cited in Kaur, et al. online) state are vital factors in quality assurance in online learning. However, in this case, there was no dialogue or interaction between the student writer and myself. Bernstein, et al. (n.d.: online) explain that “on a pedagogical level, tutors face the challenges of anticipating student questions and incorporating these into their written feedback” when working online in a “virtual environment” and as a result, I was only able to offer constructive criticism and suggestions for further revision and rewrites which the student writer could then react upon. If a conversation was entered into, it was between the supervisor and the student writer when revising the proposal.

The second group of student writers, who had participated in a proposal workshop run by their supervisor, was logged on to the WebCT site and requested to read the announcements, access the online references and websites to assist them in their writing. Once some writing had been done, the student writers were asked to post their writings on WebCT to invite peer comment as well as feedback from the Writing Support Centre. Crump (cited in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:251) states that the value of multi-user dimensions or MUDs in contrast to the writing centre could and should become “more amenable environments ... that hold incredible potential for hosting communities and are better learning environments”. He explains that students can “hang out” in such a virtual environment and consequently “chaotic conversations” will serve as “fertile ground” to develop their education.

The experienced tutor and I allocated an hour daily to respond to the writing centre-specific postings and develop on-going communication with the student writers. Initially the comments were encouraging and motivating as suggested by Salmon’s model for asynchronous computer mediated conferencing (cited in McGugan, 2000: online). As the student writings developed, format and structure for their research proposals was suggested, and later comments and suggestions about context, the focus, and the argument were posted. In some cases, suggestions were made about accessing references and additional reading to give more depth, and note was

taken of the origin and date of the reference in order to ensure that it was appropriate for the piece. At the same time that the writing support centre was responding, the supervisor and the student writers were positing their views and comments on WebCT. Information exchange thus was fast and immediate, allowing the student writers to interact with various participants and as a result a learning community was created which led to the construction of knowledge.

I found that reading through everyone's comments on the web allowed differing perspectives to emerge and one which the student could accept or reject, but it did allow for the widening of viewpoints illustrating that student writers could learn as much from one another as from sources. However, much of the 'conversation' interaction took place between the supervisor and individual students rather than between the students themselves. However, one particular student repeatedly e-mailed her proposal to the writing centre and in this case I developed a good relationship with her especially as the semester came to an end, students were on holiday and not accessing WebCT and the supervisors were at conferences overseas. This constant access via the net to a tutor reinforces Crump's view that "the benefits of being able to interact with writers at a distance means we have new opportunities to help them at their point of need, when they are neck-deep in the writing process, rather than at a deferred point" (cited in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003: 250).

Instead of responding to her entire proposal, I chose to break it up into smaller manageable tasks. I realize that higher order concerns should be addressed firstly, but in this case, Sonia's English (as a 2nd language speaker) did not really allow for the smooth flow and trying to decipher what she really meant was difficult, interfering the reader's understanding of what the writer wants to say (Harris & Silva, 1993: 533). Added to this, I realized that Sonia was modeling her writing on what she had read in the literature and was using phrases and words from the text, with little understanding or ability to match it to her own writing. So it worked for me to suggest global error corrections at the same time as correcting local errors such as spelling, language and general format errors (Harris & Silva, 1993:526) which tended to distract from the actual content and argument. In addressing these higher order concerns, I suggested the re-ordering of ideas and deleting what could be considered irrelevant to help identify the general statement within what she had written, leading to a specific statement and finally highlighting major concerns or debates related to her research. I also e-mailed the student writer the template of the academic funnel of research (see research proposal workshop) to help give structure to the proposal.

As each aspect of the proposal was responded to, it was e-mailed back to Sonia who was then able to proceed with the revisions and rewrites. This allowed Sonia to take responsibility for her own learning and writing by exploring her thinking and building knowledge based on her interaction online. This to- and fro-ing of e-mails or electronic conversations eventually led to the completion of Sonia's proposal in draft form and from that point her supervisor took over and led her through the final stages of editing in order to submit to the Higher Degrees' Committee.

As previously stated, student writers benefit greatly through constructive feedback (Quinn, 1999; Carless, 2006). Feedback, which is central to student learning, has been seen as playing a decisive role in learning and development (Carless, 2006) giving the students a far clearer idea of how they are doing with positive comments, criticism about what needs to be reduced down (Coffin, et al., 2003:101), and suggestions about where they need to improve (Hounsell 2003, cited in Carless, 2006). The way in which feedback is presented is important as Ivanic et al., (2000 cited in Coffin, et al., 2003:118) state the tutor-respondent should attempt "to build [the] students' sense of membership of the academic community".

Building a relationship with a student writer and ensuring that feedback is a "communicative act" (Coffin, et al., 2003:119) can be achieved through the use of questions that engage the student writer in a debate such as "what do you think ...", offer mitigated comments such as "Perhaps ...", and use of the first person (Ivanic, et al., 2000 cited in Coffin, et al., 2003:118) which acknowledges the feedback as the tutor's opinion. However, in giving feedback to a student writer, five aspects should be considered: content of the writing with relevance to the topic; rhetorical purpose, looking at appropriate forms of argument with reference to the literature, and offering a critical perspective; register with use of correct academic language, specialist terminology and referencing conventions; text structure appropriate to the text genre and finally linguistic accuracy where spelling and grammatical accuracy are taken into account (Coffin, et al., 2003:105). It is thus important that the tutor, when responding to student writing, is aware of the "strong affective dimension" (Ibid: 128) to giving and receiving feedback and that for feedback to function effectively it should "scaffold" (Ibid: 122) the students' writing and consequently their learning, resulting in the students being encouraged to take responsibility for their own writing.

4.4 THEMES EMERGING FROM THE DATA

As previously stated at the beginning of this chapter, the aim of the research was to understand and then define the role of a peer tutor in postgraduate writing support taking into account various models of peer tutoring and adapting them so as to become applicable at postgraduate level. A further aim was to increase the understanding of the effect of peer tutoring on the development of postgraduate academic discourse and in this case the writing of research proposals.

Findings from the data gathered through observations, questionnaires, and interviews have shown that postgraduate students in the Faculty of Education are practicing teachers, and usually serious students who are mature, experienced and motivated (Pemberton, 2002) with 100% of the students in this case study being over the age of 25. These students are adult by definition, should be treated with respect, and allowed to develop open negotiation and dialogue which will lead to co-operation (Gravett, 2001:8) and collaboration. A further aspect to be taken into account is the accumulated life experience which the adult learner should be encouraged to bring to the table of learning, ensuring that both the adult learner and tutor understand the value of this prior knowledge and experience and draw on it as a resource (Ibid. 8).

Working at postgraduate level, the student is given the choice of programme within the faculty (e.g. Environmental Education, Education Management, Adult Education, and Inclusive Education). Each programme consists of course work modules with a practical module giving the student an open choice of topic for his/her research but which should be “relevant to their own short-term and medium-term career prospects”, should be intellectually stimulating, is researchable and will add value to the area of study and is at the same time personally interesting and worthwhile (Mouton, 2001:39-40). The research proposal, a document that outlines how it is proposed that the research is conducted and which “embodies the logic of the research project” (Mouton, 2001:45), is the initial step which culminates in the writing up of the research paper or mini-dissertation.

My findings have revealed that the students were able to complete the course work successfully in that *“I had a bit of theory”* and were able to begin reading for their research paper *“I had some literature”* but *“didn’t know how to apply”* (Odette) what they had learned in the course to the

practical of writing their research proposal. As many of the students have been out of the familiarity of the university and not worked within academic discourse for many years or have never been part of it as they were trained at teacher training colleges seen as “poorly resourced tribal colleges”, during the previous dispensation (Jeevananthan cited in Cross, 1999:63), they have struggled to find true writing identity during their studies (Van Rensburg, 2004). In addition, Bridges (cited in Haynes-Burton in Murphy & Law, 2002: 218-219) explains that when adults return to higher education there is a feeling of “starting over” which could lead to anxiety such as Nora felt: *“When I came here I was lost and discouraged”*. The student writer therefore, has had to work through a series of transitions allowing for time to adjust, and commit to the new experience and develop confidence in the learning and writing processes but particularly the language especially when the student writer is learning through the medium of English which is not his/her mother tongue *“I’m a 2nd language speaker ... you find that when it comes to writing it becomes difficult because you write a paragraph and a sentence and then you think that sentence is correct but when you come in and you say no you don’t have to put this here you have to put that there then it makes us feel as if we don’t know this Queen’s language”* (Matt).

Additional concerns emerging from the data gathered in pre-workshop questionnaires revolved around the writing of the proposal and ultimately writing up their research. It appears that these student writers, to some degree, have attended lectures on writing, research methodology and how to write a proposal and the research paper, but still are not confident as little or no practical writing tasks were performed. However, these concerns and their related problems are addressed in Chapter 5 under suggestions and recommendations.

Consequently, it is once the student writer begins the writing of the research, that the peer tutor and the writing centre become involved. In dealing with adult learners, the writing centre tutors need to tread a fine line in understanding the anxiety suffered as well as the transition that the student is making from structure to relative freedom and independence of research. Anxiety that the adult learner experiences, Haynes-Burton (in Murphy, 2003: 319-220) explains, often manifests in the fixation on lower order concerns in their writing and learning. She sees the role of the peer tutor (who should also be peer in age) as being one of developing a relationship with the writing centre and in turn with a particular peer tutor as support to develop confidence in the

writing process.

My findings, thus, have shown that the peer tutor develops a *community* within the writing centre for and with student writers, by entering into *conversation* with them and through *collaboration*, *constructs* knowledge. This interaction over time, builds up the confidence of the student writer through conversation on many levels by discussing the subject matter, or the language and writing skills needed to convey the subject matter in a paper or just very informal conversations over a cup of coffee. Once the confidence is gained and the student writer has received positive feedback, he/she will maintain the motivation to progress and ultimately succeed in his/her writing.

The themes that have emerged from the findings will be discussed separately. However, it is imperative to understand that in the context of the writing support centre, they do not and cannot exist separately but are interlinked and intertwined, one needing the other to exist.

4.4.1 Developing and experiencing a community

The word 'centre' may represent the centre of a circle, and thus the writing centre may be seen as an actual place, a physical space central to the faculty or university or in other cases cited by Harris, writing centres consider themselves to be on the margins of the institutions and thus free from institutional restraints or as "cutting edge" (cited in Gillespie, Gillam, Falls Brown & Stay, 2002:75). The physical space or environment of a writing centre is an important aspect and should be welcoming to a student writer. Grimm (1999:10 cited in Boquet, 2002:41) explains that the tutor needs to promote the writing centre as a place for all writers not just remedial writers, finding joy, challenge and stimulation in teaching everyone including "those students relegated to what many consider the academic dump" Boquet (2002:36).

The writing centre, therefore, by being a non-threatening environment (Hadfield, Kinkead, Paulson, Ray & Preston cited in Pemberton & Kinkead, 2003:171) induces a sense of community. Carino (1992:38 in Boquet 2002:25) defines the writing centre as "evok[ing] the communal aspect ... as a microculture in which camaraderie replaces the competitive atmosphere of the classroom" and where "we [the tutors] attempt to create a community in the writing centre" (Boquet, 2002:27). However, Davis (2000:196 cited in Boquet, 2002:143) explains that "community is not a product; it cannot be built or produced. One *experiences* community by "*knowing the different*

students” (Nev). It is thus, within the physical space of the writing centre that the peer tutor attempts to create an atmosphere where the student writer experiences a sense of community which does not have to involve large numbers of people, but most importantly involves the student writer, the tutor and the supervisor – an equilateral triangle – a stable foundation where the supervisor’s expertise supports the peer tutor and student writer in talking.

The community of academic practice describes how students are socialised into the different ways of thinking, reasoning, reading and writing with the peer tutor helping students become agents of their own writing, gaining their voice (Woolbright in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:70) and becoming empowered (Cooper cited in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:60) consequently leading peer tutors to become “agents of change in writing pedagogy” (Ibid. 59).

Community, therefore, is created and experienced between tutor and student writer in one-on-one consultations, in on-line tutoring or between tutor and student writers in workshops and in the case of postgraduate studies, with the support of the supervisor. Experiencing community gives the student writer a sense of belonging, unity or kinship and it is this belonging which allows access to the faculty, the discipline and the discourse. In the informal atmosphere of the tutoring sessions “*a good atmosphere*” is experienced where we “*meet new friends*” and “*gain experience*” (Connie), a place “*for acquiring knowledge and skills*” (Annie), where student writers are “*relaxed*” (Matt), “*feel safe*” (Katie), and this “*helps build confidence*” (Matt) allowing one to “*plunge into the unknown*” (Katie). In tutoring situations described previously where talk is central, “*we sat next to each ... and I think it’s also very important because it makes us to bond with each other*” (Matt) leads to experiencing community.

Davis (2000:194) explains that what community shares, is ‘sharing’ itself. “*If you share information*” (Lynne) by “*supporting and caring*” this develops “*a fascinating working environment*” (Nev) reinforced with the thought that “*it’s the people that you are with ... are the ones that help you to cope ... because they were there, somewhere I got my strength from them and whenever any of us felt down, the others pepped her up*” (Odette). The social relationships that develop through tutoring sessions are as a result “cemented” through talk (McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001:5) allowing one to experience community reinforcing Elbow’s concept of “a community of writers” which indicates fellowship, cooperation and dialogue to be at the very core

of the writing process (1989), with student writers needing to be part of the community in order to learn how to write in that community (Smit, 1995: online).

4.4.2 Conversations with members of the community

Just talking or the active engagement of students in conversation at as many points in the writing process as possible (Bruffee, 2001:210), demonstrates the power of oral language which facilitates learning in general and writing specifically (McAndrew & Reigstad, (2001:4). During the workshop the student writers were either paired off or grouped encouraging them to talk about their topics as Barnes (1990, cited in McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001:4) states that students “have already taken possession of complex ways of making sense of the world ... for the social and cognitive skills they have developed in various contexts in and out of [learning institutions] provide their most valuable resources as learners”. The encouraging of conversation involved the student writers in talking, questioning and thinking about various aspects of their writing, which Barnes (1990, cited in McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001:4) explains, benefits learning as “exploratory talk” or “informal, tentative talking it over” (McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001:4), in order to gain clarity as Rosie concludes **“I gained a better understanding”**. Bruffee explains that in order to learn to think better, one needs to converse better and “to learn to create and maintain the sort of social contexts, the sort of community life, that foster the kinds of conversations we value” (2001:206-209) or as Odette explains it: **“the more you talk, the more you understand”**.

It is ‘just talking’ in this community that helps the student writer develop the flow of language for an English 2nd language (ESL) speaker. During these ‘talk’ sessions the student writer is able engage with peers to verbalize his/her internal reflective thoughts, breaking up ideas into smaller issues which are then discussed in an attempt to find contextual meaning and understanding (McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001:4). Conversations between people in the community of the writing centre are where student writers seek out the genuine information **“ask[ing] other’s opinions”** (Lynne) that might otherwise be suppressed or eliminated (Boquet, 2003:51) and **“this answered all my concerns I would see the pattern”** (Debbie). In addition, this interaction allows the student writer time to explain what he/she currently understands and if peer critiqued, is able to bring about modifications and/or changes.

Conversation is seen as a “social constructionist code work to talk about knowledge and teaching

and learning”. This interactive is created through social activity rather than in the individual mind with the resulting conversation and consensus building not only stimulating the general process of knowledge construction but also reproducing the very dialogic process of writing (Gillam in Mullin & Wallace, 1994:43). Bruffee explains that ideas originate during conversations which take place in public between people and later becomes internalized into thought (2001:210). Tiny explained her experience “*I learned to listen to every idea coming while I am busy writing and to put it on paper and later will be edited*”. It was thus during the interaction with peers, either in paired or group sessions that student writers shared ideas and were then able to “compose through inner speech” (Bishop, 1992 cited in McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001:4).

Talking, as seen in the workshop sessions, one-on-one tutoring and online tutoring, is central to the process of tutoring (North cited in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:42) and writing (Rubin & Dodd, 1987; Bishop, 1992; Boquet 2002) where student writers are encouraged to talk to their peers, their tutors and supervisors, allowing them “to bounce their ideas off an audience, which requires them to practice rhetorical skills as they adjust the ideas to the audience, and they thus develop the analytical and critical skills that are essential to drafting and revising” (McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001:4). “*I was able to open my mind concerning writing*” (Nora). This talking involves the student writer bringing the “conversation of knowledge” to the collaborative table and the peer tutor, the “conversation of the conventions of discourse” (Bruffee in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:210-213).

Pemberton (2002, cited in Van Rensburg, 2004:218) states that [post]graduate students tend to be “quite active” in writing centre tutor sessions as they have “disciplinary knowledge” and consequently are able to discuss their topics drawing on “their expertise with texts and documents”. Tutoring thus is talking, illustrating that writing is not solitary, but is a process that through “the unique conversations about reading and writing” (Kail, quoted in Boquet 2002:44) allows student writer and peer tutor growth in writing and personal relationships” (McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001:4-5).

4.4.3 Collaboration within the community to construct knowledge

Collaboration is a powerful learning tool (Harris 1992:369) and “writing center pedagogy has given high priority to working collaboratively and interactively” (Harris & Silva, 1993:532),

encouraging people to “engage in a process of intellectual, social and personal negotiation” (McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001:5). However, as many constraints are placed on the collaborating environment, from institutional burdens to worries about ethics, peer tutors should strive to remember that collaboration is more than just theory and doctrines. Collaboration is a learning technique that provides a benefit to real people throughout our society (Annett, online). In the context of tutoring, collaboration has multiple meanings and can be interpreted as the interaction between peer tutor, as reader, and the student writer in order “to promote dialogue and negotiation” and “heighten the writer’s sense of audience” (Harris 1992:369). In peer tutoring the tutor helps with student writer “*face-to-face, hands-on*” (Paul) to develop strategies and through the process of tutoring to become effective writers. Tutors are not personal editors but need to work collaboratively with student writers to guide them, especially ESL students who do not have the native speaker intuition to identify errors in their own writing (Harris & Silva, 1993: 530, 531). Research has show that ESL student writers exhibit less facility in revising by ear or in an intuitive manner as to what “sounds” right (Harris & Silva, 1993:529).

Collaboration can also be interpreted as the interaction between student writers, as seen in the research proposal workshop, where there was active involvement in discussions which Paul described as “*super*” as it involved “*meeting other students and getting information from others*” (Patrisha), demonstrating that knowledge is constructed in social communities. The student writers experienced community through “*friendship, working and helping each other*” (Anton), and through talking in pairs or groups, discovered the value of “*listening and formulating ideas with peers*” (Katie). “*And the group work as well — we shared experiences and ... it helped and we could share*” (Paul) illustrated that collaborative learning directly involves the student writers’ action and attention, with the student writers conversing among themselves. This empowers the student writers, who actively question and synthesize what is said (Bruffee, 1993:31), into combining listening, reading, talking, writing and thinking skills simultaneously (Fitzgerald in Mullin & Wallace, 1994:12; Lunsford, in Murphy & Law 2003:49).

The resultant collaborative learning which, described by Bruffee, “encourages students to listen to each other accepting the authority of helping one another learn and to acknowledge the authority of other students, their peers and in turn helping them learn themselves” (1998:87), occurred during discussions where student writers could “*learn from others*” (Connie) about the writing of

their research proposals and encourage peer critique by “ask[ing] other’s opinions” (Lynne) as well as “try and help the other ones with their topics” (Odette). Harris (1992:370) explains that “collaborative learning about writing involves interaction between writer and reader to help the writer improve her own abilities and produce her own text” which is what occurred during discussions where “we are also able to help one another ... with other students when we work together” (Matt) and consequently “my way of thinking has developed” (Lindiwe). Bruffee (1993:20-21) explains that more is learnt from what is said through the “powerful force” of interaction of others. This influence on one another is experiencing community, a knowledge community where participants speak the same language.

In collaborative learning the lecturer/facilitator/tutor tends to stand on the sidelines, teaching indirectly but with “help from facilitators” (Patrisha) “coming in from time to time to assist” resulting in “overwhelming support” (Matt). However, the tutor remains connected with the student writer by being the reader or audience who through interactive questioning, evaluates and collaborates during the process of writing (McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001:5-6).

This idea of collaborative learning, which Nev found “very informative”, offers a new model for learning which involves the “re-acculturation” (Bruffee, 1993:20) of a student through conversation with peers wanting entrance into a new community, such as the academic and professional disciplines of higher learning. Collaborative learning has major advantages for student writers who through conversations “challenge one another with questions, use the evidence and information available to them, develop relationships among issues, and evaluate their thinking” (McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001:6) working towards strengthening the student writers’ skills (Harris, 1992:371). Gere (1987:75, cited in McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001:5-6) explains that “the process of working together enables writers to use language as a means of becoming competent in the discourse of a given community”. Bruffee sums up by stating that “collaborative learning models the conversation by which communities of knowledgeable peers construct knowledge” (1993:52). Thus, it is the role of the peer tutor to facilitate collaboration between students and themselves, to construct knowledge which will then support and inform their writing.

4.4.4 Social Constructivism in the process of writing

Learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their

current or past knowledge (Brunner, online) through interacting with others. Students should be encouraged to discover principles by themselves by engaging in an active dialogue. Social constructivism introduced in composition theory by Bruffee, sees language as “social, a phenomenon of society, us[ing] language primarily to join communities we do not yet belong to and to cement our membership in communities we already belong to” (1986:784 cited in McAndrew and Reigstad, 2001:1-2), focusing on “the sociocultural and historical settings in which writers develop their understanding of language and knowledge” (Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:4).

It is through language, talking and writing, in the interaction with society that ideas gained from previous discussions, readings, thoughts and writings are shared, and as a result, knowledge is constructed. Petraglia (1991:38 cited in Murphy in Mullin & Wallace, 1994:26) states that “knowledge is created, maintained and altered through an individual’s interaction with and within his/her discourse community”. Vygotsky (1978 cited in McAndrew and Reigstad, 2001:2) explains that students/student writers have an “actual developmental level” and “a level of potential development” in the development of their language and literacy. Student writers, according to Vygotsky, are able to work without assistance but could progress to the level of potential development with the help and support of a teacher, a tutor or a collaborative group, moving them beyond what they currently can achieve. Thus the social nature of language, literacy and learning is demonstrated through the process of tutoring and collaboration where the student writer is able to construct understanding as a direct result of conversation. Conversation simulates the general process of knowledge construction, also reproducing the very dialogic process of writing, which can be translated into academic writing and in the long term help students gain entry into the larger discourse. “Social construction, dialogue, literacy, and learning all interweave during a tutoring session” (McAndrew and Reigstad, 2001:2), and accordingly, knowledge becomes the product of collaboration during the process of social interaction.

During the research proposal workshop, the social interactions relied on were the writing conversations which were most beneficial to the intellectual development of the student writer as they revolved around tasks that the student writer cannot do alone, but in which he/ she requires assistance and the extensive use of peer group critiquing to reflect the workings of discourse communities. These were the sentiments of Paul: “[*The sharing of community*] .. *is of the utmost importance ... and you can’t do it alone*” which resulted in Connie explaining that “*I can help*

others". Collaboration and collaborative learning play a more important role in social constructivist writing instruction as described by Rosie: **"I had some ideas but they were not as clear as I understand them now"**. Lindiwe found that a result of the collaboration led her *"to develop more ideas"* whilst Matt **"was able to write with confidence"**. The collaboration, aimed at downplaying the role of the tutor as an authority figure or the single source of knowledge, demonstrated that the peer tutor's voice is one of many and in the context of the workshop collaborative conversations, the peer tutor was seen as a co-learner. **"It was exciting throughout and everyday to go home having learnt so much!"** described Paul's experience of collaboration where meanings were negotiated and knowledge constructed (Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:4).

Lunsford (cited in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:52) explains that in collaborative conversations knowledge is constructed by agreement or consensus within discourse communities. A student in a letter to Lunsford writes *"knowing happens with other people, figuring things out, trying to explain, talking through things ... we are all making and remaking our knowing and ourselves each other every day"* (Lunsford, cited in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:53). Connie and Nora, after being members of the community participating in these collaborative conversations during the workshop, explain **"I have the light"** and **"Now I have courage"**.

The result of knowledge being constructed supports students in the writing of their research proposals. Writing, recognised as a social act, described as *"the social-epistemic or social constructivist theory of writing"* (Gillespie & Lerner, 2003:13) requires student writers to interact with others during the learning and writer process. Lunsford (in Gillespie & Lerner, 2003:13) explains that *"knowledge and reality as mediated by or constructed through language in social use, as socially constructed, contextualized, is, in short, the product of collaboration"*. The results of such an interactive workshop focusing on collaborative talk, allowed the students writers to complete or almost complete their research proposals: **"I could not believe that in 5 days I would be where I am with my proposal"** (Tiny); **"I really enjoyed writing my proposal"** (Nora); **"Easy for me to complete my proposal"** (Rosie); **"How easy it is to write a research proposal"** (Patrisha) and **"I didn't know it was so easy"** (Connie). Nev's final comment concludes that this was **"The most successful workshop"**.

4.4.5 The feminist approach

My findings concur with McAndrew and Reigstad (2001:1) who write that theories underpinning the tutoring of writing have developed over the past twenty five years. These theories encourage tutors in developing their tutoring practice and help writers grow in confidence and competence. The major theories, thus, underpinning tutoring are social constructionist theory, reader response literary theories, theories of talk and writing and collaborative learning.

However, one of the major theories, that of feminism, has not been discussed yet tutoring sessions, in which the feminist goal of sharing power and liberating the student's voice (Woolbright cited in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:67) has been alluded to. Shapiro (cited in Woolbright in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:68) describes the model of a feminist classroom, on which can be superimposed the role of a peer tutor in developing conversations of knowledge. She explains that in such a feminist environment or community, there is a place for conversation among equals or peers where through collaboration, students can learn from each other and "through their conversations can shape the knowledge of the discourse" and lead to an understanding that they, the student writers, have authority which can be heard through their voice in their own writings. Therefore, the role of the peer tutor is to facilitate such conversations either in one-on-one tutoring sessions, group workshops or online tutoring.

Schniedewind (cited in Woolbright in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:69 and Boquet, 2002:27) explains that feminist values emerge from a "hidden curriculum" and these can be measured against our interactions with students as in tutoring sessions. These are "the development of an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and community; shared leadership; cooperative structure; the integration of cognitive and affective learning; and action". These values characterise peer tutoring in that tutoring is non-hierarchical, cooperative and interactive, being "conversations between equals in which knowledge is constructed" (Woolbright cited in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:69) based on the student writer's experience. Schniedewind elaborates by writing that when individuals have "opportunities to come to know each other as people, speak honestly, take risks and support each other ... feminist values of community, communication, equality, and mutual nurturance are reinforced" (cited in Woolbright in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:77 and Boquet, 2002:27). Student writers who have been tutored in one of the tutoring sessions as described above, have commented positively on the support and guidance that they have received: "**support**

[from the tutors] to me was the best (Anton); *“there was a good atmosphere ... [the tutor] helped us equally without being biased ... she loves us all ... she was too jolly”*(Annie); *“the facilitators have stayed or spent every minute of every day with us giving support”* (Debbie); *“[the tutors] are wonderful in working with the students ... the overwhelming support .. feel relaxed and help build your confidence in what you are writing”* (Matt); *“the commitment of these people [the tutors]... their patience* (Nora); *“[the tutors are] hardworking, supporting and caring”* (Nev); *“patience and on-going support”* (Paul) and *“[the tutors’] patience was phenomenal”* (Rosie).

However, Schniedewind’s final feminist value implies that action taken by the students has the possibility of transforming institutions. According to Sommers, this action is the encouragement to empower the student writers “not to write in the persona of Everystudent, but rather to write [papers] that will change the academy” (cited in Woolbright in Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:78). Paul, during the interview states that *“through a hands-on type of support”* and *“feedback”* he was able to maintain his voice but hopes that his comments will help *“transform and change their [higher education institutions’] approaches”*. This sentiment is echoed by Nichols (1998) who states that within the South African context the writing centre could become an agent of change (a shifter of power) ensuring that power is differently and more efficiently disseminated (1998:92) with the students themselves taking on the roles of teaching and tutoring, and thus transforming change from below rather than hierarchically from above.

4.4.6 Concluding remarks

The role of the peer tutor is an inductive one, using a student-centred model or a Socratic method of dialogue, which assumes the student writers can do the work, can answer their own questions, solve their own problems, and learn through self-discovery. Thus, it is role of the peer tutor with the student writer members of the postgraduate community to facilitate collaborative conversations leading to the construction of knowledge.

4.5 VALIDITY, RELIABILITY AND TRIANGULATION

Internal validity of this research is shored up by triangulation using a combination of multiple methods of data collection so that data collected in an observation can be checked against that of document analysis such as the questionnaire and the transcriptions of the interviews (Merriam,

2002:25). This reinforces Denzin's suggestion in using multiple methods of data collection to ensure "methodological triangulation". He explains that "the rationale for this strategy is that the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies" (Denzin, 1970:301 cited in Merriam 1988:68).

I initially collected data through long-term observations recorded in the research journal (Merriam, 1998:204) and over time and through reflection, my perceptions and understanding were altered, increased and deepened. Before tutoring sessions, student writers completed a pre-tutoring/workshop questionnaire and afterwards, a post-tutoring/workshop questionnaire. Data was analysed from these questionnaires which informed the development of questions for the interviews which were conducted with selected student writers who had attended the research proposal workshop. Interviews were transcribed and data was then coded and categorized which allowed themes to emerge. A combination of analysed data from these three data collection tools hopefully ensures "methodological triangulation" (Denzin, 1970:301 cited in Merriam 1988:68). I have also tried to create an "audit trail" (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:146, Merriam 1998:207), consisting of questionnaire analysis (Appendix I and J) and original transcripts of interviews (Appendix K). I have also described in detail how the data was generated and analysed, how the categories were derived and how decisions were made throughout the research process. Internal validity refers to the trustworthiness of inferences that are drawn from data (Merriam 1998:199). Participants were also asked to read over "tentative findings" to find out whether the findings "ring true" (Merriam, 2002: 26) and if the results were "plausible" (Merriam, 1998:204).

External validity is traditionally concerned with the extent to which the findings can be applied to other situations (Merriam, 1998:211). To enhance external validity, Merriam (1998:211-212) suggests that researchers should provide "a rich, thick description" to allow the reader to make decisions regarding transferability because of the detailed description of participants or setting provided. The narrative of the case study (see 4.2) which includes one-on-one tutoring, the workshop tutoring and online tutoring, should provide this rich, thick description, so that the readers are able to determine whether or not the findings match the tutoring experience in writing centres at other higher education institutions as well as making it possible for outsiders to understand the context and experience (Lincoln and Guba cited in Merriam, 1998:211). The aim of

this study, therefore, was to understand the role of the peer tutor in postgraduate writing support by looking at various contexts of peer tutoring in order to, at a later stage, develop a training programme for tutors, which will enhance the development of writing and the smooth flow into academic discourse at postgraduate level.

Reliability refers to what extent these research findings can be replicated in another setting, in another study and whether the results are consistent and dependable (Merriam, 2002:27). This holds true in a quantitative study. However research in the social sciences (qualitative research) involves humans seeking to describe and understand the world as they see it. Human behaviour is dynamic rather than static and consequently results may differ as there can be numerous interpretations of the same data. As an alternate, Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Merriam, 1998:206) suggest using the terms “dependability and consistency” whereby the results of the research are “consistent with the data collected”. Researchers thus should consider using several techniques to ensure the dependability of the results. These techniques include the incorporation of triangulation, member checks, peer review or examination, the researcher’s position, adequate engagement in data collection, an audit trail and thick description (Merriam, 1998:206-7; 2002:31).

Numerous methods of data collection were employed over a period of 14 months which should strengthen reliability and internal validity. As previously explained, I have also tried to create an “audit trail” (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:146, Merriam 1998:207), consisting of questionnaire analysis (Appendix I and J), original transcripts of interviews (Appendix K) and use of observations recorded in my research journal. I have also described in detail how the data was generated and analysed, how the categories were derived and how decisions were made throughout the research process. The narratives of the three tutoring practices should lead to thick, rich description however, this socially constructed reality is my interpretation based on my observations as a peer tutor and a student writer, and the student writer’s interpretations of the tutoring practice during various situations. Discussions with the experienced tutor and the director of the writing centre regarding the process of the study and the emerging findings and interpretations were undertaken and student writers were asked to read over the findings described in the narratives. In addition, as the researcher, I have read widely on the subject of peer tutoring, observed and participated in peer tutoring over this period which has led me to reflect on the

practice and take into account positive and negative comments made by student writers during the process of writing their research proposals.

4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Working as a tutor in the postgraduate writing support centre without any formal training, led me to choose this particular research topic in an effort to understand my role and inform my practice. Initial observations were informal but facilitating the research proposal workshop provided a chance to include research from this tutoring method in a multi-faceted case study which also includes one-on-one tutoring and online tutoring.

Student writers registered within the Faculty of Education are offered the service of writing support, which is aimed at the acquisition and development of writing skills and academic writing proficiency during the writing of the various papers required at postgraduate level. The student writers were willing to participate in the study. However, individuals have a right to safety and privacy. I informed participants of the purpose of the study as well as how data would be gathered by means pre- and post-workshop questionnaires and my observations during the workshop or tutoring sessions and gained their informed consent. I also asked if the student writers if they would be willing to be interviewed. I assured the participants of anonymity and confidentiality and participants were given pseudonyms in the writing up of the research. Student writers were also given the option to withdraw without reprisal, if needed. As the majority of the student writers had previously worked with me in the context of the writing support centre, I felt that my presence would be accepted and seen as participative rather than obtrusive.

4.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the analysis of the data collected through questionnaires, interviews and participant observation which was central in this study. In data analysis, the examining and organization of the raw data into categories and themes was undertaken as well as a narrative description of the case study which includes one-on-one tutoring, workshop tutoring and online tutoring. The theoretical framework justifies the position that has been taken in this research in order to understand and interpret the meanings that the student writers attach to actions, behaviours

and situations in the process of writing their research proposals with support from the peer tutor. The interpretive theories of community, conversation, collaboration, constructivism and feminism are therefore used as central tenets in an attempt to understand the role of the peer tutor in developing conversations with postgraduate writers.

Chapter 5 presents a synthesis by superimposing the findings of the research on the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2. It also makes recommendations, gives an overview and offers concluding remarks.



CHAPTER 5: SYNTHESIS OF EVIDENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings emerging from the data have been described in narrative form in the previous chapter as well as being categorized into themes in an attempt to understand the role of the peer tutor in developing conversations of knowledge with postgraduate students. However, another vitally important element in the analytical process is making sense by the interpretation of findings to inform the practice of peer tutoring. Findings should highlight the practice of peer tutoring and the experience of the student writers during tutoring sessions and should provide understanding of the impact of any changes that need to be introduced into the practice of peer tutoring and any deficits or failings or shortcomings which may need to be addressed.

5.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK vs FINDINGS

Bassey (1995:57) states that “theory-in-the-literature is the knowledge which has been published in the literature, and which is thus available for researchers to read and base their expectations on”. The initial purpose of a literature review is to identify the general problem area and then sharpen the focus (Kaniki, 1999), argue a case, synthesize the literature on the topic and engage critically with it. Out of this emerges a theoretical framework, a disciplinary orientation, a lens (Merriam, 1998:45), through which to view the findings (Henning, et al., 2004:27-29).

The theoretical framework which was developed in Chapter 2 aligns with the peer tutoring model emerging from these findings. This model emphasizes collaboration, with writing centre pedagogy grounded in social constructivist theories of language, writing and knowledge. It is through conversation with student writers whose language may differ from others that they are able to share with another student or other students and to experience the act of negotiating meaning. The construction of knowledge in the writing centre is consequently dependent on the conversation between people. The student writer brings the content knowledge to the collaboration table and the peer tutor the knowledge of the writing discourse. But the peer tutor's role in the tutorial is strictly facilitative: developing a positive attitude, modelling strategies, discussing expectations about the conventions for writing within a given discipline, looking at

organizational skills in piecing the writing together, developing style appropriate to task and audience, reasoning ability and argument (Fulwiler, cited in Sully, 1995:online) as well as developing clarity of writing such as the ability to solve problems, the ability to examine ideas and support them with evidence and the ability to incorporate and synthesize information (Sully, 1995:online).

Peer tutoring thus helps tutors and student writers learn how to communicate with others whose ideas, beliefs, values, and language practices may differ from their own but it is important to acknowledge other students' voices and understand that their values matter. Collaborative tasks prepare student writers to participate in their community as the act of composing is equally social and collaborative, since the ideas written down are the product of interactions with others. Conventions for written communication arise out of specific social and cultural contexts. Writing implies a reader and tutoring sessions provide *real* readers, critical readers for the student writers by providing an audience which in turn assists student writers in experiencing the ways that their words affect others.

5.2.1 The disjuncture

However, what has emerged from the findings is that there is a disjuncture between writing centre theory and practice. Hemmeter (1990:online) says that understanding of theory and the practice employed is not a pressing problem as there is no need to adhere to theory strictly as theory is there as a framework and needs to be contextualized so that it fits the writing centre that it serves. In many cases, I have found that the student writers at postgraduate level are ill-equipped with the necessary skills to undertake research and then write it up. Cooke (cited in Sully, 1995:online) states that many students have no clear or realistic idea as to what is expected of them in higher education institutions and many students' language skills which relate to writing (reading, listening, vocabulary) are poor. As explained above, these students tend to be mature professionals motivated by the transformation in higher education to continue with postgraduate study but whose education, a product of the previous dispensation, was influenced by global and ethnic isolation, lack of instruction in mother-tongue and English.

As a result, when a student writer visits the writing centre or attends a workshop, the peer tutor's role which is seen as a continuum with contrasting concepts, such as tutor/editor, novice/expert,

process/product, control/flexibility and tutor/teacher, existing at either end of the continuum, changes.

In postgraduate writing, research proposals and research papers, product seems to take precedence over process. A successful research proposal provides the entrance to research and consequently product is important. To achieve a B Ed, M Ed. or Ph D. degree, the end result – the research paper – once again is the product. Perhaps during the period taken to write the research proposal and then write up the research, the student writer does work through the process of writing and improve his/her skills. However, as the student writer's main focus is the completion of the writing assignment – the research paper, the role of the peer tutor becomes one firstly of teacher, who takes on a directive tutoring stance, in order for the paper to be written. As the student writer completes the paper, the tutor takes on the role of editor.

In the pre-workshop questionnaires, student writers identified many concerns which revolve around the writing of the proposal and ultimately writing up their research. It appears that these student writers, to some degree, have attended lectures on writing, research methodology and how to write a proposal and the research paper, but still are not confident. These concerns include writing a “good” proposal, “finalising” and “fine-tuning” the proposal, “confirming format and content”, “developing a topic” and “confirming the need for such research”.

In my own case, even after attending a writing session and making several attempts to write the proposal, it took me many months before a “good” proposal was completed during which time I battled to find the “right” way. Paul confirms that time is wasted and little direction and support is given to the student writers by their supervisors: “*what I could not achieve in one year, I achieved in a week*” and Katie requests “*Please train all the supervisors to assist their students in the drafting of the proposal*”, which is re-iterated by Lessing and Lessing (1994:83) who have identified the need to train supervisors in research supervision and methodology.

One has to ask the question, where does the responsibility lie? Is teaching the student writer how to write a proposal from the beginning and guiding him/her through the various stages the role of the peer tutor? With the support of the experienced tutor, I was asked to conduct a proposal workshop with postgraduate students who had yet to complete and submit research proposals. I

was perhaps identified to conduct the workshop with the assistance of the experience tutor as my own proposal had just been accepted by the Higher Degrees' Committee.

Conducting the workshop was exciting, but based on the general to specific writing format described by Henning, et al. (2005:62) and an understanding gained after I had completed my proposal, I developed my own format (Appendices G and H) referred to by the student writers as "the funnel". However, although I felt that I was designing a new format, the teaching of research proposals has been done before and the supervisors themselves should have taught the student writers and led them through the various stages of writing their proposals. Katie highlights this problem by writing "*it surprises me that so many students don't have a clue how to draft a proposal*" which is reinforced by additional concerns voiced by students in the pre-workshop questionnaires. Student writers needed help with identifying a topic, identifying a problem, writing a problem statement, formulating a question, and putting forward an argument. Reading concerns such as finding information and finding relevant literature were also identified. Structural problems such as correct referencing and citing techniques, developing a research design and deciding on the methodology to be employed also came under the list of concerns.

Although most student writers managed to complete or almost complete their research proposals, the week was not without its difficulties. The experienced tutor was heard commenting "*you can take a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink*" and later when we reviewed the completed proposals "*you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear*". These comments were motivated by aspects displayed by student writers such as lack of motivation, no enthusiasm, extended tea and lunch times, no depth of knowledge, not enough reading and research, problems in understanding concepts, problems with language fluency, inability to transpose what has been said in conversation into their writing in their own words, inability to paraphrase and thus committing plagiarism.

One thus needs to ask the question "How directive then should our tutoring be?" As previously stated, in writing a research proposal which is the gateway to further research, product rather than process is important, and consequently tutoring tends to move down the tutoring continuum and become directive in order to achieve the product. Elbow (in Pemberton & Kinkead, 2003:102) reinforces the fact that a fine balance needs to be achieved. Tutoring in the writing centre context

cannot just be “coffee, cookies and couches” but should with either “Socratic or Rogerian nondirective tutoring [which] cue students to recall knowledge they have and construct new knowledge that they do not have” and slip between or move up and down the continuum of tutoring, depending on the needs of the student writer. However, Robertson and Apanewicz, a director and a peer tutor at the Sheekey Writing Center at La Salle University, believe that a writing centre must consider, “Where is the line?” when concerned with the ethical issue of how much help a tutor should offer a student writer (Annett, online). However, in the South African context with transformation in higher education and the motivation of teachers to become lifelong learners and continue with postgraduate studies, one then needs to question the ethical boundaries, but at the same time ensuring that the writing support needs of each student writer is met, thus moving up or down the peer tutoring continuum. Clark and Healy (cited in Barnett & Blumner, 2001:255) suggest that writing centres are “proactive” in their work “exercise[ing] a broad, encompassing vision” by being open to all students and the larger discourse community but emphasizing “individualized writing instruction” to maintain an ethical stance.

It seems that to achieve a fine balance, there is a need for community between student writers, peer tutors and supervisors to be developed so that the writing of proposals is workshopped using a specific format, agreed upon by faculty which will meet with approval by the Higher Degrees’ Committee. Student writers agree that once “*everything [the format] was explained in detail*” (Nora) and there was a template to follow as “*I would see the pattern*” (Debbie), writing the proposal was “*easy and interesting*” (Connie) and “*not that difficult to come up with a proposal*” (Lynne) “*as I had gained an idea of writing a good proposal*” (Mo), followed by “*I could not believe that in 5 days I would be where I am with my proposal*” (Tiny). In addition, the supervisor’s role should include “expertise in the research area, support for the student, and balancing creativity and critique” (Fraser & Mathews, 1999:5; Hockey, 1994:293 cited in Lessing & Lessing, 2004:75) as well as guiding, advising, ensuring scientific quality and providing emotional support (Mouton, 2001:17-18).

Writing is of great importance and as writing is a displaced form of conversation (Bruffee, 1993), supervisors, in their course work and preparation for the writing of the research proposal, need to teach students to engage in constructive conversation with one another as student writers can only write about what they can talk about, and in addition they can only write about what they have

already talked about. Writing is only as clear, incisive and effective as their conversations and therefore teachers of writing and supervisors should give students opportunities to talk with peers about what they are writing. This is reinforced by DeLyser (2003:174) who states that “it is the creation of a culture of writing in the class, the formation of a group of students who can talk with each other about their writing, who are able to share their work, and help themselves and one another with the writing process”. In addition, student writers initially find it difficult to learn the conventions of academic discourse. Lillis (2001:132-3) suggests that student writers, as “outsiders” become “apprenticed” to “insiders” who already have a feel and knowledge about the particular discourse in order “to learn the particular discourse practices of a particular community” (Lave & Wenger, 1991 cited in Lillis, 2001:133) and it is thus the role of the peer tutor to provide this support (Bruffee, 1993: 81).

It is important for student writers and tutors to be able to work collaboratively to produce writing that meets the needs and goals of the student. However, this cannot happen if supervisors are not aware of what the primary function of any writing centre is. Lindiwe suggests “*that the supervisors work with the writing support centre*” which should help to alleviate some of the confusion about the purpose of a writing centre. Supervisors need to be informed and more contact should be made directly between writing centre tutors and supervisors. This would benefit student writers by keeping the lines of communication open between those reading their work, allowing for more open discourse between supervisor and tutor, if necessary, creating the equilateral triangle of student writer, supervisor and tutor which will support successful writing and supervision and become “a key determinant of the success or failure of the project (Cross, 1999:138-9). If everyone is willing to work together, writing centres can continue to be places where student writers can get the support they need and tutors can do the kind of work they are best equipped to do.

Bruffee (1993:81) states that peer tutors can inform lecturers and supervisors and thus have the potential to act as agents of institutional change, resulting in changes in the way the coursework is taught and consequently with continued writing centre research, Nichols (1998) states that within the South African context the writing centre could become an agent of change (a shifter of power) ensuring that power is differently and more efficiently disseminated (1998:92) with the students themselves taking on the roles of teaching and tutoring, and thus transforming change from below

rather than hierarchically from above.

5.3 SUMMING UP AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the findings, various aspects arose which could, through further research or discussion with faculty, be addressed and in turn support the role that the peer tutor plays in writing support in higher education institutions.

5.3.1 Tutor Training

Tutors are collaborators and consequently their main aim is to assist student writers in achieving their goals (Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:8). In order for a peer tutor to be effective, the tutoring practice cannot rely on a “hit-or-miss, trial-and-error experimentation” (Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:7). Informed tutoring practice depends on training which includes extensive reading into the disciplines of tutoring and academic writing, discussion of concepts, ideas and problems as well as constant reflection both verbal and written, on the practice of tutoring. Although the peer tutor usually is a “good” writer, training will develop in the tutor technical skills, improved writing skills, critical reading skills and over time, an evolving philosophy and insight (Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:7). Practical training such as role-playing and the recording of tutoring sessions ending up with analyzing the interaction, develop tutoring skills and techniques.

In addition, the following key interpersonal skills such as “good intentions, strong writing and editing skills, flexibility, an eagerness to help, an analytical yet creative mind, a dedication to excellence, good listening skills, an ability to be supportive yet honest, a willingness to work hard, a sense of humour, sensitivity to others, careful judgement, patience and a dedication to collaborative learning” (Murphy & Sherwood, 2003:8) could be discussed in training sessions and displayed during the tutoring process.

5.3.2 Postgraduate programme

However, as stated previously, the peer tutor cannot operate alone. The equilateral triangle consists of the supervisors/lecturers as well and in their article, Lessing and Lessing (2004) have delineated the role that supervisors should play in postgraduate research. Sully (online) states that when supervisors pass the responsibility for writing to others, they are, in effect, signalling to

students that content is important, but process is not. Lessing and Lessing (2004:77) explain that a postgraduate student should demonstrate “professional knowledge and skills, which include technical competence, techniques for analysis of data ...” but in many cases these skills are not inherent and need to be developed through teaching, discussion and support.

As a result, I suggest that the Postgraduate programme needs to come under scrutiny and be reformulated so that postgraduate study is seen as “a dynamic process and a journey of growth and empowerment” (Bailey, 2001:7 cited in Lessing & Lessing, 2004:74). Most importantly, attention should be given to hands-on, regular supportive supervision, time management and planning (Mouton, 2001: 63-69) and the awareness of the time constraints placed upon the postgraduate student by the higher education institute. Many postgraduate students are not computer literate and consequently a computer skills session paying particular attention to word processing skills to inform the writing up of the research could be undergone. The programme should also include the on-going development of critical reading and writing skills to improve the students' analytical and communication skills with a library orientation session focusing on electronic information searches, the teaching of methodology to inform research design and develop research skills and the opportunity for postgraduate students to participate in collaborative learning, with student immersion in the students' chosen fields of study, and a greater emphasis on writing in the context of discourse communities (Smit, 1995:online).

Smit (1995: online), upholds that writing involves a wide range of knowledge and skill beyond the sentence level that cannot be solely learned in writing classes but must be acquired by immersion in various discourse communities. Thus students do not learn to write in order to prepare themselves to write in a particular community; they need to be part of the community in order to learn how to write in that community. Consequently, student writers should be trained to live in two worlds: one of composition theory and pedagogy and another of the discourse practices of particular communities. This aspect can only be addressed if all supervisors and tutors themselves include the teaching of reading, research and writing in their coursework or follow a “writing across the curriculum” (WAC) programme in which student writers learn how to transfer their abilities and skills from one context to another (Smit, 1995: online).

5.3.3 ESL Students

At postgraduate level in the Faculty of Education, it seems as if the majority of the students are teachers who wish to upgrade their qualifications either for personal or professional reasons. However, the cultural mix of these students tends to reveal that many students are not English home or 1st language speakers and consequently English, the medium of learning, reading and writing, is a 2nd, 3rd or even 4th language. Consideration thus needs to be given to students/teachers who are entering a higher education institution for postgraduate study in terms of their English literacy abilities. If students are admitted to postgraduate study based on their academic record, solely, and have not undergone an English literacy test to ascertain their literacy level, then language support needs to be given to the students to help them cope with the rigours of reading and writing expected at postgraduate level. Matt says *“English is my second language ... [so] I’m a 2nd language speaker ... you find that when it comes to writing it becomes difficult because you write a paragraph and a sentence and then you think that sentence is correct but when you come in and you say no you don’t have to put this here you have to put that there then it makes us feel as if we don’t know this Queen’s language”*.

5.4 AN OVERVIEW

The reason for undertaking this study was to understand the role that the peer tutor plays in writing support particularly as I began tutoring without undergoing any formal training. My own “training” explored what researchers have had to say about tutoring, peer tutoring and writing centres over the years and the current debates surrounding issues such as the contradictions concerned with the word “peer” and the fine balance that needs to be maintained in the collaborative process of tutoring, suggesting “a minimalist, hands-off approach”. But my reading led me to seek alternate forms of tutoring needed by writers at various stages of writing development, such as in a novice, intermediate or advanced writing stage. As a peer tutor in the Faculty of Education, I tend to be a “domain-centred peer tutor” but need to consider the arguments for and against being a “generalist” or a “domain-centred” peer tutor. My search led me to access writings from The United States of America as writing centres have been in existence in higher education institutions for many decades (Chapter 1).

The history of writing centres in the USA gave me a background leading me to investigate the

various types of tutoring programmes and styles. Models of peer tutoring developed by authors such as Bruffee, and Haring-Smith's writing across the curriculum programme as well as alternate methods and techniques were examined. Tutoring manuals from the USA universities broadened my picture of tutoring as did the reading of specific published works such as *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference* (Harris); *A Short Course in Writing*; (Clark); *Teaching in a Writing Center Setting* (Bruffee); *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Ryan); *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* (Murphy & Lay); *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring* (Gillespie and Lerner); *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook* (Tate, Corbett, and Myers); *Revising Prose* (Lanham), as well as texts from discourse and writing theorists.

Writing centre practitioners have over many years been encouraged to publish their thoughts, experiences and research in journals such as *The Writing Centre Journal*, *The Dangling Modifier*, *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, *College Composition and Communication* and *College English* as well as accessing and participating in or blogging on the International Writing Centers Association website at <http://writingcenters.org/writers.htm>. Many of these writings have been published in compilations (see list of sources) and reading these have helped me understand what constitutes the role of the peer tutor and the implications for writing centre practice (Chapter 2).

However, my aim was to understand the role of the peer tutor in developing conversations of knowledge with postgraduate students in a South African context. Working in writing support as a peer tutor in the Faculty of Education gave me the opportunity to observe tutoring practices and adapt the theory that I had developed through my reading to inform my own tutoring practice. This was reinforced with the running of a research proposal workshop, one-on-one tutoring as well as online tutoring including tutoring on WebCT (Chapter 3).

Data gathered from "The Case" through observation and interaction with student writers, pre- and post-workshop questionnaires, post-tutoring questionnaires and interviews with student writers at the three various stages of postgraduate study have led me to interpret my findings (Chapter 4) and identify aspects that need further research or attention through the disjuncture between theory and practice (Chapter 5).

5.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on the findings of this research, the role of the peer tutor is one of facilitation in which conversations with student writers who make up the postgraduate community, through interaction with one another or the peer tutor, lead to the construction of knowledge. However, the peer tutor needs to undergo training, whether through formal accredited channels, and then gain practical experience as well as participate in on-going interactions with other tutors, or as in my own case, develop tutoring skills through reading, discussions and self-development. Interaction with and support from faculty is also important as it is the peer tutor who brings to the conversation knowledge about writing and the academic discourse which will ensure that “the future of peer tutoring in writing is on the *write track*” (NCPTW 1999).



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³ Writing centre research dates back as far as the 1920s (Bouquet, 1999). Modern writings have resulted in articles and small text being published in academic journals or writing laboratory newsletters and these earlier (1970s) have been more recently published in collections. Very few individual editions have been published under one author. I have attempted to find the original texts (but these reflect very early dates) but have generally referred to the collections. Consequently I have chosen to reference the author and the compilation, so referencing at times may seem cumbersome.

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- University of Michigan
- University of Pittsburgh
- University of Richmond
- University of South Carolina
- University of Texas

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CONSENT OF PARTICIPANT

I, _____, hereby agree to allow Mrs. Cilla Nel to observe and participate in the one-on-one tutor sessions in the Postgraduate Writing Support Centre. I also agree to fill in the administrative forms required by Writing Centre policy and will undertake to fill in the questionnaire on completion of the tutoring session/s.

I understand that the observations and participation as a peer tutor forms part of Mrs. Nel's research for her Master's of Education study on the role of peer tutoring. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and I may withdraw at any time.

I also understand that all data resulting from the observations and documents will be used for academic purposes only and will be treated with confidentiality. Full anonymity will be ensured.



Participant's signature

Researcher : Mrs. Cilla Nel

Supervisor : Mr. Wilhelm van Rensburg

POSTGRADUATE WRITING SUPPORT CENTRE

STUDENT VISIT

NAME : _____ DATE : _____

STUDENT NO : _____ CELL : _____

COURSE : B.Ed. M.Ed. PhD. _____

SUPERVISOR/TUTOR _____

WRITING SUPPORT NEEDED :

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____



(Dr. A. Graham)

STRATEGIES/ COURSE OF ACTION:

APPENDIX C

TUTORING QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME : _____ DATE : _____

STUDENT NO : _____ CELL : _____

COURSE : B.Ed. M.Ed. PhD. Specialisation _____

SUPERVISOR/TUTOR _____

Gender M F

What is your age-range? 26-35 36-45

46-55 56+

Who referred/brought you to Writing Support Centre?

Self

Friend

Lecturer

Supervisor

Other _____ (please state)

How often have you visited the Writing Support Centre?

Only once several times often

When you first visited the Writing Support Centre, at what stage was your writing?

I had no idea of how/where to start

Still thinking

Planning stage

First draft

Well into writing stage

Revising stage

Editing stage

What support did you expect from the Writing Support Centre?

Sorting out ideas

Planning

Paraphrasing/quoting

Citing and referencing

Forming an argument

Structure of paper

Cohesion, coherence

Linking

What happened during your sessions in the Writing Support Centre?

What did you find most useful about your visit/s to the Writing Support Centre?

What did you find the most surprising during your visits to the Writing Support Centre?

If you were to continue with research, would you continue to make use of the Writing Support Centre?

Yes No Not sure

What suggestions would you make about the Writing Support Centre?

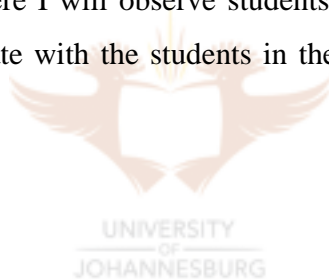
**LETTER TO THE DIRECTOR OF THE POSTGRADUATE WRITING
SUPPORT CENTRE**

Dear Mr. van Rensburg

I am a Master's student registered at the University of Johannesburg. My research paper involves conducting research on the role of the peer tutor in facilitating conversations with postgraduate writers. I would like to request permission to conduct this research in the Faculty of Education's Postgraduate Writing Centre where I will observe students in their one-on-one tutoring sessions with the principal tutor, participate with the students in these sessions and will tutor students in some sessions as a peer tutor.

Yours sincerely

Cilla Nel (Mrs.)



**LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL TUTOR OF THE POSTGRADUATE
WRITING SUPPORT CENTRE**

Dear Dr. Graham

I am a Master's student registered at the University of Johannesburg. My research paper involves conducting research on the role of the peer tutor in facilitating conversations with postgraduate writers. I would like to request permission to conduct this research in the Faculty of Education's Postgraduate Writing Centre where I will observe students in their one-on-one tutoring sessions with you, participate with the students in these sessions and will tutor students in some one-on-one tutoring sessions as a peer tutor.

Yours sincerely

Cilla Nel (Mrs.)



INTERVIEW

(semi-structured/open ended depending on responses)

The aim of this interview is to elicit a response about the role that the Postgraduate Writing Support Centre, and thus the peer tutor, played in the completion of the writing of a research proposal or a mini-dissertation.

- 1 Thank you for agreeing to talk to me about your experiences in the writing of your research proposal.
Anonymity/ethics/comment will aid my research into understanding the role that the tutor plays in postgraduate study – can be perfectly honest.
- 2 Is your proposal complete, has it been submitted, has it been accepted/rejected?
- 3 How did you hear about the writing workshop?
- 4 How well prepared were you for the week's work?
- 5 What were your expectations for the week?
- 6 Can you briefly describe your experiences during the week. Elaborate – role of tutor – what was interesting, most enjoyable, most valuable
- 7 Can you personally analyze what you gained from the week. Positive/negative???
- 8 What if you had not had the opportunity to attend the workshop.
What progress do you think you would have made on your own?
- 9 Thinking back over the time you have spent on your studies, what would be an ideal situation for students?
- 10 Some people say that students should manage on their own without the support of the writing centre or a tutor. What would you say?
- 11 To sum up – what do you see as the role of the tutor in the writing of the proposals?

APPENDIX G

OUTLINE OF RESEARCH PAPER/DISSERTATION

Title page

Dedication (Roman numerals)

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

Abstract – English (Afrikaans – optional)

CHAPTER ONE

(Normal numbering of pages)

Introduction and Background

General to Specific
Context: Historical and Geographical
Problematise

Research Question

Aims of the Research

Research design and methodology

Concept Clarification

Outline of study

Summary / Conclusion



CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review – and theoretical framework

CHAPTER THREE

Research Design and Methodology

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Collection and Analysis

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion

Bibliography

Appendices

**UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG
FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

**SUMMARISED PROPOSAL FOR MASTER'S DEGREE STUDY
(Dissertation or Mini-dissertation)**

Student number										
----------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Title	Dr		Mr		Mrs		Me	
-------	----	--	----	--	-----	--	----	--

Name	
------	--

(Full names and surname as it is to appear on the degree certificate)

Department	
------------	--

Academic qualifications

Year obtained	Degree/Diploma	University/Institution

Degree		Specialisation area	
--------	--	---------------------	--

Date of first registration for this degree
--

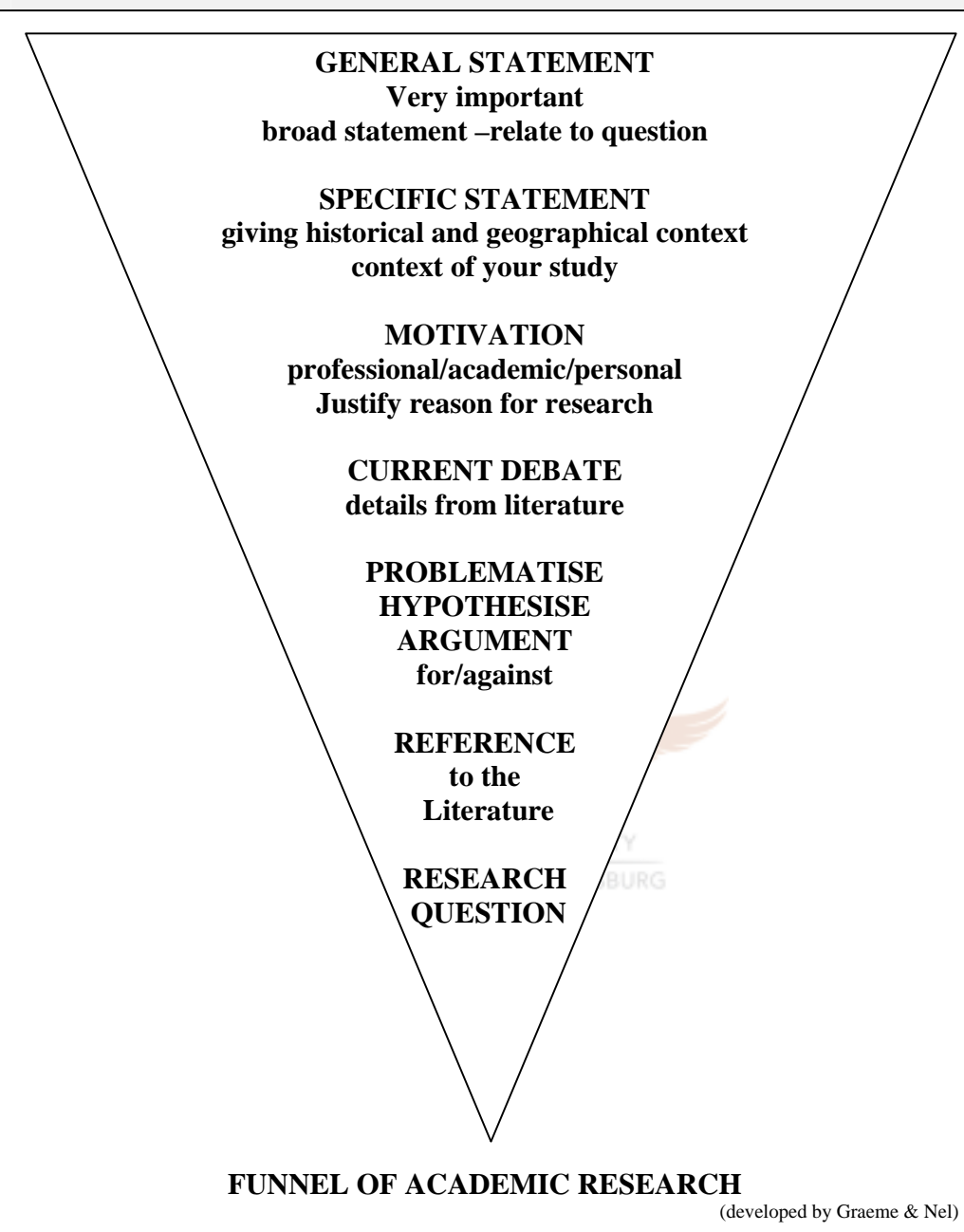
Month	
-------	--

Year	
------	--

Dissertation		Mini-dissertation	
--------------	--	-------------------	--

Proposed field of study		Proposed title	
-------------------------	--	----------------	--

Discussion of research problem and motivation for study substantiated by ample reference to literature (Regulation A.11.1.7.4)



Aims, objectives or purpose of the inquiry

Introductory sentence

- main aim

Secondary sentence

- subsidiary aims

APPENDIX 1

PRE-WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRES

	NAME	REASON FOR ATTENDANCE	CODES
1	Anton	* to finalise proposal * reference	1 4
2	Annie	* how to write good proposal * how to write dissertation successfully	1 5
3	Katie	* to finalise proposal (focus) * fine-tuning argument – professional language	1 2
4	Connie	* how to write proposal * if topic is relevant/researchable * finding relevant literature	1 2 3
5	Debbie	* focussing on proposal	1
6	Lynne	* finding focus on proposal * finding argument	1 2
7	Lindiwe	* writing a proposal * ways of going about research	1 6
8	Matt	* putting forward the argument * how to quote authors * reference	2 4 4
9	Mo	* to write a proposal	1
10	Nora	* to write a good proposal * how to add something on proposal * how to write mini-dissertation * how to find information for mini-dissertation	1 1 5 3
11	Nev	* how to formulate a question for proposal * how to write a proposal	1 1
12	Odette	* help with writing the proposal * assistance on the research as a whole * finding focus on proposal and research	1 6 1
13	Patrisha	* how to write a proposal * is my topic relevant to my research problem * adding knowledge to my proposal * how to a permission letter	1 1 1 7
14	Paul	* verification on the correctness of the proposal * confirmation on the need for such research	1 1
15	Rosie	* developing a topic	1
16	Tiny	* problem statement * aims and objectives	2 2

CODE	CATEGORIES	
1	PROPOSALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • writing • finalising • fine-tuning • finding focus • confirming format & content • research question – relevant?
2	PROBLEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finding “argument – confused with “problem” • “putting forward” • problem statement • formulating question • finding relevant topic/developing topic
3	FINDING INFORMATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research • literature
4	REFERENCING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • citing • listing sources
5	WRITING DISSERTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • writing up the research
6	HOW TO CONDUCT RESEARCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • methodologies • format
7	ETHICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letters of permission • documents

UNIVERSITY
JOHANNESBURG

APPENDIX J

POST-WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRES

1	ANTON	Course	M. Ed.	
		Specialisation	Environmental Education	
		Gender	Male	
		Age	36-46	
		Referral	Friend	
		Previous visits	Only once	
		Stage of writing	No idea, planning, 1 st draft, proposal rejected	
		Support expected	Sorting out idea, Planning Paraphrasing, quoting Citing/referencing Forming an argument Structure of proposal Cohesion, coherence Linking	
		Useful	Writing proposal according to the way of funnel	
		Surprising	Friendship, working and helping each other. Support from Cilla and Andrew to me was best	C1 C5
		Experience	Before I know nothing about to wright logical but Cilla taught me how to do it but somewhere I made a lot of mistakes	C5
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	First thing students should take books from the library	
		Interview	Yes	
2	Annie	Course	M. Ed.	
		Specialisation		
		Gender	Female	
		Age	36-45	
		Referral	Supervisor	
		Previous visits	Only once	
		Stage of writing	Well into writing stage	
		Support expected	Sorting out ideas, planning, Paraphrasing/quoting Citing/referencing Forming an argument Structure of proposal Cohesion, coherence Linking	

		Most useful	The workshop was helpful to me. There was a good atmosphere for acquiring knowledge and skills for writing the proposal. I also learn to type by myself.	C1
		Most surprising	I was surprised by the way Cilla helped us equally without being biased. She loved us all end. She was too jolly. By so doing I love her very much. May God bless her.	C5
		Describe experience	My experience was to learn to type by myself. Cilla was too impressed seeing me typing very well.	C4
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	I suggest that there must be catering during the workshop	
		Interview	Yes	
3	KATIE	Course	M Ed.	
		Specialisation	Environmental Education	
		Gender	Female	
		Age	46-55	
		Referral	Supervisor / Cilla	
		Previous visits	Several times	
		Stage of writing	Revising stage/editing stage	
		Support expected	Sorting out ideas Forming an argument Structure of proposal Cohesion, coherence Linking	
		Most useful	The funnel method Listening and formulating ideas with peers The computer lab: learned a lot of the technology on an informal basis	C5 C1 C2 C3 C4
		Most surprising	It surprises me that so many students don't have a clue how to draft a proposal. It was a shock to me to see how much effort and TIME the proposal took (initially) especially the general and specific statement.	
		Describe experience	The structure made me feel safe. I can now plunge into the unknown because I know the basics.	C5
		Further use	Yes	

		Suggestions	Please train all the SUPERVISORS to assist their students in the drafting of the proposal. Give more attention to philosophy of your work – system theory, social reconstruct (just a summary, because it will give one wings to explore it further in the library.	
		Interview	Yes	
4	CONNIE	Course	B Ed.	
		Specialisation		
		Gender	Female	
		Age	36-45	
		Referral	Friend	
		Previous visits	never	
		Stage of writing	No idea	
		Support expected	Planning Structure of proposal	
		Most useful	Meet new friends Gain experience and learn from others Learned a lot about computers and accessing Internet Knew more about writing a proposal	C1 C2 C3 C4
		Most surprising	I didn't know that writing a proposal is so easy and interesting It arouse my interest so I can try and work on my own in drawing my own format	C4
		Describe experience	It was very good and I wished to go on and on because it was interesting I enjoyed writing my proposal and I can help others because I have the light	C4
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	We should have more of them because the facilitators ran it very well	
		Interview	Yes	
5	DEBBIE	Course	D. Ed	
		Specialisation	Curriculum	
		Gender	Female	
		Age	36-45	
		Referral		
		Previous visits	never	
		Stage of writing	Planning stage	
		Support expected	Sorting out ideas Structure of proposal	

		Most useful	Planning Citing and referencing Forming an argument Structure of proposal and linking	
		Most surprising	That I can compile and complete my proposal in a week's time That the facilitator have stayed or spend every minute of every day with us giving support That structuring your work especially research problem was so understandable after all; steps to follow were discussed	C5 C5
		Describe experience	I have gained a lot especially structuring a general and specific problem, argument and the coming up with the research question. It actually answered all my concerns on coming up with research questions, aims and methods to be used I would see the pattern in all the aspects. Very interesting	C5
		Further use	Yes, definitely	
		Suggestions	I would suggest it should be part of the curriculum and be compulsory to all registered students	
		Interview	Yes	
6	LYNNE	Course	Ph D	
		Specialisation	Curriculum	
		Gender	female	
		Age	36-45	
		Referral	supervisor	
		Previous visits	never	
		Stage of writing	First draft	
		Support expected	Forming an argument Structure of proposal Cohesion, coherence	
		Most useful	Structure of the proposal Sorting out of ideas	
		Most surprising	It was not that difficult to come up with a proposal although it's a very challenging exercise	
		Describe experience	I discovered that writing is not a simple process but if you share information, ask others' opinion and writing the gathered information there will be progress This was a helpful exercise	C1 C2 C3 C4

		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	Organise more writing workshops	
		Interview	Yes	
7	LINDIWE	Course	M Ed.	
		Specialisation		
		Gender	female	
		Age	26-35	
		Referral	friend	
		Previous visits	Several times	
		Stage of writing	Revising stage	
		Support expected	Sorting out ideas Forming an argument Cohesion, coherence linking	
		Most useful	Discussions with other people were fruitful Finding out what is needed in a proposal i.e. what information is most important to put in a proposal	C1 C2 C3 C4
		Most surprising	I though I have done everything for my proposal I was surprised to find out that I have left out some important information That it was for free	
		Describe experience	My way of thinking has developed and I am able to develop more ideas	C4
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	I suggest that the supervisors work with the writing support centre	
		Interview	Yes	
8	MATT	Course	M Ed.	
		Specialisation	Environmental Education	
		Gender	Male	
		Age	36-45	
		Referral	Supervisor	
		Previous visits	Several times	
		Stage of writing	Planning draft	
		Support expected	Planning Structure of paper Cohesion, coherence Linking	
		Most useful	I was helped with my proposal Dr. Andrew and Cilla are wonderful in working with the students	C5

		Most surprising	I was able to write with confidence As English is my second language sometimes is hard to put an academic paragraph But now even though I am a second language speaker, I have developed	C4
		Describe experience	The overwhelming support by the staff at the centre They made you feel relaxed and help build your confidence in what you are writing	C5
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	More computers should be brought at the centre because more and more students are using the centre	
		Interview	Yes	
9	MO	Course	M Ed.	
		Specialisation	Curriculum	
		Gender	Female	
		Age	36-45	
		Referral	Lecturer	
		Previous visits	Never	
		Stage of writing	No idea	
		Support expected	Sorting out ideas	
		Most useful	I had gained an idea of writing good proposal	
		Most surprising	I had found out that writing proposal is very simple	C5
		Describe experience	I was not having any experience	
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	I suggest that there should be a follow-up workshop	
		Interview	Yes	
8	MATT	Course	M Ed.	
		Specialisation	Environmental Education	
		Gender	Male	
		Age	36-45	
		Referral	Supervisor	
		Previous visits	Several times	
		Stage of writing	Planning draft	
		Support expected	Planning Structure of paper Cohesion, coherence Linking	

		Most useful	I was helped with my proposal Dr. Andrew and Cilla are wonderful in working with the students	C5
		Most surprising	I was able to write with confidence As English is my second language sometimes is hard to put an academic paragraph But now even though I am a second language speaker, I have developed	
		Describe experience	The overwhelming support by the staff at the centre They made you feel relaxed and help build your confidence in what you are writing	C5
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	More computers should be brought at the centre because more and more students are using the centre	
		Interview	Yes	
10	NORA	Course	M Ed.	
		Specialisation	Curriculum	
		Gender	Female	
		Age	26-35	
		Referral	Lecturer	
		Previous visits	Never	
		Stage of writing	First draft	
		Support expected	Sorting out ideas Planning Paraphrasing/quoting Citing/referencing Forming an argument Structure of proposal Cohesion, coherence Linking	
		Most useful	I was able to open my mind concerning writing Everything was explained in detail This helps me to finish up writing my proposal	C4 C5
		Most surprising	I have enough time to think about my proposal The commitment of these people – Cilla and Andrew Their patience	C5

		Describe experience	When I come here I was lost and discouraged and now I have courage I have worked and I'm happy about my proposal I really enjoyed writing my proposal	
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	I suggest that we must have continuous workshops e.g. every term	
		Interview	Yes	
11	NEV	Course	M Ed.	
		Specialisation	Curriculum Studies	
		Gender	Female	
		Age	46-55	
		Referral	Supervisor	
		Previous visits	Several times	
		Stage of writing	Proposal rejected	
		Support expected	Sorting out ideas Paraphrasing/quoting Citing/referencing structure Cohesion, coherence Linking	
		Most useful	Knowing the different researchers (students) Structure of the proposal Interacting with one another about our proposal/titles and research questions Support from Cilla and Andrew	
		Most surprising	Cilla and Andrew so wonderful, hardworking, supporting and caring A fascinating working environment Both are making a wonderful team Available at all times and very informative	C5
		Describe experience	How to structure a proposal Starting with your general statement, specific and to our everyday situation Typing our own proposal – assistance at all times	C4
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	Please call regular classes This was the most successful workshop THANKS	
		Interview	Yes	
12	ODETTE	Course	B Ed.	
		Specialisation		

		Gender	Male	
		Age	36-45	
		Referral	Friend	
		Previous visits	Only once	
		Stage of writing	Proposal rejected	
		Support expected	Sorting out ideas Planning Paraphrasing/quoting Citing/referencing Forming an argument Structure of proposal Cohesion, coherence Linking	
		Most useful	The use of a funnel i.e. general statement, specific statement, details, argument for and against – references, current debate and research questions	
		Most surprising	Interaction with other researcher Peer tutoring, I also gained a lot of experience	C1 C2 C3 C4
		Describe experience	This is an experience of a lifetime I am going to use it to assist other researchers as well as in my M Ed. and further studies	C5
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	I would like all students who are busy with research to attend this workshop	
		Interview	Yes	
13	PATRISHA	Course	B Ed.	
		Specialisation		
		Gender	Female	
		Age	36-45	
		Referral	Friend	
		Previous visits	Only once	
		Stage of writing	No idea where to start	
		Support expected	Sorting out ideas Planning Linking	
		Most useful	Identify my research topic Plan and type my proposal with the help of the facilitators	
		Most surprising	Format of writing a proposal Meeting other students and getting information from others It also encourages one to study further	C1 C2 C3 C4

		Describe experience	I thought a research proposal is a difficult procedure I did not know where to start The most surprising thing is how easy it is to write a research proposal	
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	To inform other students from other institutions for example Soweto campus to visit the writing support centre	C1 C4
		Interview	Yes	
14	PAUL	Course	Ph D	
		Specialisation	Curriculum	
		Gender	Male	
		Age	46-55	
		Referral	Supervisor	
		Previous visits	Never	
		Stage of writing	Still thinking	
		Support expected	Sorting out ideas Planning Forming an argument Structure of proposal Cohesion/coherence linking	
		Most useful	This was a face-to-face hands-on workshop with Cilla and Andrew The patience and ongoing support provided by Cilla and Andrew were very helpful	C5
		Most surprising	That of one year of study I came to learn about the general statement and specific statements What I could not achieve in one year, I achieved in one week	
		Describe experience	Before starting on Monday morning I did not know whether I was going or coming It was exciting throughout and everyday to go home having learnt so much!	C5
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	Let the workshop take place in March and winter holidays	
		Interview	Yes	
15	ROSIE	Course	M Ed.	
		Specialisation	Environmental Education	
		Gender	Female	
		Age	46-55	

		Referral	Supervisor	
		Previous visits	Several	
		Stage of writing	Editing stage	
		Support expected	Sorting out ideas Planning Paraphrasing/quoting Cohesion/coherence	
		Most useful	The lectures I received made it very easy for me to complete my proposal I gained a better understanding of referencing, quoting and structuring in general This was the best workshop for me	C1 C4
		Most surprising	Cilla and Andrew's patience - phenomenal	C5
		Describe experience	The whole layout made me realise how my dissertation will be structured I had some ideas but they were not as clear as I understand them now	C4
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	Similar workshops on reporting and analysing data would be very useful	
		Interview	Yes	
14	TINY	Course	M Ed.	
		Specialisation	Curriculum	
		Gender	Female	
		Age	36-45	
		Referral	Friend	
		Previous visits	Often	
		Stage of writing	Editing stage	
		Support expected	Sorting out ideas	
		Most useful	It help me to differentiate between the broad and specific statement and to come up with a research question	
		Most surprising	I could not believe that in 5 days I would be where I am with my proposal – completing my reference	
		Describe experience	I learned that each and every topic should start as global and be specific I learned to listen to every idea coming while I am busy writing and to put it on paper and later will be edited	C1 C2 C3 C4
		Further use	Yes	
		Suggestions	It should be conducted at the beginning of the year	
		Interview	Yes	

CODES	CATEGORIES
C1	COMMUNITY
C2	CONVERSATION
C3	COLLABORATION
C4	CONSTRUCTIVISM
C5	FEMINISM



APPENDIX K
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL

Saturday 9 November 2005

<p>When you came to us for the proposal workshop, how far had you got with the writing of it?</p>
<p>Ya, I had actually , I thought I had gone quite far, because I had done Chapter 1 already. I had already spent one year in the university but then after Chapter 1 it just seemed that there was not direction it was clear both between me and my lecturer eee – it wasn't clear where I was going</p>
<p>With your research?</p>
<p>With my research yes, although I had finished Chapter 1 but thereafter there was just – it wasn't clear with my research where I was getting to until there was that invitation eee that there was going to be this course for one week in the computer centre there ... and I think ... then actually at that time I then started from scratch.</p>
<p>But ... but you came to that workshop with something.</p>
<p>I came to the workshop with something.</p>
<p>And did it stand you in good stead – did you have enough prepared?</p>
<p>Eee I had read quite a lot , you know, books and materials but when I.. so when I came to the writing centre I knew what I wanted to do - but I didn't know .. know I could do it. So coming to the centre assisted me.</p>
<p>So it helped you find focus?</p>
<p>I .it help me a lot – to find focus. It was from there that I you know that I found it clear A clear idea of where I was going.</p>
<p>Do you remember the first two days? We spent in the lecture room</p>
<p>Yes, I do</p>
<p>Initially Andrew and I talked</p>
<p>Yes, yes</p>
<p>And then we asked you to write And then we came together in groups to talk</p>
<p>Yes</p>
<p>Can you perhaps elaborate on that - give me an idea of how you found that, was it valuable – how – you were quite vocal – if I remember correctly – you came up with some really good ideas and you tended to lead a lot of the discussions. Could you just think through on that again? And perhaps see it from your point of view</p>

I think, Cilla, what was good – in fact the first day when we came. We – the very first morning when we met you there – I think every one of us was tense and maybe with a bit of frustration and maybe I was the worst because eee we didn't really know exactly, understand – we didn't really know and have an understanding of what was going to happen because all of us we had done some something – some had done something and others had done nothing there were those who were coming there, you know, to learn for the first time on how to approach their research . Then I think, after you had presented, I think you were very good there, after you had presented after the first session, you were writing on the board and so on and somethings and there was also terminology We were doing research, we had written somethings but there were scientific things we were—we discovered this morning –that morning that we were not doing right. So After your first presentation session and of course moving around, you divided us into groups and we were moving around , Andrew was also coming in from time to time to assist and you know when we spoke in groups and some of use, we didn't understand the writing but we found we found that we didn't know what was a hypothesis and those things were clarified there, and once we were clear about our topic and what the hypothesis was, I think ... I think that it was a key thing and we all everybody there we were all on par in terms of .. if what it is that we are going to do we start. And the group work as well – I think what happened there is – we shared experiences and ... there are things we were.. were just writing – once we sat in that meeting you called it was very clear to us – and it helped and we could share.

The interaction was important

The interaction is super, in fact , I learned there that that's the danger that we as students sometimes you are afraid as well to let other people ... learn about what you are doing – sometimes maybe they will see that we don't know much but that we are still learning but in that meeting when we came together and we interacted– a hundred of times we learned from one another– from each other you know, and even sharing ideas – sometimes things I remember that maybe was now there now, but where you said – you know what that person – this is what that person has done, you know, and ... and that person, you know, can share with us how he or she has approached the topic or a piece of writing that we were doing there and so one. It helped us a lot– a lot.

The sharing of community, the sharing between members of the community that is important to construct knowledge, isn't it?

It is of the utmost importance Ya and you can't do it alone.

So the initial conversations that we had in that lecture room were valuable – you feel were valuable.

There were very valuable, very, very valuable and very helpful. We gained a lot there.

Then we moved down to the computer lab.

We moved down, the third day, I think to the computer lab, We met somewhere here and then we went to the computer lab.

Are you/ were you computer literate? Were you able to get on and do?

I was computer literate eee although I know there were people who it seemed had never touched a computer before. There are things of course eee we didn't know how - but as for being computer literate , in fact I was, but there were many colleagues there who learned that day Day three, to switch on a computer and they worked on it and three days later that had done their research, their research proposals, done their research proposals on the computer.

Did you find it helpful working on the computer and having the tutors go around and talk to you about what you were writing. Did you find that support helpful?

Ya, in fact, I found it - you know – that it what I feel and we spoke about it Everyone of us eeee, some of us but they had never had that type of support before So we felt and I think that that is something that is lacking maybe in the university or universities Everybody was there and we were many, they had not done that before and in one week to sit down and in fact and if you look at the first two days was actually theory, but the last three days was actual working on the proposal And we all finished and there were people who finished on the Thursday . So just in two days and their work was good and we also shared .. we also went to see because Andrew , you and Andrew would say look at this person and then we went – it was good work, you know. So it helps. But it is lacking and so I felt and I still feel that especially in the junior degree if people, if they have to do research , if they can quite early have exposure to that type of support, it will be very nice, it will be excitement to do your studies – your university studies.

So you will feel quite comfortable if you've got support all the way through?

All the way through – it's easy – it gives you confidence – in what you are doing. As a student.

It you had an ideal situation, and you could create the ideal situation for B Eds, M Eds and PhDs, what would be the ideal situation in order for them to write effectively?

You know, Cilla, that for me I would not – just have students maybe what is happening now, talk to them and let them go and start writing. Then I would create an environment for whether a person is 1st year or any level of their studies even up to PhD, once they had the that requires them do research or a proposal I would make sure that before they start, maybe let them read, and once they have read, just broadly, I would then create an environment where they really go to sit and say you've read, what is your topic? Because topics change, I changed my topic ..

You changed your focus.

I changed my focus and I thought over the year more than a year that I had written. When I came there last week, I changed my focus - If I had got that type of support and this is what I would create for people , to say from the onset – we shouldn't let the people be frustrated and spend a year more than a year paying money and not knowing what they are doing. So from the onset, I would create an environment for all the research for that type of situation to take place where it's a hands-on type of support not just theory because , you know, these Saturday courses, I attended some and I am working with many many students in fact most of quite a number of people there – I had people who came from my own district of education and I know they attend on Saturdays then I brought about 10 or 12 to the university and I come with them as well and them we attend and I know they attend but even after attending on a Saturday they are still not sure because they attended, they had the idea that they must do it alone. But if I had an ideal situation, for me to create an environment where someone is here to at least support me , you know, to teach me because theory maybe I pass because theory I know but the actual practical eee the practical – it is not easy. But if you create an environment where you sit with a person and you tell them what to do and they type that and someone comes to read immediately, and correct you then ...

And give you feedback

Feedback, immediately – and you move on we had feedback the entire week and on almost everything we were doing. We did not waste time gathering information and going away for weeks and months., we got feedback there and then in a week and

How about structure, Paul? Were you given enough structure?

Yes, definitely. We were given ya ,, we were given ... definitely.

Did you have any knowledge beforehand of what was supposed to be in that proposal? Had you been taught before?

No, no, no Structure .. in fact, there, I learnt for me and I checked with others, those officials with me, structure was so important. We didn't know, we realised actually the way we started our proposal was wrong. I still remember, you know, we worked the funnel – the funnel approach. Funnelling – that's the word. It was super - it was really excellent. In fact, in any debate or or maybe a report now, because personally I've learnt. When I give a report or address people, I use the structure. It was very good – it helped. Our work became very clear. In my work now, I haven't finished, I can see it's clear, it's got structure.

Now, just to take you back – if you had not been able to attend this workshop, how far would you have progressed?

If I had not attended I think I would have been proceeding but without the joy and mmmmm pace – good pace that I am having now. Now with that support, I mean, you even took us to the library and it had never happened before to me and all those who were there We knew and now I know today from here I am going to the library. So we knew, so without that support, I think maybe I could still be writing but with.... Not with confidence. Now I feel my study would have been returned back and my colleague who has completed the study and a thick study like that, it was returned marked by the UJ, now it's returned but when I read that study I can see for instance the structure is not there and I understand why it is returned. But now when I write I am quite confident that I am writing something that even when it is corrected, in future, eeee .. if it's returned, it won't be drastic mistakes. And you tell me I have to change the structure of the study so without that the support eeee I would not have been as confident or enjoying my study as much as I do today.

There are some people who say that students should manage on their own without the support of the tutor. What do you feel about that?

Eeee it will be – you see I also did something back with UNISA and I know what is happening in one or two universities. Now eee these are the weaknesses of distance learning so if you if UJ for instance is here, but as a student I've enrolled but I have no support from a tutor then it's as good as ..., I must just register and have my books and go home there's not need for a tutor then and students will fail in large numbers and that's why eee universities have a many of them have had to transform and change their approaches because they were not helping students and in some cases there are many many students – you find a person is a doctor but they are shallow and hollow because there was no support – people just read different books may be maybe not with the correct approach and so on. But I think you can't eee in education eee have a student with no support – a tutor is a mentor – a tutor is there – a tutor knows something that you don't know. So why leave a student to go wrong for years and so on

And re-invent the wheel

Exactly – so rather guide a person correctly. And a tutor is there to give guidance he must be there to give guidance so that where you are going off, the tutor can say come back – this is the way and you proceed. The tutor will not do the work for me but the tutor is there to guide me where I am going wrong – I can't do it alone.

So you still have your voice?

Definitely – yes –

So the whole process – the whole weeks writing, you still managed to use your voice, you still maintained your focus, you still maintained your content – you were just kept within a framework.

Definitely – a framework and there are times when you know – when you write – when you find a certain idea and you tend to move out and then for instance, I remember you coming back and Andrew coming and saying NO but this is what you said up there, remember you are funnelling here, so ... – it's nice structure. So the same way the tutor assists you to remain focussed and structure because if the student, I'm doing PhD but I haven't done this before so it's the first time I'm doing it, so I am as good as a ...

Novice

As a novice – I am a learner – you know at my level, I am as good as that child in Grade 1 who needs that teacher to be present always. Though at a different level but I don't know Ph D studies so a tutor must be there to assist and keep me focused and sometimes you know, Cilla, there – when you study we are human beings – something family-wise or at work also affects you or somebody dies or something or financial problems – you have that and maybe you have flat now and discouraged you need someone who says Hey Hey – continue continue and so on and with someone who will motivate you – a tutor is not only is like a mentor is there to guide you, not only to there to say have you done the work or not – is like a parent guiding you through your studies, you know.

One last question – what skills do you think you've gained by being on this workshop?

I think there are quite many – mmmmm – I've learnt now, for instance with what I have studied now, I can integrate with people easily. I can because I know it is comes to a proposal – it is comes to writing chapter 1 I can, you know meet people and discuss with them confidently and because of the focus and the structure and the clarity that I have ... so socially it helped me as well but then academically it shaped me and also I had ever used the computers there – I am computer literature – but I had never used the computer centre – I didn't know how to use it but I have been back. I learnt how to use the library, I had never been to the UJ library before but I was doing a Ph D study but when I went there and now many times on my own, I'm becoming better in using the library. But also writing skills – I think I am writing better now, with clearer focus and a clear idea of where I am going to with the writing centre. When I present to my lecturers sometimes when you've written something, you come to a lecturer you are really not sure. Sometimes they .. they criticise one part, you can't defend it – you just leave it and you fall apart. But now I know I am quite clear on what I am doing. When I presented my studies, my supervisor wanted to know and I explained the whole thing – you know the funnelling thing, so I have learnt also as I have indicated earlier on, even when I write an article or I prepare a report at work, I don't just start from anywhere, I know I must start from --- I use the funnelling stuff because I am working with curriculum – if I have to report maybe on curriculum I know I can't just start with the school and then the province and then the district, I know I must funnel and it logical. People can follow this thing comes from national – a wide perspective and it narrow up to where we are. So I think those are skills that I have learnt.

INTERVIEW WITH MATT
Saturday 26 NOVEMBER 2005

At the very beginning of the workshop, how far had you got with your research proposal?
..... I ... had already submitted my proposal but it was sent back to me saying it was.. it was not up to standard <ok> when it came back to me ... I was so shocked.. ya ..that's how far I went about my proposal.
O.K. When we first got together in the lecture room Andrew and I gave you some structure. Did that give you any help at all?
Ya .. it did a lot because we started to to open our eyes now with the other guys .. the EE students we now saw that this is what is supposed to be done and beforehand we never had the idea of how to do it .. the proposal
So you had no structure given to you before
No we had a structure but it was not explained in details as you did <o.k.> yup
Once we got going and we worked within that structure, a lot of you had to... I asked you all to write something and then I asked you to get into groups or then into pairs and to talk about it. Can you just perhaps explain or describe how that helped you - if anything
In pairs? mmmm When we were in pairs .. we started in interact with other students from other faculties we were able now to see the important parts that are supposed to be in our proposals, because before we never had the chance to interact with the proposals, we were just given a structure and on the structure we were supposed to fit in what we supposed to feel. But I think at the end we made some silly mistakes and this is why I am saying the interaction helped a lot because we are coming up with different options as a group.
And when we came together in that big group and we all read out our first sentence – our general sentence –do you remember there was quite a lot of discussion as to understanding - we all didn't quite understand that person. How did you find that little aspect?
I think what it come to the general sentence – it was where we started to realise where we were going – the general sentences was an indication of now here you start and where we were going - it was like a route map to see where you were going.
And how do you see Andrew and I and the role that we played in the classroom.
I want to be honest with you, Cilla, you and Andrew, you were so fantastic you were so helpful and I wish maybe you could help other students when it comes to proposals.
So you think support is necessary?
Yes it is so necessary because beforehand as I indicated when we started we had not idea about the proposal and when you and Andrew came in, it was like we were able to know what is happening and I wish other students could have the same chance that we had.
So you are saying that structure was important, once you had structure you were able then to write <ya> and once you had support you knew how to continue?
Ya we knew how to continue. Basically as I said support is very very important... I don't know about the previous students, but with us we never had the support, we, I think we were lucky to get help from people like you and Andrew
There are many lecturers who believe that support is not necessary. So you would reinforce and say that it is valuable.
Oh it's valuable ... very very very valuablelet's take for instance if maybe we didn't get the support I think right now I would be struggling with my proposal and as I am saying now, my proposal has been accepted thanks to you and Andrew

Well, that's wonderful.....Now, Matt, when we went down to the computer lab .. first things up, were/are you computer literate? Were you able to get on to the computer and get going?

Ya I am computer literate.

So you were quite happy to do that.

Ya I was quite happy to do that.

Now, while we were down there can you give me some areas where you gained. What do you think you gain by being in that environment?

At the computers..... Even though I didn't finish with you guys because my daughter was ill, The two days that I spent there were so valuable to me because at first sometimes it is very very important to know that it is yourself who deals with in that structure < mmm> coming to put in the words again ... I think we are also because we sat next to each other we are also able to help one another and I think its also very important because it makes us to bond with each other with other students when we work together >< and I think this could be done .. every time and I think students will gain from it

Did you get to read other students work as we were going through?

Ya .. I managed to get the chance and it was so valuable because even one didn't have to copy because we didn't have the same topics... so it was so important when someone would say you don't have to do that maybe do like this .. even you yourself .. maybe myself I had to go and correct the other students – it was fantastic.

So that interaction was valuable?

It was valuable

And to do it with your peers

Ya it was very good.

Down there again, how did you see Andrew and I as our role? Were we acting like teachers, like lecturers? How did you see the way that we worked? Can you describe it?

I think you worked more like facilitators ya .. because you came in and you were looking at the individual's work, you corrected wherever you had to correct and I was ... even impressed by the way you and Andrew were working ... when maybe they was something that maybe somebody did not understand then you highlighted it and then you said just go on and come back to that thing it was very nice to do that Because then the highlighter it will remind you that there is something that you had to do again.

And because your daughter was ill you didn't quite finish so you had to come here to work with us in the writing centre. How have you found the experiences here in the writing centre?

I think,... I wish this writing centre will be expanded so that maybe several students can be in here ... what I mean by that is that I think in this writing centre there are not enough computers <mmmm> because when you come here you find that there are some students maybe writing, maybe being helped by Andrew and yourself and you don't quite get the chance to write. Myself having to travel from Pretoria and you don't find enough chance to work on the computers because you have to give other students the chance. So I wish that the university can see the importance of this writing centre because it is so valuable ...when I first came here Andrew was changing those paragraphs it was fantastic and you come here with your confidence low but when you come out your confidence is now on.

In one of the questionnaires that you filled in for me, you spoke about language. That you are an English 2nd language speaker. <yes> But you're not talking here about support with language, you are talking about support with actual writing. <ya, it's the actual writing> it's the structure and how to put your paper in a reasonable order so that you are following guidelines.

Ya I think as I indicated I'm a 2nd language speaker ... you find that when it comes to writing it becomes difficult because you write a paragraph and a sentence and then you think that sentence is correct but when you Andrew of yourself come in and you say no you don't have to put this here you have to put that there thenI think now it gives us a it makes us feel as if we don't know this Queen's language by the way we are 2nd language speakers and we – it's so helpful when you are here you are able to correct us. Just imagine having to submit a paper which is not coherent and I think at master's level it is not O.K. with your support you and Andrew, it was good.

One more question – did you find that working with other people, reading their work and then having them question you – did it do anything to your thinking?

Ya I think it does a lot because sometimes it is very important to work with other people so that you know – they make you think more because sometimes they will ask you questions – what do you mean here and sometimes maybe the students aren't in environmental education like myself I will write about sustainable development or permaculture and now the person who is reading the thing will ask me what is permaculture and I have to explain that to him. Now you gives you the confidence to know something about what you are writing.

So the peer student became your readers - <mmmm> your critical readers who made sure that your writing was clear.

That's what I mean.

Well thank you Matt, for coming in to chat with me – you've given me some valuable insight and definitely some good data to use.

Thanks Cilla and I wish that next year I can still work with you.

INTERVIEW WITH ODETTE

Saturday 9 November 2005

<p>When you came to us for the proposal workshop, how far had you got with the writing of it?</p>
<p>I had started my proposal but it was wrong</p>
<p>It was wrong according to.....</p>
<p>According to supervisor so I had to restart</p>
<p>O.K.</p>
<p>And I had no idea where to start .. what to do Then I consulted a friend and they referred me to the writing centre so I came here he made an appointment for me and so I came to the centre and then I met you and Andrew. I came with a friend too as we both needed help. And then you asked us to come the following week because you had a workshop. So we joined with another friend and came ... very fast</p>
<p>O.K. When you came to the workshop, how well prepared were you? You yourself</p>
<p>aaaaa.. The only thing I knew a bit of theory but didn't know how to apply it. So I needed help on how to apply the theory that I had gained in both qualitative and quantitative research studies.</p>
<p>O.K. So your expectations for the week. When you said you were going to join us for the workshop, what did you expect to achieve?</p>
<p>I expected that by the end of the workshop I should know how to start the proposal and then by the end of the week I should have completed my proposal because I had already read – I had some literature though every thing was there but I did not know how to apply it.</p>
<p>So it was the practical putting down on paper that was important to you?</p>
<p>Yes</p>
<p>Do you remember we started in the lecture room and Andrew and I gave you an outline? This is what you need to do, this is how you do it. And then I asked everybody to sit and write. How did you find that interaction with the other students when we finished writing?</p>
<p>The interaction was helping because somewhere we met with students who were close – Master's and PhD students. Some of them – they looked – it was as though they were like us – they were just lost everywhere. But because we were altogether, we all wanted to learn – we were learning from each other and helping each other.</p>
<p>So that was valuable?</p>
<p>Very – very much</p>
<p>Can you remember what language you spoke in?</p>
<p>Mmmmmm – did I speak in English? I think we spoke in English. Ooooo but we ended up speaking of our languages because when you talk to people in other – a language which is not your mother tongue and not their mother tongue then you have a problem. But when in your own languages you are able to get information easily and fast.</p>
<p>So you could switch...</p>
<p>Code-switching</p>
<p>You could code-switch you could switch to whatever language which was important in understanding</p>
<p>And fortunately my research is on the importance of mother tongue instruction so it was good to get all the information that I needed</p>
<p>It was a good practical experiment for you..</p>
<p>It was,.... it was ...</p>
<p>How did you um find working with Andrew and I. Still in the lecture room</p>
<p>It was good because we we we had to form our groups and talk to each other but whenever we had problems were had to call you to come and help and it was very fruitful.</p>

It was fruitful.... And then we move down to the computer lab. Were you computer literate?
Yes
So you were fine on the computer. You didn't have problems
No.
So immediately you could get in there and start typing? O.K. What do you find. ... When you look back on the week, what did you gain – what were important things for you? Did you gain something, did you learn something – was there a big learning curve – did you find it fruitful?
It was fruitful in fact I remember the funnel – when I look back – when I got to my campus Soweto campus – with the other group we could help them form the funnel and many students understood it better with the funnel than the way we understood it earlier.
You were able to take your learning back to your campus
Yes and then one one one .. student colleague of ours did not come to the group – she went home to Pietersburg and we she came back she found that we were very far we had to sit down with him with her and show her what we did and then she and she went on. She even completed ahead of us.
So would you say that giving you the structure, telling you exactly what to do – like with that funnel – this is how you do it, do you think that facilitates your learning?
Yes ... because when we got back even our lecturers did not give us an idea of the funnel they came back with a funnel now.
The student teaching the lecturer!!! Wonderful!!
When they started there and we think globally and then we come back to the specific then we looked at each other and we said we are looking at the funnel.
Now if you had not had the opportunity to attend that workshop, do you think you would have What sort of progress do you think you would have made?
Mmmmm I think I would have dropped out and tried next year.
Why do you say that .. because you were actually quite far ahead – out of the 3 B Eds that were there you went on - you were very motivated and clued up.
Normally it's not that you are motivated - it's the people that you are with are the ones that help you to cope. If they were not there I wouldn't have coped the way I did. Because they were there somewhere I got my strength from them and whenever any of us felt down the others pepped her up – so that's how we did it.
So that working – that collaboration is important
Very important
That sense of community – working together. When we got to the computer labs did you get involved with chatting to any of the others? About your mm research?
I did
And how did you find that?
Uuuuuuuuu - there was this lady Nev – the topic was very similar to mine. So we exchanged books, we exchanged a lot of information and the other group – the B Ed students – normally when we get a topic we don't know where to start we normally get together and talk about that topic together. And then we try and help you with your topic and then also try and help the other ones with their topics. And we even thought if we had time we have done one research, completed it, gave the owner, do another one, completed it and the like – if we had time – we would have done it together.
So the important thing here is to talk it - and the more you talk
The more you understand

Yes – I remember when I did my computer literacy we had a student tutor and she was of great help. If we had such student tutors then we would go far. I would even opt to go for my Master's but I think I must stop.
This is the whole thing of lifelong learning
You initially came here to see Andrew and I and we work as tutors – writing tutors – do you see yourself coming and using us at any other stage?
Sometimes when you are busy with your research you lose direction and you need someone to pep you up – and take you back to the direction. So when the lecturer is not there, then the tutors they can help you.
To find your direction and find focus.
To find focus especially when I came to that analysis – I lost focus when I was doing that – I think four to five weeks
Did you have specific lectures on data analysis?
No
Did you do methodology?
We did methodology last year
Last year? And did they cover analysis
They did but we were not aware that it needs to be done practically – we thought it was just theory – write it pass it and it was the end. We were now aware that with the theory we have to apply it in another situation – if we knew that I think we would have asked a lot of questions – researched more and by now we will be – when we're doing our research essay we would be – have light
At the beginning of your B Ed programme did you have a Writing Composition module? As that's quite an important module to do
No no – I had no background to research but fortunately I had a friend who did B Ed here and that was helping
So you used community and collaboration
Research writing – so I got her notes and had to study them – that was the support I used – it helped.



Ethical Clearance

Date: 16 November 2005

Dear Mr van Rensburg and Mrs Nel

Ethical Clearance Number 053 19/09/05

Re : Ethical Approval for Mini Dissertation titled

'Conversations' with postgraduate writers: Understanding the role of the peer tutor

The FAEC has decided to

Options	Decision marked X
Accept proposal	X
provisionally approve the proposal with recommended changes	
recommend revision and resubmission of the proposal	

Sincerely,

**Prof B Smit
Chair: FACULTY ACADEMIC ETHICS COMMITTEE**