



Implementing a Peer-Assisted Study Skills scheme in a college based HE setting

Peer-Assisted Study Skills (PASS) type schemes exist in many universities in the UK. These schemes are based on the widely documented premise that peer learning is not only a recognised method of helping students to acquire study skills, enhancing achievement and retention but can also help develop students confidence as scholars, giving them the tools to reflect upon and share their own experiences as members of a learning community. Boud (2001) defines peer learning as 'a two-way reciprocal learning activity... the sharing of knowledge, ideas and experience between participants.' The aim of this project was, then, to test how formalised student peer mentoring of Level 4 by Level 5 students, based on the University of Brighton PASS scheme, might work in a College Based HE setting.

Level 5 FdA Games Development students attended a PASS training session provided by the Centre for Learning and Teaching at the University of Brighton. Following this training they developed, in collaboration with the Course Leader for the FdA Games Development, a plan for how this could be implemented. They planned a range of different types of session – some with particular themes (looking at supporting students with work for specific assignments, for example) and some which were more informal (discussing work completed, for example).

All staff and students involved in this project considered it to have been extremely successful. Attendance for the peer mentoring sessions was very high – although attendance was voluntary more than 80% of the Level 4 group attended almost all (more than 90%) of the provided sessions. The Course Leader attended some of the sessions to monitor and evaluate the project. Level 5 students were seen to be sharing their own experiences (positive and less positive) – in particular identifying areas they struggled with. Level 4 students were seen to make very good use of the sessions, asking questions and discussing work completed along with problems they were having (including students who had a tendency to be less likely to ask questions during timetabled sessions).

When asked what they felt had worked particularly well, Level 4 students identified that "It was really useful to be able to talk to students who have recently been through these assignments – they know what you're looking for". They also identified that they found

it particularly useful to be able to discuss, with Level 5 students: “examples of their own work from last year” and “problems we were having” (with specific assignments). They also identified that the short ‘Tips and Tricks’ presentations delivered by some of the Level 5 students (short presentations focussed on specific assignments/topics) particularly useful. Level 5 students added that they felt the sessions had not only developed their confidence and leadership skills but had also helped them improve their own work – not only did they feel that they needed to ensure they understood something if they were going to help others with it, but they also felt they were looking at their own assignment briefs more critically. This was supported by achievement for the Level 5 students – with 3 out of the 4 peer mentors improving their overall average grade from Level 4 and one of the mentors achieving ‘A’ grades in 4 out of 5 modules at Level 5 compared to 0 ‘A’ grades at Level 4. The only weakness seen by students was that the project did not start early enough in the academic year (with the PASS training happening just before Christmas). Both Level 4 and Level 5 students felt that it would have been useful to have started earlier in the academic year – with Level 4 students identifying it would have been useful to have met the mentors during Induction as this would have helped them “settle into the course more quickly”.

Going forward, all the Level 5 mentors have requested to be involved in the project next academic year (they are progressing to a Level 6 Top Up and have asked to mentor Level 5 students). As part of this project the college is designing in-house training that is more closely tailored to the needs of college based HE students than that offered by the University of Brighton – both staff and students are involved in developing this. Additionally over 80% of the Level 4 group have requested to train as Peer Mentors for next year’s Level 4 group, with the Course Team organising a ‘Meet your Mentors’ session during Induction.

For more information, contact: Sue Messingham, Course Leader FdA Games Development and BA (Hons) Game Asset Development

References:

Boud, D, Cohen, R & Sampson, J (2001), *Peer Learning in Higher Education*, London: Kogan Page