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Never Knowingly Oversold: a watchword for tutoring and mentoring schemes?

by

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Abstract

Examples are given of some of the many uses to which tutoring and mentoring have been put. Yet, despite the volume of activity, there are still many things that we do not know about tutoring and mentoring, and on which research needs to be conducted. Until we know more, we need to establish precise, and limited, objectives for schemes and to beware of over-selling the ideas lest we discredit them.

Meanwhile, there are certain matters that, if not attended to, can cause schemes to fail. Seven are examined. Participants are invited to consider during the conference if the list offered accords with their experience or needs to be modified.

Introduction: a gentle warning

The well-known chain of shops in England, the John Lewis partnership, has as its motto 'Never knowingly undersold'. If a customer can find a specific item that John Lewis sells on offer elsewhere at a lower price, John Lewis offers to pay the difference. As a watchword for tutoring and mentoring schemes, I wish to offer an inversion of this motto:

Never Knowingly Oversold.

As the range and complexity of student tutoring schemes increases, and as ever more exciting possibilities suggest themselves, we have to beware of our enthusiasm getting the better of us. There is still a great deal that we do not know about how to make tutoring and mentoring work effectively. As we build up experience, and carry out research, we need to be careful not to claim too much for tutoring and mentoring. In short, we need to beware of over-selling, and thereby discrediting, exciting and eminently useful ideas.

Tutoring and mentoring are complex activities. My object in this paper is to suggest that although we may not know exactly what makes a tutoring or mentoring scheme work, we have accumulated some useful experience about what makes them fail.

Plan of paper

With a view to stimulating discussion that may generate synergy from the many paper sessions of the conference, I propose to:

- Remind you of some of the many uses of tutoring and mentoring;
- Reflect upon some matters concerning 'The Pimlico Connection' scheme where we need further information;
- Review the seven golden rules of tutoring and mentoring schemes, namely

    - Define aims;
    - Structure the content;

- Define roles;
- Train the tutors and mentors;
- Support the tutors and mentors;
- Keep logistics as simple as possible;
- Evaluate the scheme

In the conference, I will be particularly interested to learn from you whether or not you think this is the right list – or if, rather, you think some items should be added. We need to learn from each other of our experience of different types of scheme. In what I say, I will give greatest emphasis to the type of activity that I know best - Student Tutoring and schemes which involve

· Students from colleges and universities
· Helping pupils in local schools
· On a sustained and systematic basis
· Under the direction and supervision of teachers

The key differences between these activities and mentoring are as follows:

Differences

	Tutoring	**Mentoring**
Focus	Academic learning	Life skills
Location	Usually in a classroom	Often outside classroom
Mode	1 to several	1 to 1
Duration	A few weeks	Several months / years

Some uses of tutoring and mentoring

Foundations
Peer teaching, as tutoring or mentoring, has been going on in various forms of education for hundreds, indeed thousands, of years (see Wagner, 1990).

As you know, the very word 'mentor' derives from the name of the teacher of Telemakhos in Homer's Odyssey. The basic principle of mentoring is, as you know, deployed in numerous self-help schemes from the Scout Movement, through Alcoholics Anonymous, Synanon (drug rehabilitation), Gamblers' Anonymous, to Buddy Systems in schools in which older pupils welcome and support new pupils. The benefits of peer mentoring are now so well know that in management, peer mentoring is being used as a valuable source of support during periods of change (McDougall and Beattie, 1997).

Likewise, tutoring was pioneered over two hundred years ago by Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster. Having been neglected as an educational technique since the mid- 19th. Century, (following the development of teaching as an organised profession), it was re-discovered in the 1960s as a way of meeting situations of acute need (see Goodlad, 1979; Goodlad and Hirst, 1989; Topping, 1988). It is now recognized as a way of enriching education, and achieving goals that cannot be achieved by other means. (See, for example, Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik, 1982; Devin-Sheehan and Allen, 1976; Feldman, Devin-Sheehan, and Allen, 1976; Wilkes, 1975.)

The field of tutoring and mentoring is vast and steadily growing. Let me remind you of some work in these areas. (The list of examples that follows is intended to be illustrative rather than definitive.)

Tutoring and mentoring within school education

Children helping children
Psychologists have become increasingly interested in the possibilities of children helping children (see Allen, 1976; Foot, Morgan, and Shute, 1990) and in the wider field of group and interactive learning (see Foot, Howe, Anderson, Tolmie, and Warden, 1994).

Help for the learning disabled
Peer tutoring techniques have been used to help the learning disabled (see review by Byrd, 1990) and as a way of assisting students who are seen as not socially accepted (see Garcia-Vazquez and Ehly, 1992).

Spelling
In a study of cued spelling, Watt and Topping (1993) found that the expectation that parent tutoring in cued spelling would prove better and more effective than peer tutoring was not supported by the findings, both groups doing equally well.

English as a second language
Tavener and Glynn (1989) used peer tutoring as a context for children learning English as a second language. Flanigan (1991) also found peer tutoring effective for second-language acquisition.

French
Fitz-Gibbon and Reay (1982) deployed 4th. formers to help 1st. formers in French. They found that in six lessons the tutees had learned the materials up to the original level of the tutors, a gain that was still evident four months later. Likewise, in a scheme designed to improve motivation amongst low achievers in French, Dean (1990) found that peer tutoring offered significant cognitive gains – even though tutors and tutees did not seem to increase their affection for French!

Chemistry
Bland and Harris (1988) used peer tutoring as part of collaborative teaching in chemistry. Curtis (1992) found peer tutoring particularly helpful in teaching science to pupils learning in a non-native language.

Rehabilitating difficult pupils
Having seen how responsibly even normally disruptive pupils took to the role of being tutor to younger children, Carol Fitz-Gibbon, with perhaps intentional echoes of President Kennedy's inauguration address, asks "..would it be more effective to stop asking what the school can do for difficult pupils and to ask instead what such pupils can do for the school?" (Fitz-Gibbon, 1988: 219) Dearden (1998:256) notes a similar benefit of giving trust. The parent of one Y10 student who had been permanently excluded from his last school specifically sought out the careers teacher at parents' evening to thank her for including him in the mentoring scheme. They felt he had benefited enormously from being given some responsibility.

Tutoring and mentoring within higher education

Increasingly extensive use is being made of tutoring and mentoring within higher education itself – e.g. Houston and Lazenbatt, (1996a); Saunders and Gibbon (1998), Topping, (1998). There is now a staff development pack available (Topping, 1997) and a do-it-yourself manual for staff and students (Donaldson and Topping, 1997).

Transition from school to university
Hofmeister (1998) describes a scheme at the University of Amsterdam, Netherlands, in which attempts are made to reach pre-university students from non-academic backgrounds with a view to motivating them to attend university and then supporting them when they get there. Similarly, Rutherford and Matlou (1998) describe a student-student mentoring scheme for freshmen students at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. With high levels of drop-out from university by first-year students in several countries, there would seem to be abundant scope for such schemes.

Reciprocal peer tutoring
Reciprocal peer tutoring has been shown to improve examination scores, reduce stress, and offer student satisfaction (Fantuzzo, Dimeff, and Fox, 1989), and, provided there is mutual exchange in a structured manner, other academic benefits (Riggio, Fantuzzo, Connelly, and Dimeff, 1991).

Medicine
Moore-West et al (1990) found that 75% of US medical schools responding to a questionnaire had student-based peer advising or peer tutoring in place. Some medical schools have been doing this for over 25 years - e.g. Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine (Schaffer, Wile, and Griggs, 1990). In the UK, Carroll (1996) found that a scheme could be successful if the commitment of student tutors was limited and there were tightly-defined goals. However, in another experiment, staff were found to be marginally more effective than students with higher-level work that drew on breadth of knowledge and experience (Schmidt, Arend, Kokx, and Boon, 1995).

Law
As an adjunct to problem-based learning, peer tutoring has been shown to stimulate students' interest in learning law (Moust, De Volder, and Nuy, 1989; Moust and Schmidt, 1994). Moust and Schmidt (1994) report that in a problem-based curriculum in a faculty of law, students guided by student tutors performed as well as students guided by staff tutors.

Supplemental Instruction
Supplemental Instruction (SI) differs from academic support through student tutoring in that instead of targeting high-risk students, SI concentrates on high-risk courses, mostly at the freshman level. Instead of offering individual tutoring help, SI provides group sessions led by student peers. One of the principal outcome measures is the success in college examinations of students who have

attended SI sessions compared with those who have not. Despite the suggestion by Schwartz (1992) that attendance can be the result of academic achievement, not the other way around, (i.e. that only competent students attend the SI sessions), there is some good evidence of the efficacy of SI. (See, for example, Commander et al, 1996; Sawyer et al, 1996; Kochenour et al, 1997.)

University outreach programmes
The thrust of the Imperial College/British Petroleum International Mentoring and Tutoring Project, from which the conferences that preceded this conference grew, has been primarily on college-level students helping younger students (usually schoolchildren). This type of tutoring is operating on a massive scale, particularly in the USA (see Cahalan and Farris, 1990; Reisner, Petry, and Armitage, 1990), in Israel through the much-evaluated PERACH scheme (see Eisenberg, Fresko, and Carmeli, 1980a, 1980b, 1981, 1982, 1983a, 1983b, Fresko, 1988, 1993, 1996; Fresko and Carmeli, 1990; Fresko and Chen, 1989; Fresko and Eisenberg, 1985; PERACH, 1984), and in Australasia (see Jones, 1989, 1990, 1993a, 1993b).

At the most recent count there were over 180 schemes in the United Kingdom alone (CSV 1996, 1997). At the IC/BP conferences in 1995 and 1997, presentations were made about schemes in many other countries including Australia, China, Czechoslovakia, India, Jamaica, Lithuania, Malaysia, Malta, Namibia, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Tanzania, Thailand, The Ukraine, and the USA (see Goodlad, 1995a, 1998). For those who wish to start this type of scheme, there is available a splendid resource pack produced by BP (Hughes, 1991).

One outcome of this type of tutoring is an increase in students' interests in a career in teaching. In a large-scale national study involving 1400 student tutors in the UK, Topping and Hill (1996:35) found that a substantial majority of student tutors (72 per cent) became more interested in teaching as a possible future career.

And so?
With all these possible uses of tutoring and mentoring, it might seem that all that we need to do is to rush forth from this conference and persuade everyone in education, and many folk outside education, to leap into action. I do, however, recommend a slow and evolutionary approach, rather than a fast and revolutionary approach. There is still a great deal that we do not know about tutoring and mentoring; we have to be careful not to oversell the product!

I will illustrate this thesis by describing some features of Imperial College's student tutoring scheme, 'The Pimlico Connection'.

The Pimlico Connection

I mention this scheme because it illustrates the point that although we know some things about the effects of the scheme, we do not know others. We were gratified at Imperial College that British Petroleum decided to use 'The Pimlico

Connection' as a model to be replicated in its major 'Aiming for a College Education' initiative. We are frustrated because we still do not really know if, for all its other merits, this type of tutoring scheme really does increase pupils' aspirations to attend college.

The scheme started in 1975 with 14 engineering students from Imperial College visiting a local comprehensive school weekly for two terms to assist with the teaching of science, mathematics, and design-technology. Their purpose was to try to make these subjects more interesting to the pupils, many of whom gave them up at the earliest opportunity. The school was The Pimlico School, whence the name of our scheme 'The Pimlico Connection' - the name being a deliberate invocation of two famous movie titles Passport to Pimlico and The French Connection that made people think that they must have heard of the scheme before!

The first experiments, funded by a grant from Leverhulme Trust, were within the framework of socio-technical group projects in which the students not only did the tutoring but also carried out a detailed evaluation. In every subsequent year, the scheme has been evaluated - with strikingly similar patterns of results, which suggest that the effects derive from the SYSTEM rather than from the personalities or capabilities of individuals. The evaluation was originally done by psychometric tests, then by depth interviews plus open-ended questionnaires, and latterly by a combination of specific questions and open-ended reply sheets.

The principal findings (replicated frequently in other schemes stimulated by BP and by Community Service Volunteers: CSV since then) in terms of benefits to participants were as follows:

Pupils:

· Lessons more interesting
· Lessons easier to follow
· Lesson more enjoyable
· Seemed to learn more

Students:

· Practice in communication skills
· Feeling of doing something useful with what already learned
· Getting to know about people from different social backgrounds
· Gaining insight into how other people saw subjects
· Increased self-confidence
· Reinforcing knowledge of subject
· No great interference with college studies

Teachers:

· Lessons were easier to handle
· Teaching was more enjoyable
· Pupils seemed to learn more

Numerical values on these items are recorded in, e.g. Goodlad, 1985, and in Chapter 5 of Peer Tutoring by Goodlad and Hirst (1989). Strikingly similar effects have been found in other schemes elsewhere in the United Kingdom, (e.g. Beardon, 1990; Green and Hughes, 1992; Hector Taylor, 1992; Potter, 1994, 1995a, 1995b; CSV, 1995a, 1995b). Two papers by Keith Topping and Shirley Hill (Topping & Hill, 1995; Hill & Topping, 1995) offer a comprehensive summary of the outcomes for the various types of participants in such schemes.

In addition to the above benefits, there are the benefits of the gearing effect that any largish tutoring scheme can offer. For the input of a somewhat less than half of an administrator's time (900 hours at the most generous estimate), we are able to release each year nearly 4,000 hours of intensive tuition by bright undergraduates – a gearing of over 4 to 1.

We go on running the scheme to gain these benefits; but there are many things we would dearly like to know. For reasons that I have explored at length elsewhere, (Goodlad 1995b, Chapter 4), it is not possible to apply the precision of psychometrics to a complex scheme deploying some 130 tutors in 17 schools. Maybe at this conference, some of you will give me advice on how best to proceed – particularly with a view to exploring changes in attitudes among pupils.

Pupils' aspirations
Although one might expect contact with undergraduates to stimulate in school pupils an aspiration to go to university, research results are mixed. Topping and Hill (1996: 36) suggest that the effect of student tutoring on the aspirations of tutees from a wide range of backgrounds would be enhanced by the recruitment of more male tutors of working class and / or ethnic minority origin, provided that those recruited were intrinsically well motivated. It is possible that contact with successful, middle-class students may induce the sort of despair I sometimes experience on hearing a concert pianist: 'I will never be able to play like that. So why bother!' On the other hand, the pupils may be getting a more realistic picture of life!

In a small study involving pupils tutored in 'The Pimlico Connection' for 15 weeks, Hughes (1994: 8) found that student tutoring increased the amount by which pupils try in science. He suggests that this in itself could increase aspirations. But we really do not know. We do, therefore, have to be cautious in telling people about the scheme – not over-selling it, but, rather, describing only what we know to be the effects.

The seven golden rules for tutoring and mentoring schemes

Although we may not yet know exactly what makes tutoring and mentoring work effectively, we have a pretty good idea of what will make a scheme fail. I would submit that if any of the following seven matters is neglected, trouble will follow. I shall be interested to learn from you at the conference, or afterwards, whether or not you agree.

Define aims
In a tutoring scheme, who is to teach what to whom for what purpose? In a mentoring scheme, are the benefits sought primarily professional / academic or social?

If a compromise has to be made between benefits accruing to tutors and those accruing to tutees, in whose favor will the scheme operation? (See Fitz-Gibbon, 1978.)

Although the intended benefits of a scheme may seem self-evident to the planner of a tutoring or mentoring scheme, it can be very useful to have a short 'statement of intent' that can be given to prospective participants and inquirers about a scheme. If the focal objective can be stated in a single sentence, this can be useful: e.g.

- To give school pupils support in learning mathematics and science by the provision of undergraduates as tutors
- To assist first-year undergraduates in the transition from school to university by the provision of mentoring by second-year undergraduates.

If the focus of a scheme is not completely clear, problems may result. For example, Houston and Lazenbatt (1996b) report that in a scheme to support independent learning in mathematics some participants felt insecure and resented the innovation. The authors suggest that the students' discontent was more with the independent learning aspect of the course than with the ideas of peer-tutoring and peer support. One innovation was colliding with another.

If a scheme is to be the subject of research (see section 5.7. below), it may be helpful to phrase objectives in terms of precise behavioural outcomes, e.g.

- Six-year-olds who receive help in reading from ten-year-old tutors will achieve X points better in test Y than pupils from a matched control group who do not receive tutoring but who spend an equal amount of time in normal classroom instruction.

Define roles

As I have indicated elsewhere, (Goodlad & Hirst, 1989: 137), when tutoring schemes have failed, two major factors have been present:

- There was a lack of communication – people who should have known what was going on did not;
- There was a loss of initiative and impetus – nobody seemed to know who was responsible for what.

Most of these difficulties can be avoided if there is one single person with whom the buck stops! This in turn suggests keeping a scheme to a scale in which one organizer can be realistically in touch with what is going on. The lack of such a person can be catastrophic. For example, Saunders & Gibbon (1998) report that one scheme, the Peer Assisted Student Support (PASS) scheme at the University of Glamorgan foundered after one year for lack of overall co-ordination by a member of staff. As a 'bottom-up' scheme initiated by students, it suffered from the inevitable transitoriness of student union executives.

As with aims, so with roles, it is important to write these down – particularly if inter-institutional contacts are involved. For example, in a scheme linking schools and a university it is necessary to write down as a minimum the tasks of: the university organizer, the school heads, the receiving teachers, the tutors – especially any who help with the administration of the scheme (as they often do).

Matching

Part of the assignment of roles involves the complex issue of pairing up tutors and tutees, and mentors and mentees. The jury is still out on this topic, but some early findings may be of interests.

Cloward (1967) found no significant effect of different sex pairings, nor did Mevarech (1985). Cicirelli (1972), study the effect of sibling relationships on the concept learning of young children taught by child-teachers, found that

irrespective of the sex of the younger child: (a) sisters were more effective than brothers when teaching younger siblings; (b) sisters were more effective in teaching younger siblings than girls in teaching younger unrelated children; (c) boys tended to be more effective in teaching unrelated younger children than in teaching younger siblings; and (d) boys and girls did not differ in effectiveness as teachers of unrelated younger children. Drawing on extensive experience of running tutoring schemes, Mainiero et al (1971) recommend that an older boy should never be matched with a younger girl, but offer no research findings in support of this suggestion.

More recently, Topping and Whiteley (1993), studying the matching of tutors and tutees by sex in paired reading, found that male-male combinations did particularly well all round. Female-female combinations were good for the tutees but poor for the tutors. Mixed-sex combinations were good for the tutors but poor for the tutees. This latter was particularly true for the combination of female tutors with male tutees. They do, however, caution that the supposition that same-sex pairings are more effective than mixed-sex pairings is a gross over-simplification, and the interactions between sex combinations and outcomes for tutors and tutees are more complex than previous research has indicated.

Friendship
In a study designed to explore the influence of friendship upon the process and outcome of learning in peer-tutoring, Foot and Barron (1990) found that far from reducing task demands upon eight- to nine-year-old tutors, friendship appeared to impose greater burdens on children's limited resources. This came from their need to re-negotiate their new social relationship arising from the unfamiliar and unequal roles into which the tutoring had thrust them.

Ethnicity
In the PERACH project, Fresko found that the relationships between student tutors and young people was easier when pairs were matched by ethnicity (Fresko, 1996)

In the absence of unequivocal guidance from the research, a sensibly strategy might be to always ask the participants! Suffice it to say that the assignment of roles, particularly face-to-face roles, is a complex area.

Train the tutors and mentors

Not surprisingly, it has been known for many years that untrained tutors are less effective than trained ones; (see, for example, Niedermeyer, 1970; Conrad, 1975). Evidence about this continues to be produced; (Fuchs et al, 1994; Shore, 1995). Barron and Foot (1991), for example, found that children who have a fuller understanding of a task and its rationale are not only better prepared for performing the task themselves, but are also better equipped to manage the demands of the task when teaching it to others. Again, Wheldall and Mettem (1985) found that 16-year-old tutors who had been trained in the "pause, prompt and praise" technique were effective, whereas those who had not been trained made almost no use of praise at all.

The particulars of training will, of course, depend upon what the tutors or mentors are going to do; but the following items constitute the irreducible minimum of matters that need to be addressed in a student tutoring scheme:

- How to start a tutoring or mentoring session by establishing a friendly atmosphere;
- Familiarity with the content of the tutees' syllabus;
- What to do when the tutee gives a correct answer;
- What to do when the answer is wrong;
- What to do if a session goes badly;
- How to vary the content of tutoring or mentoring sessions;
- How to end a tutoring session;
- Record keeping.

Even postgraduate students acting as tutors for undergraduates are anxious not only about the possible limitations of their subject-knowledge, but also how to cope with students who are too talkative or, more frequently, not talkative enough (see Goodlad, 1997a, 1997b).

A similar agenda can readily be constructed for mentoring where the process of disengagement at the end of a mentoring arrangement is even more complex than ending a tutoring relationship.

At the 1997 IC/BP conference, I described at length the fertility of student tutoring as a focus for academic study (Goodlad, 1998: 10 – 17) and argued the case for building the preparation of tutors and mentors into their formal education. Where this has been done, (Saunders and Kingdon, 1998; Wood, 1998), not only have the students benefited personally and professionally, but also it has been easier to argue the case for a tutoring scheme having a claim for part of a university's tuition budget.

Structure the content

For the organizer of a tutoring scheme, a major decision concerns the degree of control to exercise over the content of the tuition/teaching. The two extreme conditions are (a) when tutors are given complete responsibility for choosing materials, and (b) when tutors operate with programmemed texts and/or CAL (Computer Assisted Learning) in which steps for the tutee are laid down very precisely.

It has long been known that striking benefits to tutees can come from the administration by tutors of programmemed materials; (see, for example, Ellson, 1986, and Ellson et al 1965, 1968, 1969, 1970; Harrison, 1969, 1971a, 1971b, 1972a, 172b). Not only does careful structuring ensure that learners are given material in appropriate sequence, but it has also been found that tutors still find the human interaction with their tutees rewarding. Tutors' originality and creativity can be built around the content whose structure is the prime responsibility of the

trained teacher. Tutors, in short, do not re-invent the wheel; rather, they use other people's wheels to travel further and faster.

For those of you running tutoring or mentoring schemes that involve placing numerous tutors or mentors, this suggestion may seem like a counsel of perfection. However, it is an important management task for an organizer to urge receiving teachers to deploy tutors on clearly-defined tasks for the tutees or to provide mentors with a list of matters to raise in encounters with their mentees.

To ease the dilemma about offering too much content or too little, Bloom (1976) offers sensible advice. She urges organizers to choose materials that:

- make learning more meaningful and salient to tutees – based on the skill-needs of tutees, organised as a sequence of planned tasks, providing clear models of correct responses and desired behaviors;
- involve the maximum participation and human interaction;
- incorporate appropriate reinforcement – because tutors may not offer this spontaneously;
- offer some choice to participants – so that a mixture of structure and freedom is encouraged.

Benware and Deci (1984) suggest that one of the areas that merits research is whether it is reflecting about the deep structure of academic disciplines, as much as doing the tutoring itself, that offers benefits to students – as some of the early phenomenographic work by Marton and Saljo (1976a, 1976b) might imply. Annis (1983), however, demonstrated in one experiment that the benefits to students seemed to come from actually doing the tutoring, rather than just preparing to do it. Again, an area where we have to be careful not to over-sell tutoring and mentoring.

Support the tutors and mentors

Providing the necessary support to tutors and mentors is one of the most difficult aspects of running a scheme – but also one of the most rewarding. The teacher's work moves from being direct instruction to being more one of management. The teacher effectively passes to non-professionals responsibility for tactics while retaining responsibility for strategy. But the teacher cannot just train tutors or mentors and then let them loose, hoping for the best: some regular feedback is needed on how a scheme is working. Ideally, this should be achieved through regular de-briefing sessions. If the tutoring or mentoring is built into students' studies, de-briefing sessions are a legitimate and fruitful call on the organizer's time, and the learning from experience of the tutors or mentors can be actively encouraged.

Well-structured materials will, of course, have built-in instructions to keep the tutors on the right lines. Whether or not such materials are available, it is useful to give tutors or mentors a ready-reference list of instructions to review regularly

– before and / or after sessions, maybe on the bus, possibly with sound or video recordings of sessions for checking their own performance.

Many tutoring schemes involve parties and other gatherings for tutors to generate a feeling of collegiality, and contact with others with whom to share and compare experiences.

Keep logistics as simple as possible.

Writing of paired reading, Rhodes (1993: 18) observes that: "This kind of project is practical: that is, it can fit into the working patterns and routines of mainstream school without extra effort and time." As those of you who run tutoring or mentoring schemes know, that is no small thing! Logistics can make or break tutoring and mentoring schemes.

Time
In a survey of 82 peer tutoring projects, Fitz-Gibbon (1978: 29) found that scheduling problems occurred in 52 per cent of them! Likewise, in mentoring, Marc Freedman (1995: 221) identifies time as the biggest single problem with adult mentoring schemes:

'People come forward to participate in these programmes because they recognise that adults in our society (USA) do not spend enough time with kids. Unfortunately, the volunteers tapped for programmes quickly discover that they don't have enough time to mentor. They are the same individuals….who are struggling to spend enough time with their own kids: (this problem is exacerbated by the emphasis on recruiting successful 'role models' for these programmes – the lawyers, bankers and other professionals who tend to be the busiest people in society). The end result is that mentors are often better at signing up than showing up.'

There is no easy answer to this problem, either for tutoring or for mentoring. One approach, which we have consistently used in 'the Pimlico Connection' tutoring scheme is to ask students to make only a limited commitment of time (2 hours per week for 15 weeks) – and not to sign up if they do not think they manage this. Again, in a scheme mobilising volunteers to act as tutors or explainers in the London Science Museum, Stephanie McIvor and I found that volunteers preferred making a defined commitment of time rather than an open-ended one (Goodlad and McIvor, 1998).

Then there is the related problem of finding time for all those involved in tutoring schemes (organisers, teachers, tutors) to meet each other. It is one of the laws of nature that organisers of schemes soon discover – Timetables never fit!

Space
Likewise, space is a problem. We are encountering it at present in Imperial College with a peer tutoring scheme in which we are facilitating the pairing up of students who speak French or German and who want to improve their English with English students who want to improve their French or German. We have lots of huge, raked lecture theatres, but very few small rooms. And from this

month, we also have a complex space-charging system so that we have to pay for the rooms that we use!

In schools, I have seen tutoring taking place in locker rooms, store-cupboards, dining rooms, corridors, and corners of libraries in which lack of privacy can be a nuisance.

For mentoring schemes, the choice of places for meetings is a non-trivial issue. Not only must the meeting-places be geographically accessible, but they must also make both mentors and mentees feel comfortable – culturally as well as physically.

It is these very practical matters that lead to the suggestions:

- Start small!
- Keep it simple!

Evaluate the scheme;

At a conference on tutoring and mentoring, it hardly seems necessary to stress the important of evaluation; so I will be brief. There are at least three good reasons for evaluating your tutoring or mentoring scheme:

- One's perception of suitable objectives for a scheme will be sharpened if one tries to determine how those objectives will be achieved;
- Everyone involved in the scheme will feel satisfaction of there is 'something to show for it all';
- Self-contained evaluation reports can be very useful instruments for telling other people (including putative participants) about the idea.

But once again, we need to proceed with caution. The late Vernon Allen, one of the best-known advocates of children teaching children, (Allen, 1976) warns that evaluation tests can be seen by teachers as spying – and testing sessions can be very disruptive of class time. He recommends that test materials should be made available to teachers before the scheme is instituted. Researchers should avoid springing things on people, should avoid scheduling tests at busy times of the school year, and should give teachers the results as soon as possible after the testing.

Evaluation procedures that are too complex can fail. For example, Topping, Simpson, Thompson, and Hill (1997) achieved only a 30% response-rate from student tutors when evaluating a faculty-wide accredited cross-year student supported learning programmeme. It appears that this may have been a result of reporting schedules being too complex. All were, it seems, critical of the long list of NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications) competencies, which they though too vague and too numerous. When compiling the portfolios required of them, some student supporters were unsure about what to include or leave out and what level to aim for. Again, the message is: keep it simple!

Never knowingly oversold

For all their many attractions, tutoring and mentoring schemes are complex and difficult to get right first time. As Mary Kennedy has argued, (Kennedy, 1990: 59) the links between research findings and established educational theory are often tenuous. Likewise, as Keith Topping has reminded us, (Topping, 1998:51), the number of variables to be controlled is daunting. They include, inter alia: Curriculum content; Contact constellation (numbers of tutors and tutees involved); Year of Study; Ability; Role continuity (whether roles of tutor and tutee are switched or not); Place; Time; Tutee characteristics; Tutor characteristics; Objectives.

Mentoring programmes, which are often more diffuse in aims and looser in organisation, can be even more difficult to study.

We would not be at this conference if we did not think tutoring and mentoring to be important. Indeed, their re-discovery and re-invention over the last 35 years could be as important as that of printing. Coupled with use of the Internet (see Beardon, 1998), they hold quite stunning promise for the spread of education. We have everything to gain by persevering with our experiments, but we must beware of putting upon tutoring and mentoring schemes burdens they cannot bear, or claiming more for them than we ought. It is for this reason that I advocate as our watchword the phrase:

Never knowingly oversold!

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