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An Investigation into the benefits of Peer Coaching: Students supporting students.

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ABSTRACT

There have been many studies carried out which investigate the concepts of coaching and mentoring (Lu, 2010) but there is often confusion between the two models as no clear classification between coaching and mentoring is provided (Fletcher, 2007). This highlights the importance of finding a definition of coaching or mentoring that fits the particular aim of the situation or study. The peer coaching partnerships in this study are reciprocal relationships with another person where issues can be discussed, goals set and solutions found (Robertson, 2005). These relationships develop into ones based on trust and respect where effective and open dialogue is established (Buzbee-Little, 2005; Robertson 2005; Slater & Simmons, 2001).

This mixed methods research is located in the tertiary education sector where a group of student teachers studying on a field-based initial teacher education programme (Early Childhood Education) are about to set out on a peer coaching journey. Students undertaking a field-based programme of study face somewhat different pressures to their pre-service colleagues. One of the main differences is the fact that most students undertaking field-based training in early childhood education also work in the early childhood settings where they complete their practicum's (the practical component of the training programme) for up to four days per week (Bell, 2004; Kane, Burke, Cullen, et al., 2005). Within this practicum setting it is often difficult for students to differentiate between when they are wearing their 'student hat' and when they are wearing their 'employee hat'. One of the benefits of a peer coaching partnership for field-based initial teacher education students could be extra support from someone who is facing the same situation outside of the tertiary provider.

The participant's peer coaching stories are told through narratives as they embark on their peer coaching journeys, continue on these journeys as peer coaching in action and then reach the conclusion of this phase of their peer

coaching partnerships. The research investigates how students are supported at tertiary level when involved in peer coaching partnerships and whether both partners identify the same benefits. The factors which the participants think are important to maintain successful peer coaching partnerships are also examined. Previous studies have found many benefits of peer coaching. These include being able to give something back, providing encouragement and support and learning from each other, and are well documented in the coaching literature as being consistent benefits of peer coaching (Anderson, Barksdale, & Hite, 2005; Donegan, Ostrosky & Fowler, 2000; Swafford, 1998). This study, however, indicates that there are other benefits of being involved in a peer coaching partnership as a tertiary student. Having someone to ask the 'silly' questions, increased communication skills, the importance of training and pairings and the use of technology to enhance the partnerships were all identified as benefits by the participants.

It is evident that there are significant benefits for tertiary students to be involved in a peer coaching partnership, and in fact that these relationships can contribute to successful study and student retention. By providing another means of support for tertiary students in a field-based initial teacher education programme retention rates can be increased. The participants in this study all agreed that peer coaching is an effective support network for tertiary students if the right training is given, if students are involved for the right reasons and if pairings are made thoughtfully by the facilitator.

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INTRODUCTION

As a lecturer and programme manager for a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) qualification a good proportion of time is required to provide advice and guidance, which includes pastoral care, for students on the programme, which is an extremely important part of my role. Through advice and guidance I am responsible for academic counselling and for directing students to specific support services to enable them to successfully complete their chosen programme of study. Research shows that in Aotearoa/New Zealand up to 48% of undergraduate students withdraw before completion of their initial qualification (Scott, 2009). This is an alarming statistic which needs to be addressed. Through undertaking a previous unpublished project with work colleagues who were involved in a peer coaching partnership, I have wondered if a similar model could be used with students as a further support network to help them succeed at tertiary level. This study investigated whether being involved in a peer coaching partnership enabled students to support each other to find solutions to common problems encountered while completing an undergraduate tertiary qualification. It is clear from literature surrounding student retention that if these minor and often common problems aren't addressed in a timely manner then students may withdraw from the programme as they feel overwhelmed and in some cases isolated (Norton, 2010; Werth, Southey & Lynch, 2009). Having access to a peer coach may mean that student concerns are addressed more quickly as the students' utilise technology, such as texting which will often get an instant response, and could lead to improved student retention rates.

A point of difference between the current study and others previously carried out is that participants in this research are undertaking a field-based initial teacher education programme. As such they face different pressures to their pre-service peers in most other tertiary institutions. Many of the students on this programme are employed at their practicum setting meaning that they not only face issues surrounding being a student but also those of being an

employee. In many instances the students on this programme need to continue working to contribute to the household financial position which is one reason why they choose field-based training. It is possible that when working alongside another student in a peer coaching partnership who is facing similar problems that the students involved in this research will be able to support their partners through shared issues. Subsequently this study intends to identify what, if any, characteristics and personal attributes a potential peer coach may require to be successful when involved as a tertiary student in a peer coaching partnership. The research will investigate any problems that may arise in the partnership and suggest possible solutions to these.

Background

I first became interested in the topic of peer coaching when I completed a post graduate paper at The University of Waikato in 2005. The focus of the paper was on educational leadership and how coaching could support educational leaders (primarily School Principals) in their own professional development and leadership capacity. During the course of the paper I undertook a small research project with my colleagues at my workplace at the time. I was employed as a Home Based Childcare Co-ordinator (now predominately known as Visiting Teachers) and in the project I worked with four other Co-ordinators to develop peer coaching partnerships. Home Based Childcare Co-ordination can be an extremely stressful job. Home Based Co-ordinators oversee Home Based Educators, provide support and guidance on children's care and education to these Educators, monitor safety issues and ensure that the Educators are following New Zealand's Early Childhood Curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996). I hoped that the developing peer coaching partnerships that my colleagues were embarking on would help them to overcome the many issues, challenges and dilemmas faced by Home Based Childcare Co-ordinators. For one of the partnerships this level of support was definitely achieved and was in fact so successful that the two Co-ordinators involved still peer coach each other to this day. The other partnership, however, was not successful and this made me wonder why. Were

there certain traits that people involved in peer coaching needed to be successful coaches? Were there personality issues to consider? Or was it perhaps just the mere fact that peer coaching takes extra time and effort. These questions made me want to investigate the benefits of peer coaching further and so the seed was planted.

In 2008 I successfully gained employment at Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec) as a Lecturer in Early Childhood Education. This was an exciting time to join the Early Childhood team as they were in the midst of developing the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) which was due to be approved by the New Zealand Teachers Council. I was asked if I would undertake the role of Degree Programme Co-ordinator, a challenge which I readily accepted. During the first year roll out of the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) I worked very closely with the beginning year one students and watched a number withdraw from the programme during the winter months. As I was mulling over a thesis topic at the time, I wondered if a peer coaching partnership arrangement would be beneficial for the students to help them succeed at tertiary level. Hence the idea into an Investigation of the benefits of peer coaching for tertiary students was developed into a research topic. The concept of peer coaching is further defined in the following literature review. However, as an initial introduction it can be thought of as reciprocal relationship based on trust where the coaching partners help each other to resolve issues through actively listening to each other, having reflective conversations, setting achievable goals, and planning a way forward to enable each other to meet these goals. This study involved a group of tertiary students as research participants. These students were undertaking an initial teacher education qualification, the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE), at The Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec) at the time of data collection. The students were working together in peer coaching partnerships. These partnerships are Laura and Chelsea, Louise and Charlotte, Lucy and Cindy, and Liz and Carol. This is their journey.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores the literature which is based in peer coaching. It includes discussion of the difference between coaching and mentoring; identifies the key characteristics of peer coaching; explores the history of the use of peer coaching in education (across the sectors) and how it is used by teacher education providers (pre-service, field-based and postgraduate). The chapter will also look at issues of student retention and whether peer coaching is a possible means to support students to complete their tertiary study.

Coaching or Mentoring?

There is often confusion around the concepts of coaching and mentoring. As Fletcher (2007, p. 1) notes, "Mentoring and coaching are rarely clearly defined and there has been a growth of confusion, as both terms tend to develop singular meanings in different professional contexts". Laird (2008) makes a further suggestion that although there are many facets of mentoring and coaching (such as guide, coach, mentor, critical friend and supervisor) they all have one thing in common. She suggests that they are all forms of guided conversation. She goes on to suggest that the skills used by coaches, mentors, critical friends, guides and the like, are all similar but there are some fundamental differences defined by where they sit on a matrix which includes qualities such as control, freedom, direction and reflection (Laird, 2008). Murphy, Mahoney, Chen, Mendoza-Diaz and Yang (2005) provide some useful definitions of both mentoring and coaching. They define mentoring as a relationship (one on one) between an expert and a novice where the expert guides and supports the novice. They go on to describe coaching as a motivating relationship where the coach observes the coached and provides encouragement and feedback which in turn provokes the coached to reflect on their practice.

Cox (2003) suggests that coaching and mentoring have many commonalities and at time overlap. She argues that mentors could be more effective if a coaching style is used in some circumstances and that "effective

coaching relies on wisdom and prior knowledge as least as much as mentoring” (p. 9). However Cox (2003) does not provide a clear definition of what a coach is and her view of the difference between the two roles appears clouded. Ives (2008) on the other hand notes that there are many diverse approaches to coaching and he suggests that there is a time and place for each approach. His discussion of these various approaches, such as behaviour based, adult-development, adult learning and a positive psychology model (Ives, 2008), highlights the fundamental problem with much of the literature about coaching (and mentoring) - each author has a different idea of what coaching actually is, and its key characteristics. It is apparent, therefore, that each model or situation requires its own definition of what coaching is.

Key characteristics of peer coaching

Peer coaching itself has been defined in many different ways over time (Fletcher, 2007; Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Ives, 2008) and as with notions of coaching and mentoring discussed above, there appears to be no consensus as to what a typical peer coaching model would look like. Griffiths and Campbell (2009) suggest that because of the growth in the popularity of peer coaching and the lack of research in this field that there is significant uncertainty about what coaching actually is, who it is for, where the concept came from, and in fact what it can actually achieve. Several authors (for example: Jackson 2004; Slater & Simmons, 2001; Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, & Bolhuis, 2007; 2009) suggest that there are some fundamental principles of peer coaching that each model shares. Many of these principles are captured by Robertson (2005) in her definition of coaching. She views peer coaching as:

... a special, sometimes reciprocal, relationship between (at least) two people who work together to set professional goals *and* achieve them. The term depicts a learning relationship, where the participants are open to new learning; engage together as professionals equally committed to facilitating each other’s leadership learning development and wellbeing....Dialogue is the essence of coaching and the concurrent improvement of practice. (p. 24)

Robertson’s (2005) mention of dialogue or communication between the peer coach partners is one key characteristic of a good peer coaching model and

is an important one. As with any relationship clear and open lines of communication are essential. A relationship where conversations are non-evaluative must be developed between peer coaching partners (Ladyshefsky, 2006). In fact, Showers and Joyce (1996) removed verbal feedback from their coaching structure as they discovered that when the teachers in their setting tried to give each other feedback the collaboration between the partnerships often collapsed. In her discussion of peer coaching versus peer observation Munson (1998) suggests that peer coaching requires teachers to make judgments about each other's practice which could cause interpersonal issues to arise; she argues that peer observation eliminates this aspect and that the relationship then becomes one of trust because the feedback being given to teachers involved in peer observation is purely observational data and doesn't contain judgments on each other's practice. However, feedback which contains constructive criticism for example can be beneficial and warrants further investigation. For the purpose of this study though, the participants will not be observing each other's practice so this possible issue is therefore removed.

Two other key components of peer coaching which must be identified and discussed are issues of trust and reflection. The importance of basing a coaching relationship on trust is clearly identified in the literature (Jackson, 2004; Ladyshefsky, 2006; Robertson, 2005; Slater & Simmons, 2001). As with a community of practice where trust develops as the members begin to understand each other better (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002), so too will trust become stronger overtime in a peer coaching partnership. Robertson (2005) proposes that a feeling of trust should also be felt towards the facilitator of the peer coaching partnerships. Both Robertson (2005) and Wenger et al. (2002) suggest that this trust will take time to develop. Therefore it is crucial that time is allowed in order to establish trust when initially beginning a peer coaching relationship.

A second critical characteristic of peer coaching is reflection. Jackson (2004) proposes that coaching is intrinsically a reflective endeavour, and as such

participants will need to be skilled in reflection. Reflective practice therefore needs to be evident in any peer coaching training that is provided. Donegan, Ostrosky and Fowler (2000) suggest that the growth of reflective practice that comes through participation in a peer coaching relationship is paramount for early childhood education teachers. In fact reflection must certainly be an essential skill for any educator. In her model of coaching leadership Robertson (2005) says that by learning the skills of reflective interviewing, coaches are able to question their partners in ways that enable them to critically reflect on whatever issue they are discussing. Inherent to successful reflective conversations is the ability to be an active listener (Robertson, 2005). Without this ability coaches are unable to formulate the reflective questions needed to empower their partner to find solutions. As Robertson (2005) suggests this can be an incredibly hard skill to master. When involved in conversations participants are often eager to share their thoughts and experiences which doesn't always allow the issue to be resolved in a reflective or satisfactory manner.

In summary, trust, reflection and good communication skills, which include being able to provide non-evaluative feedback, have all been identified as significant components required for successful peer coaching partnerships. It is essential that these components must be considered and nurtured if peer coaching partnerships are to be beneficial for those involved.

A brief history of peer coaching in education

Peer coaching is not a new topic and has in fact been evident in education internationally for some time in many different guises, and with a wide range of models (Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; O'Bree, 2008). Britton and Anderson (2010) suggest that peer coaching builds on the influential work of Goldhammer (1969) in clinical supervision. Clinical supervision was developed as a professional development technique between supervisors and classroom teachers. The supervisor would observe the teachers classroom behaviour and provide detailed

data of that observation (Munson, 1998). This has grown, Munson (1998) suggests, into peer coaching and peer observation.

The idea of peer coaching in education was suggested in the early 1980's by Showers and Joyce as a tool for onsite professional development for teachers (Lu, 2010; O'Bree, 2008; Showers & Joyce, 1996). Showers and Joyce (1996) began with the aim of finding out whether regular opportunities for groups of teachers to engage with each other would increase the rate of implementation of what they had learnt during professional development. They discovered that through the establishment of small groups of peers coaching each other implementation of what the teachers were learning increased considerably. That is, the professional development which the teachers were undertaking made a greater difference to student's learning when the teachers shared their learning with each other prior to implementation in their classrooms. In New Zealand, Ramsay (1994) conducted research into supporting quality teachers through continuing education. He discovered that some schools were using an appraisal and staff development system as 'in-house' professional development. This links very closely with Showers and Joyce's (1996) theory of peer coaching. Educational institutions have been using strategies for the professional and personal development of teachers which closely align to peer coaching, particularly primary and secondary schools, for some time. However peer coaching is not as widely used in early childhood education or by Initial Teacher Education Providers where it could be an important and influential support mechanism for early childhood education teachers (particularly beginning teachers) and tertiary students.

Peer coaching has been popular in many diverse fields, such as business, counselling as well as education. Ives (2008) notes, the discipline of coaching has benefited from an influx of varying opinion on how best to utilise the model. Griffiths and Campbell (2009) suggest that currently the foremost form of coaching is executive coaching as used in the business realm. Life (or personal)

coaching is also becoming popular, as the proliferation of infomercials on television touting the services of such coaches highlights.

In more recent times there has been substantial growth in the use of coaching in most areas of the education sector (O'Bree, 2008). Teachers in some early childhood settings, primary and secondary classrooms are using this model of collaborative support to enhance their practice and student learning outcomes (Buzbee-Little, 2005; Donegan et al., 2000; Gathercole & Ruston, 2009; Swafford, 1998) through to tertiary institutions where coaching (or a comparable model) is being used with pre-service teachers and postgraduate students (Baron & Carr, 2008; Britton & Anderson, 2010; Jenkins & Veal, 2002; Ladyshevsky, 2006).

Peer coaching and classroom teaching

Many studies exploring peer coaching have discussed the benefits of the model for teachers in both primary and secondary classrooms (for example: Buzbee-Little, 2005; Donegan et al., 2000; Fletcher, 2007; Gathercole & Ruston, 2009; Zwart et al., 2007; 2009). One of the main benefits of peer coaching, as purported by some of these studies, is the effect it has on collaborative teacher learning and teaching (Buzbee-Little, 2005; Zwart et al., 2009). These collaborative models of teaching can then go on to strengthen learning outcomes for students (Showers & Joyce, 1996; Swafford, 1998; Zwart et al., 2009)

A small study carried out by Zwart et al. (2009) of 28 Dutch secondary school teachers was motivated by educational reforms in the Netherlands. These researchers had a particular desire for students to develop the ability to become active in their own learning and to become life-long learners. It is widely recognised that teacher's learning or professional development is critical in driving educational change (Zwart et al., 2009). Therefore, it makes sense that any proposed educational reforms must start with the teacher. As noted by Zwart et al. (2009), professional learning is enhanced when it becomes a shared goal or has a shared focus, in this instance, the outcomes for the students. This

belief is shared by Lave and Wenger (1991) and their theory of communities of practice, where groups of people work together with a common goal and/or a shared vision. This can be seen as reciprocal problem solving or collaborative thinking (Gathercole & Ruston, 2009).

Donegan et al. (2000) have investigated the use of peer coaching in early childhood education (ECE), in particular the special education field. They have identified four reasons why peer coaching may be an advantageous tool for professional development in the early childhood education sector. They propose that if involved in a peer coaching partnership the feeling of isolation felt by some early childhood teachers could be resolved. The very nature of peer coaching, where peers work closely together fits well, they suggest, with the collaborative nature of early childhood education. Donegan et al. (2000) also say that peer coaching could help early childhood teachers respond better to children, and this is particularly important in their field of research – special needs. Finally because, as previously mentioned, being a peer coach means that the teacher must be reflective on not only their practice but that of their peer coaching partner.

Donegan et al. (2000) go on to discuss the differences between expert coaching and reciprocal coaching (as defined by Ackland, 1991). In expert coaching a more experienced teacher works with a new teacher in a coaching partnership. The experienced teacher always acts as the coach. Whereas with reciprocal coaching, the teachers work alongside each other and share the coaching role to find ways to empower each other in their practice (Lu, 2010; Donegan et al., 2000). The idea of reciprocal coaching fits well with this study. However, as previously noted, Donegan et al. (2000) investigated peer coaching for teachers of children with special needs, which is a relatively narrow field. In New Zealand it is now common for children with special needs to be ‘mainstreamed’ with their more able peers, so peer coaching could be beneficial for all early childhood teachers, particularly as early childhood teachers strive to

notice, recognise and respond to all children's learning (Ministry of Education, 2004).

Robertson (2005) has further developed the concept of peer coaching in education as a form of professional development for educational leaders.¹ Robertson's (2005) notion is to not only establish peer coaching partnerships between educational leaders but to also include a facilitator in this process. She terms this facilitator an "academic professional". This is similar to Ramsay's (1994) study where the school principal often took this role. Robertson (2005) suggests that this person is crucial for providing an outside perspective which is important for ensuring effective change. In most of the studies in peer coaching this person appears to be the researcher who has provided the training for the peer coaching partnerships, although their role is not often documented. In the current study I intend to act in this role, providing the initial workshop where participants will learn the skills of peer coaching and will continue to support them with their developing coaching relationship over the period of the study. It is therefore evident that the influence of this role on peer coaching needs further discussion.

Peer coaching in Initial Teacher Education Programmes

Peer coaching, or a comparable concept, has been used in pre-service teacher education to support students while undertaking their field practicum's² (Anderson et al., 2005; Lu, 2010) and this relates to the current study. However what differentiates the present study from others is that the peer coaching model is being used with early childhood education student teachers who are undertaking a field-based programme of study, as opposed to student teachers who are studying in the pre-service model. As such the participants in this study face different pressures from their colleagues in pre-service training institutions.

¹ For the purpose of her study Robertson (2005) has not used position titles, choosing rather to group all those in education as 'leaders'. This is because she believes that everyone in education should take up leadership responsibilities regardless of the position they hold.

² Sustained placements in a school classroom or early childhood education setting.

Peer coaching for pre-service student teachers

Several studies have investigated the role of the student mentor in pre-service teacher education, favouring this term over coaching, (for example Heirdsfield, Walker & Walsh, 2007; Lennox-Terrion & Leonard, 2010; Scanlon, 2008; 2009) and as previously discussed there can be clear distinctions made between the two terms. Lennox-Terrion et al. (2010) investigated the motivation of paid peer mentors who were employed to help improve the academic outcome of pre-service students, with that of unpaid peer helpers. Many tertiary institutions now implement some form of peer mentoring, tutoring or helping as research shows that this relationship can help with retention, academic success and the overall student experience. Lennox-Terrion et al. (2010) discovered that being paid is not an exceptionally motivating reason for peer mentors/helpers. Many stated that the desire to help was more of an incentive. This finding resonates with the present research where the vision of the peer coaching partnerships is to help students not only with their study, but with other aspects of their lives which may impact on their ability to focus on their learning.

Britton and Anderson (2010) imply that peer coaching for pre-service teachers is an underutilised model. They suggest that if peer coaching is implemented well then it could be beneficial to pre-service student teachers, fostering an environment where collaboration and striving for improvement becomes the norm. They go on to suggest that good implementation of peer coaching would mean that the available human resources (for example, Lecturers) would be better utilised (Britton & Anderson, 2010). Pre-service students are under many different pressures and often have high levels of anxiety. These stresses, either real or perceived, can take up a lot of the Lecturers' time providing pastoral care and academic advice. Britton and Anderson (2010) suggest that a well implemented peer coaching programme running alongside traditional pastoral care could alleviate some of the need for this extra support from teaching staff. In addition, Britton and Anderson (2010) found that peer coaching is a model that is straightforward; it is easy to teach and learn and was considered beneficial by those participating in their study.

The studies conducted by Britton and Anderson (2010) and Heirdsfield, Walker and Walsh (2007) focused on the commencement and first year of the training programme, as this is where, they suggest, that the students need the most support in order to continue successfully on the programme. This is a somewhat narrow view as there are many factors that must be taken into consideration when investigating why students withdraw from a programme of study. These include, but are not limited to, issues such as workload, family issues, financial pressure and academic ability and can happen at any time during the student's tertiary study. There is a clear gap in the literature here, these issues are important and need to be taken into consideration when discussing why students withdraw or drop out from tertiary study.

Field-based Initial Teacher Education

Students undertaking initial teacher education in a field-based training programme spend a good proportion of their time in early childhood settings, as well as attending classes at their institution. It can be likened to an apprenticeship model of training as student teachers are guided by qualified teachers in the field. Field-based initial teacher education was first offered in New Zealand in the 1990's. The establishment of field-based training for teachers was to support those already working in the early childhood education sector to gain a qualification and to continue working (Bell, 2004; Kane et al., 2005). Field-based initial teacher education in New Zealand is mainly provided at Institutes of Technology and is particularly focused on early childhood education. Students completing a field-based qualification are required to complete a practicum of a minimum of 12 hours per week in a licensed early childhood setting throughout the duration of their study, in either a paid or voluntary capacity (Kane et al., 2005). Alongside this practicum students attend lectures and complete blocks of teaching experience away from their home centre. This form of learning can be defined as praxis. Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, and López-Torres (2003) state "We define praxis as the dialectical union of reflection and action" (p. 249). Simply put, praxis is putting theory into practice and putting practice into theory, the very nature of field-based initial teacher education.

Bell (2004) goes on to suggest that field-based training allows for “rigorous and authentic assessment” (p. 14). This, she suggests, is because students are assessed in a number of contexts. These contexts being, in the student’s practicum setting, teaching experience and classroom learning. These various forms of assessment clearly demonstrate praxis. Warren (1989) suggests that education must be learner centred and therefore the learner’s experience becomes a fundamental part of their learning. Arguably, field-based initial teacher education is learner centred, authentic and is focused on learning what is required to be a teacher rather than just learning the theory needed to do the job. Goodfellow and Sumison (2000) have a similar view when they state “We believe that learning to teach involves learning how to *be* a teacher rather than simply learning *how* to do the work of a teacher.” (p. 247).

Peer coaching for postgraduate students

Various studies have investigated the benefits of a peer coaching, or a similar concept, with postgraduate students. Devenish et al. (2009) found that when recalling their postgraduate experiences the study group the participants were involved in (where peers supported each other collaboratively) was perceived to be one of the most critical factors in their success. Ladyshewsky (2006) had similar results in his study with managerial education postgraduate students. He, in fact, suggests that peer coaching should be considered as a feasible strategy for enabling students to learn, and to critically reflect, and could become part of the curriculum framework for postgraduate programmes. Baron and Carr (2008) go further when they argue that using peer mentoring with international students can reduce the cross cultural communication issues which so commonly arise. With the growth in international interest to complete tertiary study in New Zealand this is an important point to note. Clearly, as with pre-service teacher education, peer coaching is worthwhile in many ways and including this model within the curriculum, as part of a programme of study, has been shown to augment the potential of the student to succeed.

Summary

While it is evident that there has been some research in the area of peer coaching/mentoring for pre-service student teachers in primary and secondary teaching programmes and postgraduate students, (Baron & Carr, 2008; Devenish, et al., 2009; Ladyshevsky, 2006) studies investigating the use of peer coaching with early childhood education student teachers are lacking. There is also a particular gap in the peer coaching literature about students undertaking a field-based programme of study. There is a need for more extensive study of peer coaching in these particular areas to investigate the benefits of peer coaching and whether or not student retention is improved by using this strategy. The present study aims to fill this gap in the research.

Student Retention

Improved student retention is one of the intended outcomes of this study and as noted in research undertaken by Zepke, Leach and Preeble et al., (2005) decreasing the student attrition rate remains a challenge for tertiary institutions both nationally and internationally. This is particularly true with the current political climate in New Zealand where some Government funding is now directly linked to completion rates (Tertiary Education Commission, 2011). As with any training organisation obtaining the highest amount of funding possible is essential to maintain quality teaching and programmes, therefore issues of student retention are important and need to be addressed.

In their 2009 study Werth, Southey and Lynch suggest that there are four important teaching practices which they have identified as helping to improve student success in their first year of tertiary study. These practices are: constructivism, scaffolding, social presence and reflective practice. Students who are engaged in constructive learning are more likely, Werth et al. (2009) imply, to succeed in their chosen programme of study as they move from what they know to what they don't know with active support from their Lecturers. This links closely to Werth et al.'s (2009) second teaching practice, scaffolding. As students are challenged in their learning they are supported to look at the

wider context and think deeply (Werth et al., 2009). Social presence, Werth et al.'s (2009) third teaching practice can be achieved, they suggest, by maintaining a high level of communication with the student. The final teaching practice identified by Werth et al. (2009), reflective practice, is beneficial for both students and lecturers. Students are able to self-reflect and therefore 'debrief' their own practice and Lecturers can assess their own teaching. The desired level of reflective practice can be achieved, Werth et al. (2009) suggests, by maintaining reflective diaries.

These are four good teaching practices for Lecturers and they are equally useful in a peer coaching relationship. Students involved in a peer coaching partnership are able to share their experience with each other (constructivism), support each other's issues (scaffolding), build a relationship off campus as well as on (social presence) and together reflect on issues to find solutions (reflective practice). Werth et al. (2009) found that when these techniques were used in classroom teaching practice student retention rates went up. Through establishing peer coaching relationships where these practices are supported then the peer coaches should develop the skills to encourage each other to continue with their tertiary study.

In a New Zealand context, Zepke et al. (2005) carried out research across seven different tertiary providers to discover if there were commonalities amongst institutions and their staff surrounding issues of student retention. Their findings focus on many ways in which institutions can foster student's wellbeing. These are, ensuring that the institution has a learner centred culture, good teaching is valued and of high-quality, positive relationships are fostered, good academic counselling is given, small class size, and student performance is monitored so that any issues are caught early. As this research was carried out across a number of varied institutions Zepke et al. (2005) note that it is important to be aware of generalisations and to know your own institution. Although this research highlights the importance of positive relationships their discussion is focused on relationships between students and staff. Positive

relationships between students, such as those developed in a peer coaching partnership, are an important consideration when discussing student retention strategies.

Norton (2010) suggests that there is a tension between the newfound independence that many tertiary students experience and the anxiety that can be associated with this freedom. This, Norton (2010) notes, could be particularly true for new tertiary students who have come straight into undergraduate study from secondary school. However, this tension can also exist for many mature students, especially women, who are returning to study after raising a family. From personal observation I have witnessed how this new found independence and academic challenge can affect mature students and can impact on their personal and professional lives. It is hoped that through the peer coaching relationships being developed in this study that some of these tensions can be addressed and rectified.

Challenges of establishing a peer coaching relationship

Just putting a peer coaching partnership together is not enough to ensure that a successful relationship develops. Factors such as issues of trust, time, knowledge and skills must be taken into consideration. As Zwart et al. (2009) note, both partners must acquire the necessary skills and attitudes to be both the coach and the coached. For this reason many studies investigating peer coaching include some form of workshop or training for the participants. In her review of literature on peer coaching in pre-service teacher education Lu (2010) found that most of the studies provided training, prior to embarking on peer coaching, lasting from two to nine hours in duration. These training sessions involved learning the techniques, skills and attitudes required to be coached, be a coach and in some instances training on specific technology needed for the coaching programme (Lu, 2010).

As previously acknowledged trust is an important factor for a successful peer coaching relationship. Participants in a peer coaching partnership must

develop trust in each other and time needs to be given for this to be established (Robertson, 2005). Robertson goes on to suggest that in order for trust to be created and maintained then issues of respect and confidentiality must be addressed. In the first instance peer coaches need to be given time to begin to form trusting relationships. This can be achieved through the workshops or training programmes as described by Lu (2010) above, or through other forms of communication such as email, text, face to face communication methods like Skype and such. Through initially developing trust respect will then be built. It is important for the facilitator of a peer coaching arrangement to ensure that the participants are well aware of the importance of confidentiality because if privacy is breached then trust and respect dissipates. Robertson (2005) suggests that confidentiality is paramount so therefore “a coach’s personal integrity and professional ethics must be the ultimate guide here” (p. 95). This again highlights the point that to be a successful coach certain personal attributes need to be present.

As with any relationship peer coaching partnerships need to be fostered and a commitment to investing time must be made by both partners. Robertson (2005) proposes that it is important at the beginning of the peer coaching relationship that both partners agree on regularity of contact and make a commitment to the process. In this busy world finding time can be a difficult thing so setting meeting dates early can help with maintaining commitment. In this technological age contacting each other through means such as text (SMS) messages or Facebook (or other social networking sites) could strengthen commitment in a peer coaching relationship and would indeed make the most of every opportunity for contact, however it must be noted that using social networking media comes with its own set of dangers.

The next step in establishing a peer coaching relationship must be that of learning the necessary skills, which have been defined previously as active listening, reflective conversations, goal setting and planning a way forward. These again can be initially taught by a facilitator at a workshop or training

programme and will develop overtime as the peer coaches practice them with each other. It is important for the facilitator to maintain a presence after the initial training to further support these developing skills. How this presence is maintained and how effective it is will become part of the findings of this study.

Problems and Solutions

One of the biggest problems faced by people engaged in a peer coaching partnership is lack of time (Donegan et al., 2000; Robertson, 2005). Because of the pressures of everyday life finding the time to meet can be a challenge, particularly when participants don't live close to each other.

Donegan et al. (2000) further identify that different philosophies held by the peer coaches may cause a problem in their relationship. As already noted, the skills of active listening and reflective practice are essential in maintaining good communication between the partners and if used correctly will enable partners to work together to see issues from each other's perspective. Having a facilitator who is available to help resolve any issues which arise can assist in a successful resolution of any problems (Robertson, 2005).

Another potential problem is that of real or perceived outside factors which may impact on the coach's abilities to form relationships and continue in their partnership (Robertson, 2005). Such outside factors may include family commitments, work responsibilities, visits to their setting by the Education Review Office³, community obligations and the like. As Robertson (2005) suggests when these problems arise this is when coaching can come "into its own" (p. 152). Effective coaches will be able to help their partners to find solutions to order outside commitments in relation to their importance or urgency.

³ In the early childhood, primary and secondary education sectors in New Zealand the Education Review Office regularly reviews early childhood centres and schools to ensure quality learning environments for children are maintained.

Conclusion

Peer coaching is used as a professional development tool across many settings, such as commercial business, schools and tertiary providers. The reviewed literature shows that peer coaching can be an effective model for students studying at a tertiary level in a pre-service initial teacher education programme. This study is focused on students completing a field-based early childhood education qualification and although there appears to be a lack of research in this area this could be a successful model for these students. Students undertaking field-based training are immersed in praxis; they put theory into practice and practice into theory. This form of adult learning sits nicely alongside the proposed peer coaching model defined for this study.

Peer coaching is defined in this review as a reciprocal relationship based on trust where partners support each other to find solutions. It is clear that for peer coaching to be successful there are certain skills which need to be taught to potential coaches. For the purpose of this study these have been identified as active listening, reflective conversations, goal setting and planning. It is evident that to maintain and establish an effective peer coaching relationship peer coaches need to maintain respect and confidentiality for their partners.

Through the present research, characteristics of a successful peer coaching model will be identified, which will include personal attributes required to be an enduring peer coach. Problems which hinder this form of support will be identified and possible solutions will be discussed. A potential offshoot of this study could be discovering factors which may aid in student retention through using peer coaching as another form of support for tertiary students.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter discusses the methodology and methods used in this research project to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways are the students supported at tertiary level study when involved in a peer coaching partnership?
2. Did both partners in the peer coaching partnership identify the same benefits?
3. What factors are reported as being important in maintaining peer coaching partnerships?

It will go on to introduce the participants involved in the study and give a brief background as to why each pairing was made.

Methodology

This study used a mixed method approach for data collection. Although the data was mostly qualitative two quantitative surveys were included. The initial survey enabled relevant interview questions to be designed. These questions had clear links to what students had already experienced. The mid-way survey could give some indication of how the partnerships were going and what methods they were using to communicate with each other. It could also identify if the partnerships needed any further support from the facilitator. This research has been undertaken as a case study and uses narrative inquiry. Though aspects of positivism (quantitative) research have been used in this study it sits firmly in the interpretative field, and is more qualitative in nature.

Positivist research and Quantitative methodology

Positivist research, which underpins quantitative methodology, often uses experimental methods to test hypotheses and/or research questions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Gibbs, 2006; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). This paradigm has its origins in the physical sciences so therefore sits well within the scientific fields where data is collected through methods such as surveys and experiments (laboratory, natural or field) which produce numerical findings (Cohen et al., 2007; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). When using this method

researchers start with their initial thoughts loosely framed into a hypothesis. These initial hunches often come from observation (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). From this, positivist researchers design experiments and take samples, which look for a pattern, to confirm a theory from which a stronger hypothesis (or hypotheses) is formed. Further research is then carried out to test the new hypothesis. After this stage of a positivist research project the hypothesis is either accepted and generalisations are developed or it is rejected and adjustments are made to the theory (Cohen et al., 2007; Mukherji & Albon, 2010).

Positivism has been criticised. These critics suggest that by using a positivist approach in research the holistic nature of the human subjects is overlooked and undermined (Cohen et al., 2007). They argue that because of the lack of consideration and exclusion of things such as “notions of choice, freedom, individuality, and moral responsibility” (p. 17) this form of research is not suitable for the social science fields. However some methods used in quantitative methodology can be utilised in qualitative research and can strengthen these studies as a richer set of data is able to be analysed (Cohen et al., 2007; Gibbs, 2006; Mukherji & Albon, 2010).

Interpretative research and Qualitative methodology

A different approach to that of researchers using positivism is interpretivism. The interpretative paradigm arose out of criticisms of the positivist approach (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Many researchers in the social science fields had one common view on positivist research and that is that human behaviour is not ruled by “general universal laws and characterized by underlying regularities” (Cohen, et al., 2007, p. 19) and that in fact a more individualistic and holistic approach is necessary. Interpretivism, therefore, forms the basis of qualitative methodology, which is often more concerned with an issue than wanting to make generalisations about the world (Mukherji & Albon, 2010).

Qualitative methodology is typically focused on a small sample, rather than making generalisations about large numbers of people or particular phenomena, which is the focus of quantitative methodology (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Researchers using qualitative methodology recognise the importance of the researcher and how they impact on the research. This is termed reflexivity, which identifies the importance of self (the researcher) as well as all the other aspects of a qualitative research project (social settings etcetera) and acknowledges that these are inter-reliant (Cohen et al, 2007; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Lincoln and Guba (2000) argue that the notion of self is central to a qualitative study, that it is fluid and ever changing, and that it is in fact further defined and developed in the process of undertaking the research.

As with positivism, interpretivism has been criticised. Opponents of this qualitative approach argue that the methods used (such as interviews) can be inaccurate and suggest that more control, such as what is used in quantitative methods, is needed (Cohen et al., 2007). Thus a mix of the two methodologies in a research project may be beneficial.

Case study methodology

A case study is a useful tool for educational researchers. Thatcher (2006) notes that case study methodology is a major research strategy in modern research projects, particularly in the social science field. He goes on to suggest that case studies have two main purposes, firstly to identify causal relationships and secondly to discover the worldwide view of the participants in the study. Case study methodology is particularly useful for small scale research projects which focus on an individual or group of individuals. Cohen et al. (2007) suggest that a case study can provide a unique insight into a particular issue using real people in real situations. They go on to say that case studies investigate cause and effect and that because this is happening in a real situation that this is one of the benefits of using case study methodology (Cohen et al., 2007). Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, et al. (2011) further elaborate on this as they see case study methodology as an in-depth way of exploring real life issues. They suggest

that case study methodology can be used to answer the *how, what* and *why* questions posed by researchers.

It has been identified, however, that with any research method case studies have strengths and weaknesses as a research tool. Meyer (2001) notes that the design of case study research is rather loose and can therefore be open to interpretation by the individual researchers. This she points out has led to many weak case studies which are challenged by other researchers, particularly in the positivist field. Meyer, however, goes on to note that this perceived weakness is also a strength of case study methodology. Because the design is so loose then researchers are able to mould and fit this particular method to their research project.

It is important when using case study methodology that the researcher decides whether to investigate one case or if multiple cases are to be investigated. This differentiation is necessary because if only using one case then the study will only find out information about that particular case. However, if multiple cases are used then an issue which has wider interest can be explored (Mukherji & Albon, 2010).

Narrative inquiry methodology

Hendry (2010) suggests that narrative research is the oldest form of investigation and therefore considers whether all research methodologies could in fact, stem from the narrative. History has been told orally and these stories are worthwhile accounts of real life experiences. Through participating in narrative methodologies participants are telling their story. This is termed narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Gibbs, 2006). Schaafsma and Vinz (2007) suggest that by using narrative inquiry researchers are paying close attention to what the research participant's stories tell us. They do note, however that one of the problems of narrative inquiry is the researchers desire to make meaning of the stories rather than letting the stories speak for themselves. A good narrative story leaves the reader to make decisions for themselves as well as being guided by the researcher.

Murrihy (2009) proposes that by using narratives access to the “heart and soul of experience” (p. 92) is gained. Through using narratives the real story of the participant’s journey can be heard. Murrihy (2009) goes on to say that narratives can be oral, and transcribed into text, or written. These texts are then developed into stories by the researcher and common themes can then be identified. Gibbs (2006) suggests that narrative inquiry sits well with educational research as researchers explore the holistic nature of teacher education. Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) support this notion and go on to say that narrative inquiry can be used to explore specific phenomena and human meaning.

Craig (2007) breaks the concept of narrative inquiry down even further. He proposes that there are five qualities which highlight the reflective nature of narrative inquiry. These are “(1) research in the midst; (2) research on the boundaries; (3) knowing through relationship; (4) narrative truth; and (5) following where the story leads” (p. 108). These five qualities are evident in this research project in the following ways:

1. The researcher is directly involved (workshop and data collection methods).
2. The researcher remains on the periphery (while the peer coaching relationships were in action).
3. The importance of relationships, (the researchers and those that were developing between the partnerships) was identified.
4. Truths were acknowledged through the participant’s stories.
5. The participant’s journeys were told through their own stories.

Thus, narrative inquiry is an important method in this research project as the participants embark on their peer coaching journeys, continue on these journeys as peer coaching in action and then reach the conclusion of this phase of their peer coaching partnerships.

Methods

A variety of methods of data collection, analysis and reporting were utilised in this study. Surveys, interviews, focus groups, a workshop and reflective journals were used to gather data which was analysed through case study methodology and reported using narrative inquiry. A discussion of each of the above data collection methods follows.

Data Collection

The period for data collection for this research was intended to be from February 2010 – December 2010. Initially I had wanted to set up the partnerships at the beginning of semester one and collect the data over the entire year. However, ethical approval from two ethics committees was not completed quickly enough. This meant that the data collection period would mainly be across semester two (from June – November/December 2010) and the initial workshop for participants would be held during the midyear break. It is possible that this delay impacted on the ability of the participants to form really strong relationships before the critical winter months.

Surveys

Two online surveys (appendix A & B) were undertaken during the data collection phase of this study. The first of these surveys was undertaken prior to the initial interviews and focus groups as the responses to this survey would form the basis of the questions for these interviews. All of the year two students studying on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) were invited through Wintec's online tool, Moodle, to participate in the initial online survey. As there were approximately 70 year two students the initial online survey was the most appropriate way to collect information as this method can be used for a large pool of participants (Cohen et al., 2007; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). A URL (Uniform Resource Locator) link was posted on Moodle and participation in the survey was taken as consent.

The second survey was undertaken mid-way through the data collection phase of the research, and was offered to the participants who were involved in the peer coaching partnerships. This survey intended to track the progress of the participants and their developing peer coaching partnerships. As with the previous survey participants were able to complete this online. A specific Moodle (Wintec's online tool) occurrence had been set up for the project so this is where the survey was located. The mid-way survey was mostly quantitative but had qualitative aspects as the respondents were asked why/why not to the yes/no questions.

Interviews and focus groups

Interviews were chosen as a method for this study for many reasons. As Mukherji and Albon (2010) note, interviews are a versatile and effective research tool which can be used across many disciplines. Interviews can be quantitative or qualitative in nature and can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Cohen et al., 2007; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). For the purpose of this research I chose semi-structured interviews. All participants in the interviews were asked the same set of open ended questions. After the analysis of the initial survey a set of interview questions were designed (appendix C). The initial interviews conducted with the year one students participating in the project were individual, whereas the year two participants were interviewed in a group. This approach is often referred to as focus groups (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). In this instance I acted as more of a facilitator of a discussion as opposed to an interviewer. Although I had a set of questions, the participants, when in a group tended to expand on these in more depth as they bounced their ideas off one another. As with the individual interviews undertaken with the year one students the focus group questions were semi-structured and open ended. The initial individual interviews and focus group were audio recorded. I videoed the focus group in case I needed further identification for transcription purposes, however I did not need to use this in the end.

It is important when interviewing research participants to ensure that the time and place are suitable to them. I wanted the interviewees to be as

comfortable as possible so I left it up to them as to where they would like to be interviewed. They all decided that they would be happy to be interviewed at Wintec in one of the teaching rooms. To make this easier for the participants I scheduled the interviews on the day of the workshop (which was to introduce the participants to the peer coaching skills) so that they would only need to come into Wintec once during the study break. Unfortunately due to work commitments one year two participant was unable to attend the focus group interview or the workshop. I made arrangements to go through the workshop and interview with her individually (using the same set of questions used in the focus group interview) at a time convenient for her when she was next on campus.

At the conclusion of the data collection phase all the participants were interviewed again. The interviews were again semi-structured in nature using open ended questions. I used data from the initial interviews and the mid-way survey to design this set of interview questions (appendix D). As with the initial interviews and focus group these were audio recorded. This time I didn't video the focus group as I had no need for this extra data for the previous focus group. For these interviews I interviewed all the year two participants individually and the year one participants as a focus group. Once again I organised for these interviews to take place at a time and venue convenient to the participants. Two of the year two participants were interviewed at their homes, one came to my home and the other chose to be interviewed at her workplace. The year one students were happy to come to Wintec again for their focus group interview. Unfortunately two of the year one students forgot about the focus group interview. Rather than rescheduling I conducted the interview anyway with the two students who came, as I did not want to further impact on their time, and sent the other two the questions by email to respond to.

When determining what format the interviews should take, individual or group, I took the characteristics of the participants into consideration. I decided to undertake a focus group interview with the year two students initially so that

they could expand on what their colleagues had said in the initial survey. I hoped that as a group they would be able to expand on the areas identified in this survey in more depth. The year one students were interviewed individually in the first instance because they did not know each other well and this may have impacted on what they were prepared to share. Because the initial interviews were conducted in this way the process was reversed for the final interviews. By working in a focus group the year one students would extend their thoughts by bouncing their ideas off one another. The year two students, on the other hand, would be interviewed individually and this was purely because of location. As the final interviews were to be conducted after the end of semester two and because three of the four year two students lived rurally to alleviate any extra pressure on the year two participants they would be interviewed at a place suitable to them. Once the interviews were transcribed all participants were given a copy so that they could make any changes and approve the content.

Workshop

As this study is focussing on peer coaching as a possible strategy for supporting tertiary students I felt it was important that there was some form of 'training' so that the participants had knowledge of the important characteristics and techniques of peer coaching. As Lu (2010) notes, training is an important part of establishing peer coaching partnerships because the participants need the opportunity to develop the required skills and to learn why these are important. Most peer coaching arrangements feature some form of training and this training can range from just a couple of hours to a few days (Lu, 2010). The workshop was run over an afternoon, on the same day that the initial interviews were undertaken. The decision to run the workshop on the same day as the interviews was made so that the participants only had to attend on one day. This was particularly important as a number of the participants had to travel some way to the interview and workshop venue. Out of the eight participants in this study seven were able to attend the workshop. The eighth participant was unable to attend because of work commitments. She was provided with an opportunity to complete the workshop in a one on one situation with me at a

later date. At the workshop the participants were given a peer coaching kit. I gave them this kit because I didn't want the participants to be financially responsible for any items they may need to make their partnerships successful. This kit contained some reading material on peer coaching which covered in more depth the concepts that they were learning and practicing during the workshop. It also contained writing material and a notebook which they were invited to use as their reflective journal.

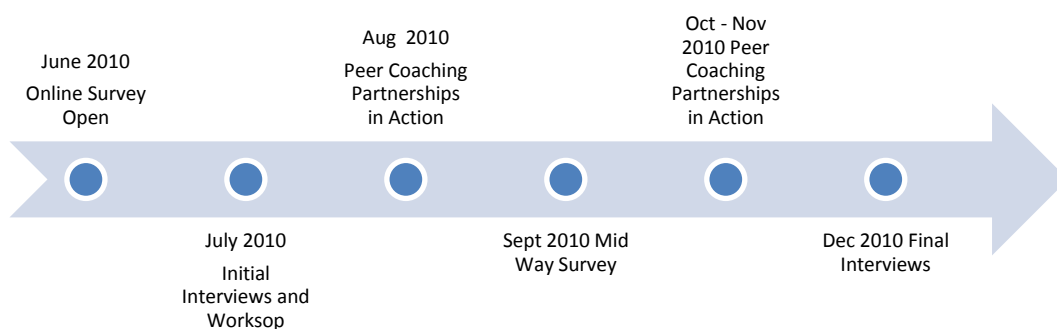
The workshop gave the participants a brief history of peer coaching and explored some of the techniques that they would use in their partnerships. At the workshop the participants were put into their partnerships, which had been selected prior to them attending by the researcher (see page 40). The participant whose partner couldn't come to the workshop joined in with another group and they worked triadically on this occasion. During the course of the workshop the participants were able to practice the techniques with their partners. The researcher worked alongside the partnerships at the workshop to help the participants develop the skills. The skills taught to the participants during the workshop were active listening, reflective conversations and goal setting.

Reflective Journals

Reflective journals as a data collection method is often featured in qualitative research studies, in particular qualitative feminist research (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Reflective Journals are an effective way of reflecting on one's own practice and can be a key tool for reflective practitioners in education. For this study the participants were all given a notebook to use for their journal. They were asked to reflect on the workshop, the peer coaching process, their meetings or other contact with their partner and any other issues that impacted on them over the six months of data collection. All students on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) are required to keep a reflective diary as a part of their practicum (weekly placement in a centre) requirements. They are required to have the text *On Reflection: Reflective practice for early childhood educators* (O'Connor and Diggins, 2002). Because of these aspects of their study I thought that they would be familiar with reflective journal writing through the support of their

visiting lecturers and reflective practice taught in class so I did not provide any further ‘training’ around this during the workshop. Most of the participants wrote in their journals initially but this documentation of their thoughts was not as thorough and reflective as I had hoped. In a study undertaken by Hooker, Peters, Biggar and Bleaken (2008) the participants were required to keep a reflective journal. As with the present study this was not an effective data collection tool. The authors wondered if the concept of keeping a reflective journal was new to the participants and therefore some extra support and guidance about what was required could have been beneficial.

Figure 2.1: Time line of data collection for the peer coaching study



Triangulation

Triangulation occurs when more than one method of data collection is used within a study, comparing information obtained from three or more sources (Cohen, et al., 2007; Gibbs, 2006). The concept of triangulation is a metaphor derived from surveying and navigation where two points are used to determine the third, thus forming a triangle (Turner & Turner, 2009). Triangulation is now widely used in many research arenas either by using a mix of quantitative and/or qualitative methods or by using the same methods a variety of times (Turner & Turner, 2009). By using triangulation the strengths of one method can counterweigh the weaknesses of another (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). In this study the use of a quantitative method, surveys, were complemented by the qualitative aspects, workshops, interviews, focus groups and reflective journals, as illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 2.2: Triangulation of methods used in the current study



Ethical considerations

There are various ethical considerations which must be addressed and discussed for any research project. By taking these into consideration researchers are seeking to ensure the safety of their participants and to maintain the legitimacy of the study.

Recruitment

At the time of recruitment of the participants for this research project there were approximately 70 year two students and 100 year one students enrolled on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) at Wintec.

Initially students on stream⁴ one, year two, and stream one, year one were invited to participate in the peer coaching phase of the research, however there was a low uptake from the year two students so the invitation was extended to stream two as well. The students were approached by the School of Educations' Research Leader at the conclusion of a class and were all given a participant information sheet. In doing this I was not part of the recruitment process so there could be no suggestion of coercion on my part. This is

⁴ Students on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) are divided into streams of approximately 35-40 students at the commencement of the programme. They are in these streams for their taught classes. The majority remain in their initial stream throughout their study for this qualification.

important because as Wilkinson (in Tolich, 2009) points out, the moral validity of the research would be weakened or destabilised if the participants were coerced or forced in any way to become part of the research. The potential participants were given an expression of interest form which they returned via the research leader either accepting or declining the invitation to participate.

It was initially my intention to purposefully select the four year two students who would be involved in the research. Cohen et al. (2007) describe purposeful selection as when "...researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought" (p. 114). However, this purposeful selection was unnecessary as of the five year two students who initially volunteered only four chose to participate in the research.

Initially ten year one students expressed interest in being part of the research. After the initial meeting to explain what participation would entail five potential participants remained interested. One of the four peer coaching partnerships was therefore going to be a triadic relationship which would have added another dimension to the research, however at the beginning of the data collection stage the fifth year one student withdrew from Wintec.

Access to participants

I am employed by Wintec as a Senior Academic Staff Member and the Programme Co-ordinator (Manager) for the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE). In these roles I am involved in lecturing the students, providing academic advice and guidance including pastoral care. This means that I was in regular contact with the students and I had already established relationships with them. Cohen et al. (2007) point out that access is a key issue in a research project and that it must be decided upon early in the research. As they suggest, it is important that access to the participants is not only permitted but is also realistic. Because of my role as Programme Co-ordinator access to the participants once consent was given was not an issue.

Informed consent

The year one and year two students were initially invited to participate in the research via a letter which was given to them by the School of Education Research Leader (appendix E). At this time the research leader briefly outlined the research and answered student's questions. Once the students had expressed interest in becoming a participant in the peer coaching research I held an informal meeting to further discuss what would be required. After this meeting those students who chose to participate were given a consent form (appendix F). Upon signing the consent form the participants were not only consenting to participating in the research but also that they fully understood a number of important factors. Mukherji and Albon (2010) note that these include, but are not limited to:

- That participation is voluntary;
- The right to withdraw at any time;
- That their confidentiality and anonymity is safeguarded;
- What will happen to the data once it is collected.

In this research participants were advised that being a participant should have minimal impact on their study and/or work.

Confidentiality and anonymity

O'Brien (in Tolich, 2009) suggests that matters of confidentiality and anonymity of participants must be seen as ethical principles which researchers take every possible step to protect. This is particularly important in studies like this one where the participants are taken from a relatively small potential participant pool, such as the Early Childhood student body at Wintec. In order to protect anonymity of the participants in any reports they have all been given pseudonyms which were chosen by me and no other identifying information such as addresses will be included in the project findings. However, as Cohen et al. (2009) note; there can be no absolute guarantee of complete anonymity of the participants in this study, particularly because those involved may choose to share their experience with others in the student cohort. The participants in this study were given information about confidentiality and anonymity during the

initial phases of the data collection period, and were assured that all possible steps to maintain confidentiality and anonymity have been taken. I would argue that this is particularly important for a study such as this one which involves students who are undertaking a tertiary qualification. This is because identification of participants could lead to accusations of favouritism or special treatment by others on the programme or indeed other lecturers. At no point during the research have I disclosed who is participating to my colleagues or other students.

The use of focus groups as a data collection method does mean some issues around confidentiality arise. The participants involved in the focus groups were told that the discussions were to remain confidential amongst the group. Students on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) are often involved in discussions in class where a member of the cohort may inadvertently disclose the name of an Early Childhood Education centre when discussing good and bad practice. They are aware of the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of the class in these circumstances and sign a class contract agreeing to this.

Potential harm to participants

As the Degree Programme Co-ordinator and a Lecturer on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) I am in a position of authority over the participants in this study. Students who were invited to participate but chose not to be part of the study were not disadvantaged by their non-interest in participation. Likewise the participant who chose to withdraw after the research project commenced was not disadvantaged in any way. The students who have participated in the research project have not been judged on their performance and their involvement has had no impact on their marked assessments during the course of their programme of study.

At the introductory session, all students were asked to submit an expression of interest indicating their acceptance or decline of the invitation to be involved. This eliminated any potential harm to students deciding not to be involved from the start.

One area that could cause potential harm to participants was the time commitment involved in being part of the study. Participants were advised that it was up to them how much time they chose to invest in their partnerships and therefore there was no specific time commitment required from them apart from the interviews and workshop.

Participants were encouraged to be open and to express all their thoughts, positive and negative. All of their input was valued and confidential. If a student made a negative comment they were not in any way penalised or disadvantaged.

The participant's relationship with their coach could be a contributing factor to potential harm. Participants were aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time so if, for example, they found they could not work with their partner they could withdraw and their reason for withdrawal would not be disclosed. The option of withdrawal removed this possible potential harm.

Participants and peer coaching partnerships

There were eight participants in this project, making up four coaching partnerships. The participants were a diverse group ranging from school leavers to mature students. Two of the year one students had come into tertiary study straight from secondary school; one of these had completed a level five certificate prior to starting on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE). One of the year two students had also commenced the Degree programme straight from school. The other five participants could all be termed as 'mature' students, returning to study after a significant time away from formal education. Four of the five of these 'mature' students had children ranging in age from pre-school to young adult. At the start of the data collection phase six of the participants were all employed by their practicum setting, the other two were volunteers. By the end of the data collection one of the participants who was volunteering had gained employment at her practicum setting. Those participants employed worked on

average 3 – 4 days per week in their early childhood setting alongside their study at Wintec. One, in addition, worked in a part time job in the weekend. Two of the students who were employed were in Education Support Worker (ESW) positions, working one on one with children with special needs in a mainstream setting. Those volunteering undertook the required 12 hours per week in their early childhood practicum setting.

When deciding on the partnerships all of the above factors were taken into account and the participants were matched using specific criteria (such as location and employment) in some instances. Due to the nature of the participants one partnership resulted in a pair, Lucy and Cindy, who were very different from each other. The other partnerships all had a least three criteria in common as outlined in the following participant summary table.

Figure 2.3: Summary of the characteristics participants involved in the peer coaching study

Participant	Year One	Year Two	Mature Student	School Leaver	Employed	Volunteer	Lives rurally*	Lives locally**	Runs a household	Lives at home/flat
Laura		✓		✓	✓			✓		✓
Chelsea	✓			✓	✓			✓		✓
Louise		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Charlotte	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
Lucy		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Cindy	✓			✓		✓		✓		✓
Liz		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Carol	✓		✓		✓			✓	✓	
Notes:	All year one students have been given a pseudonym which starts with a 'C', all year two students pseudonyms start with an 'L'. *Students in this category lived out of Hamilton, where Wintec is located. These students worked or volunteered at a centre local to their residence. **Students in this category lived in Hamilton and worked or volunteered at a centre within this city.									

Laura and Chelsea:

Laura and Chelsea had both come to tertiary study straight from school. Laura was in her second year of study on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) and Chelsea was in her first. Chelsea had, however, undertaken a level five certificate at Wintec during the previous year. Both of these participants were still living at home with their parents. During her first year of study at Wintec Laura was a volunteer in her early childhood practicum setting. This year she has been employed. Chelsea was employed at her early childhood education practicum setting and additionally had another part time job in the weekend.

Louise and Charlotte

Louise and Charlotte were both mature students who had been away from studying for some time, Louise was in her second year and Charlotte was in her first. Both Louise and Charlotte were employed at the early childhood settings where they were completing their practicum. Louise and Charlotte both lived rurally but there was quite a distance between them. This increased further when Louise moved during the course of the study. Charlotte had primary aged and teenage children.

Lucy and Cindy

Lucy was a mature student in her second year of the degree, had teenage children and lived rurally. Cindy was in her first year of the degree and had come to tertiary study straight from completing secondary schooling. At the beginning of the study she had just gone flatting. Lucy was employed at the early childhood setting where she was completing her practicum and Cindy was a volunteer.

Liz and Carol

As with Louise and Charlotte, both Liz and Carol were mature students. Liz was in her second year of study on the degree programme, lived rurally and had children ranging from pre-school to primary school age. Carol was in her first year of study, lived locally and had children at primary and intermediate school. Both Liz and Carol were employed as Education Support Workers

(teachers who work closely with a child who has additional needs) at their early childhood education practicum placement settings.

It was hoped that these pairings would give an insight into the different ways peer coaching partnerships could work, and would help to discover what the important factors are for a successful peer coaching partnership. Two 'school leavers' were paired together; two 'mature' students together; one 'mature' student and one 'school leaver' together; and two students who were both employed as Education Support Workers made up the final peer coaching partnership.

CHAPTER THREE: FINDINGS

This chapter explores the findings of the two surveys which were carried out in the study. The first survey sought to identify barriers to successful study and what support networks tertiary students used to reduce these barriers. The second survey was undertaken with the participants who were involved in the peer coaching partnerships. It identified how often they were meeting, what forms of technology they were using to enhance their relationships and what ways they had been supported by their peer coach.

Results of the initial survey

The initial survey of year two students was undertaken in June 2010, prior to the initial interviews as its purpose was to aid in the designing of the interview questions. This would enable the researcher to go into the interviews with some idea of what barriers the year two students had encountered, how much impact they thought these barriers had to successful tertiary study, where they sought support to overcome these barriers and how effective this support was. The survey was open to all year two students on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) at Wintec, of which there were 70 at the time. 19 students responded to the survey. The survey was a brief questionnaire containing only four questions and was quantitative in nature as there was no opportunity for respondents to make comments, however they were able to identify other barriers/supports that were not included in the survey.

Survey Results – part one

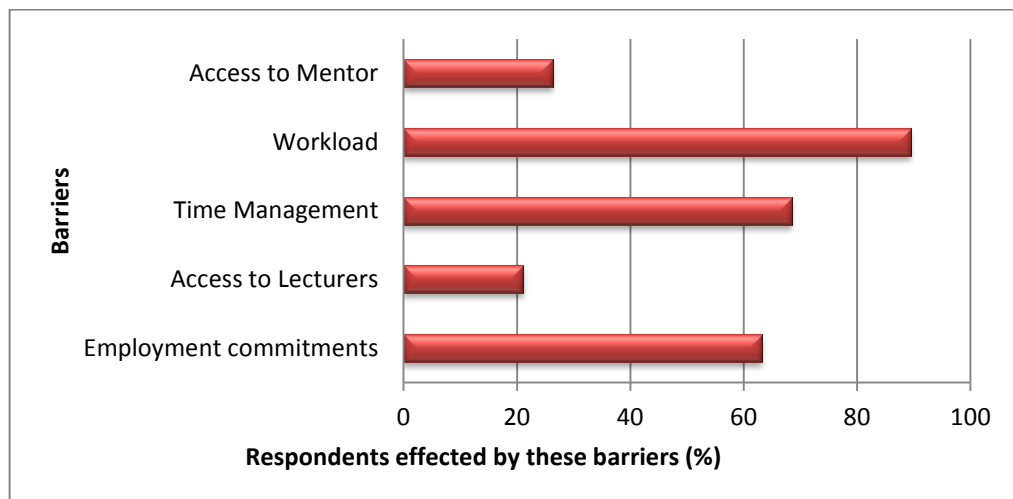
Students were firstly asked to indicate if they had encountered any of the following barriers during their first year of tertiary study at Wintec and to rate how much impact they thought these barriers had on their study. The barriers included in the survey were:

- Access to Mentor
- Workload

- Time management
- Access to Lecturers
- Employment commitments

These barriers to successful study were commonly identified by students on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) when they undertook academic counselling with Lecturers. The other main hurdle that same students face is ill health, either their own or that of a family member. However, because this affects a relatively small number of the student population it wasn't included as an option in the survey.

Figure 3.1: Barriers to completing successful tertiary study identified by students



The respondents to the survey identified workload (number of assignments) as being the most common barrier to successful tertiary study, with 90% indicating that this was a barrier for them. 70% of respondents identified time management (their own) as also being a factor to their study success. There is a correlation between these two identified barriers as often students who have poor time management skills are often the same students who think that the required assessment workload is too high. Another barrier identified by over 60% of respondents was employment commitments. This is perhaps a unique barrier to successful study for field-based initial teacher education students or those undertaking their study by distance learning. This is because the majority

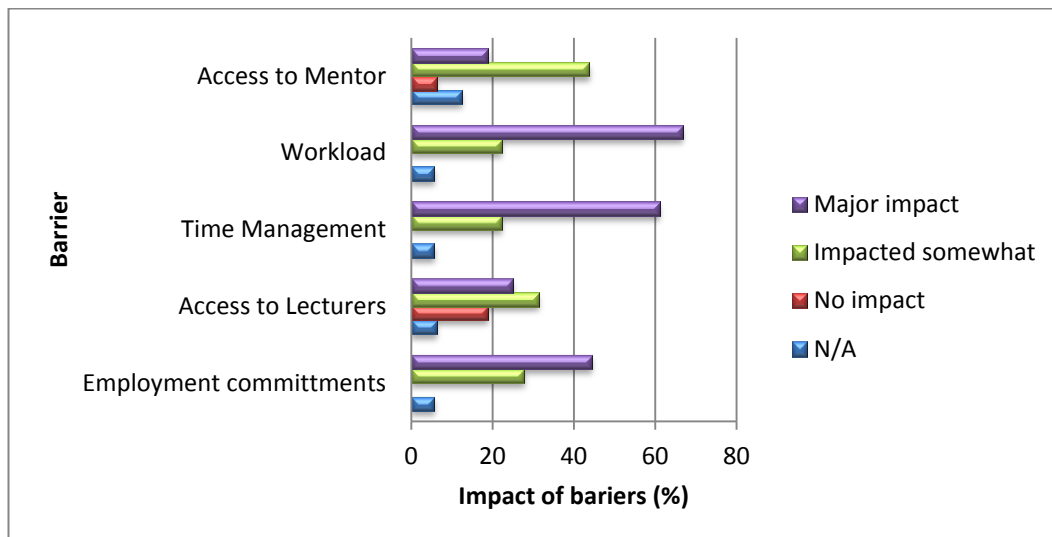
of Wintec Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) students are employed at the early childhood education setting where they complete their practicum. Within this practicum setting it is often difficult for students to differentiate between when they are wearing their 'student hat' and when they are wearing their 'employee hat'. Employers, too, can find it hard to make clear distinctions as to when the student is a student and when they are an employee. In his recent study which investigated school based placements for initial teacher education students studying on a distance programme Ussher (2011) noted that the transition between roles could be an issue. As with students studying on a field-based programme these students had other roles in the school, such as teacher-aide positions, and these roles could become "blurred and confused" (p. 179).

Within their practicum setting early childhood initial teacher education students have a Mentor. The Mentor is a qualified early childhood education teacher who has usually had significant experience in the field. Mentors guide and support the students during their training, particularly with their practicum requirements. Over 20% of the year two respondents to the initial survey acknowledged that sometimes access to their Mentor could be a barrier to successful study. Likewise 20% of the respondents identified that access to Lecturers can also be a problem for them. It is unclear, though, whether this is Lecturers in general or their specific Visiting Lecturer who visits them in their practicum setting.

Other barriers to being able to complete successful tertiary study that were identified by the respondents were family commitments, distance from home, ill health and their Community of Practice group⁵.

⁵ One of the first modules that students undertake on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) is called Communities of Practice. In this module students are put into Community of Practice groups, ranging from three to five members and selected by location. The students remain in these groups throughout their study.

Figure 3.2: Impact of identified barriers on respondents ability to successfully complete tertiary study



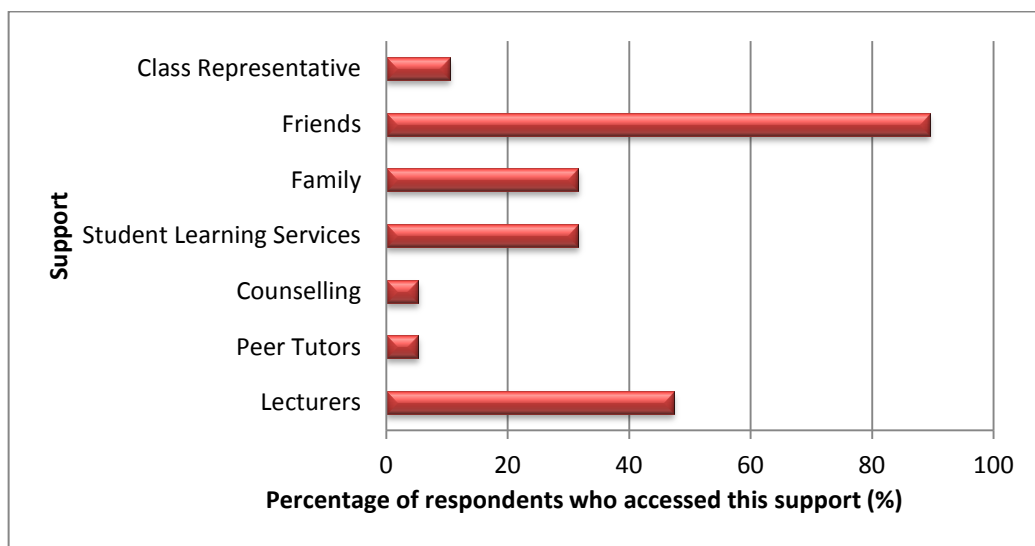
Over 60% of the 19 students who responded to the survey said that issues surrounding workload and time management influenced their ability to complete their programme of study successfully, and that these barriers impacted majorly. Again, these two factors often go hand in hand as students fail to successfully manage their time to insure that they meet assessment requirements. Nearly 50% of the respondents said that employment commitments had a major impact on their ability to successfully complete their programme of study. As mentioned previously a high proportion of students studying on the Bachelor of Education (ECE) at Wintec are employed at their early childhood education practicum placement setting. Being an employee can have many negative effects for the student. These include, unclear expectations, working three or four days per week on top of study and some students are required by their workplace to actually come to work on their class day to either open or close the centre, or both. It should be mentioned, though, that volunteering in the students early childhood education practicum setting can also have negative effects on the student. The main ones being, not feeling part of the team and not being involved in the centre's programme planning. This

possible barrier to successful tertiary study was not included in the survey as this again affects a small minority of students.

Survey results – part two

In the second part of the survey respondents were then asked where they had accessed support and to rate how effective they felt this support was for them. There were seven options available for the respondents to choose and they could choose as many as they liked. These were: Class representatives on the student association (SAWIT), friends, family, student learning services, counselling services, peer tutors (academic tuition) and Lecturers.

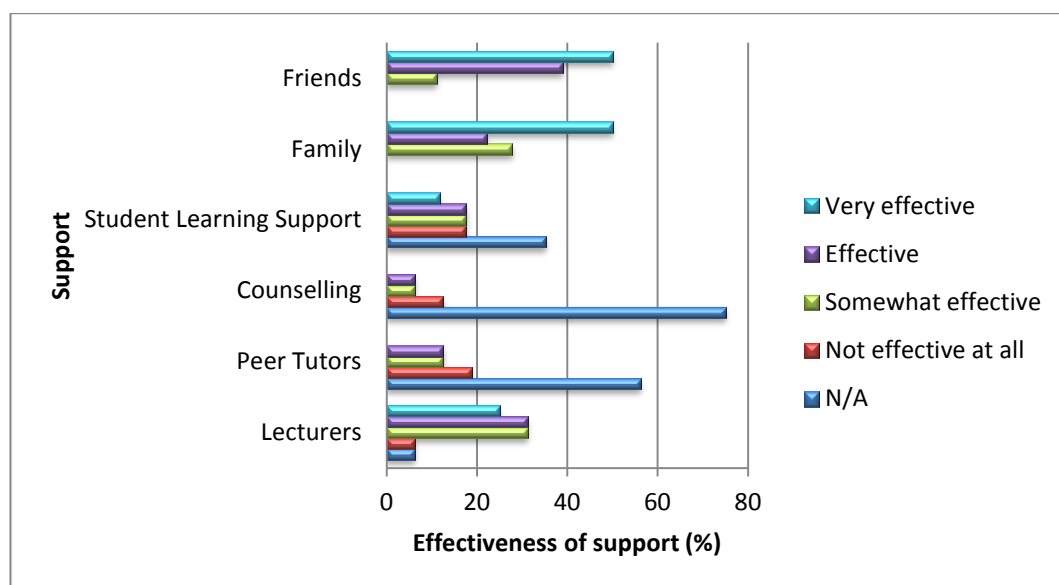
Figure 3.3: Support accessed by students to overcome identified barriers to successful completion of tertiary study



Overwhelmingly, over 90% of respondents selected friends as being the most common support accessed to help them overcome their identified barriers to successful tertiary study. This was by far the most common support network used by students (it would be interesting to know if these friends were outside of Wintec or if they were in fact the student's classmates with whom they had developed friendships). Close to 50% of the respondents said that they had used Lecturers as a support network, interestingly more often than their own families who 30% of respondents identified that they turned to for support. Student

Learning Services was also identified as a place to go for support to overcome barriers by 30% of respondents. Around 10% of respondents said that they had utilised class representatives for support with fewer than 10% using peer tutors or counselling services. As with question one, respondents were also able to identify other support networks they had used. These were classmates, communities of practice groups and health professionals.

Figure 3.4: Effectiveness of support accessed by students to overcome identified barriers to successful completion of tertiary study



When asked how effective this support was friends and family were highlighted as being very effective, with around 50% (10/19) of respondents highlighting this. Lecturers were also identified as a very effective support network with over 20% of the respondents selecting this. The only other support network to be rated as highly effective was Student Learning Services which over 10% of the respondents selected. None of the other identified support systems were rated as very effective, ranging from effective to not effective at all. It is noted that four of the identified support services, Student Learning Support, counselling, peer tutors and Lecturers were identified as being not effective at all by a number of respondents. It is apparent, however, from these results that different students value various support systems differently.

Summary

The initial survey provided data which enabled two different sets of interview questions for the year one and year two student participants to be developed (appendix C). Although these questions had a similar focus to the online survey questions, barriers and support, it was possible to expand further to include questions such as what coping strategies had the participants noticed other students using. The participants were also asked in the interviews if they could see any future potential barriers and how they supposed being part of a peer coaching relationship could benefit them. One of the questions that this research aims to answer is whether being involved in a peer coaching partnership provides another form of support for students studying at tertiary level. By identifying what support networks students already use before embarking on the peer coaching journey, comparisons will be able to be made between these already established support networks and the new peer coaching relationship.

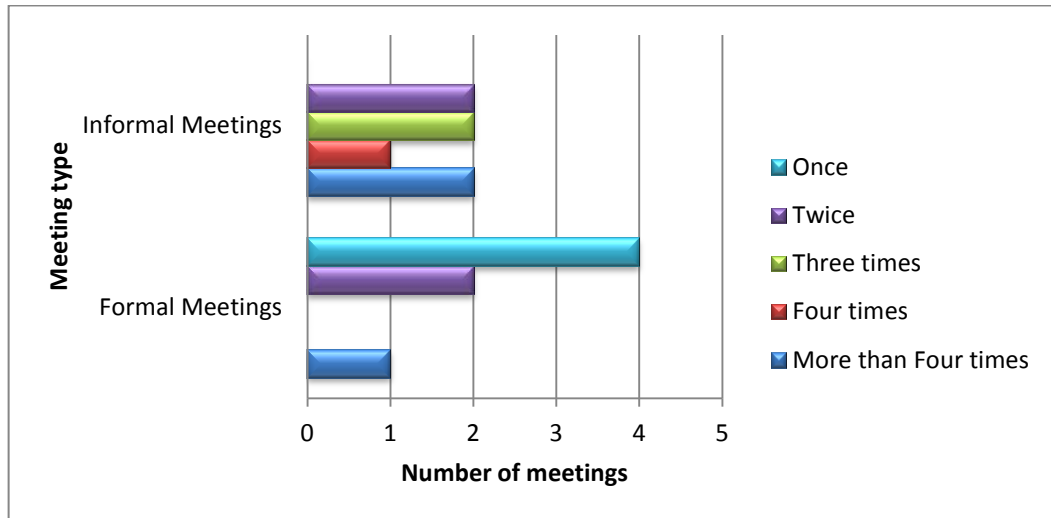
Results of the mid-way survey

The mid way survey was intended to measure how well the peer coaching partnerships were going. The survey furthermore explored what forms of technology the participants were using to support or enhance their peer coaching relationships and sought to discover which way of communicating the participants found the most and least beneficial. Finally participants were asked to identify how their peer coaches had helped them to date. Seven of the eight participants involved in the study responded to this survey.

Survey results – part one

In the first part of the survey participants were asked how many times they had met with their partners face to face. They were asked to identify if these meetings were formal (planned) or informal (such as running into each other in the hallway at Wintec).

Figure 3.5: Number of face to face meetings held by the peer coaches to date (mid-way) in this study

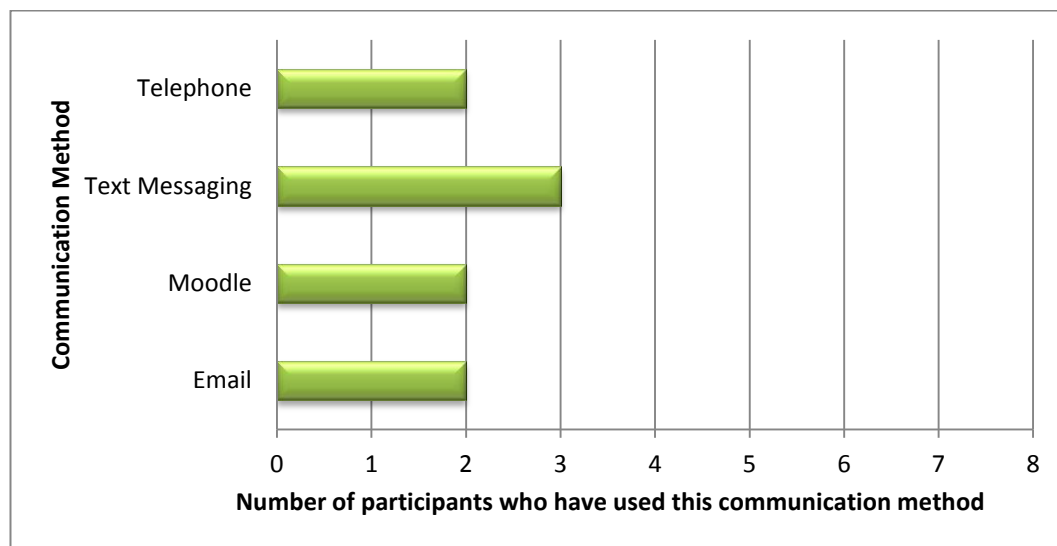


All of the respondents reported that they had met at least once with their partners, with two people identifying that they had met four times or more. As this survey was anonymous it was not possible to match the responses to the partnerships so it is not clear which responses are from year one participants and which are from year twos. The majority of the meetings appear to be informal with formal meetings only occurring occasionally. It is possible that the respondents counted the workshop as a formal meeting. It is interesting that one respondent noted that they had met four times informally while another respondent said that her partnership had met more than four times formally. This could highlight different perceptions of informal and formal meetings.

Survey results – part two

In the mid-way survey participants were asked if they had used other ways besides meetings to communicate with their partner. The identified communication methods were telephone, text (SMS) messaging, Moodle (Wintec’s online tool) and email.

Figure 3.6: Other methods of communication used by the peer coaches in this study



Text messaging was the most popular form of alternative communication. The function of text messaging varied from setting up a meeting to just saying hello. When asked why they found this method of communication beneficial participants said:

- It is easy and this is how we agreed to contact each other.
- Because it is a simple way to find out when each other is free and to let each other know if we can make it [to a meeting].
- Easy and tend to communicate with most people this way.

One respondent commented that they had chosen not to use text messaging as a contact method as there was no mobile phone coverage at her home.

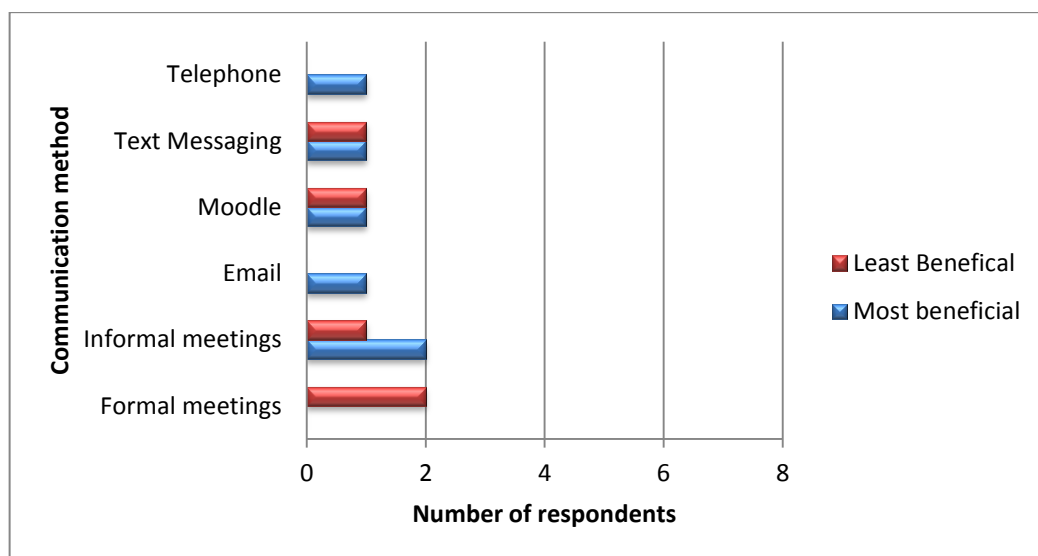
Moodle, email and telephone were also used by the participants as alternative contact methods. One respondent stated that their relationship started through using Moodle as the main contact point and also that this is a good communication method because of differing timetables. Telephone and email was seen by some participants as a more personal way of communicating

with each other, however one participant did comment that her emails often weren't responded to.

Survey results – part three

The third section of the mid-way survey asked the respondents to identify the most beneficial form of meeting/communication with their partners, and the least beneficial.

Figure 3.7: Most beneficial and least beneficial communication method used by the peer coaches in this study



It was clear that formal meetings were not seen as a beneficial form of communication. Reasons for this were because participants found it hard to find time to meet. Differing timetables, commitments and finding time when they were both free was an issue. Moodle was seen as not a beneficial form of communication by one participant as she did not check it regularly enough, relying more on phone and email. One participant did note, however, that every form of communication that she and her partner had used had been beneficial to their relationship.

Survey results – part four

The final part of the survey asked the participants to identify how their peer coach had helped them so far. Of the seven participants who responded to

the mid-way survey only three chose to answer this question. All three responded that their coach had helped them with study issues, with one commenting that her coach had given her confidence and the belief that “I can do it”.

Summary

This survey showed that the participants were using many different ways to communicate with each other and that each partnership chose to use the communication method/s that best suited their relationship. These methods included meetings (formal and Informal), telephone, text messaging, Moodle and email, and were used by participants for varying purposes, such as setting up meetings and ‘touching base’ with each other. By comparing these communication methods and others identified in the participants narrative stories the factors which are important in maintaining a peer coaching relationship can be identified.

It is interesting that only three participants responded to the final question which asked them how their peer coach had helped them so far. This could indicate that even though the survey was undertaken mid-way during the data collection phase that the relationships were still developing into actual peer coaching partnerships. These initial findings could indicate that the participants may not identify the same benefits of being involved in a peer coaching partnership.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PEER COACHING JOURNEYS - THE BEGINNING

In this chapter the beginning of the journeys of the peer coaching partnerships during the six months that they worked together is outlined. It will provide a snapshot of the developing relationships (or in some cases, not developing) and will begin to highlight the benefits of being involved in a peer coaching partnership, issues of such relationships and the personal attributes required to be a successful peer coach.

Laura and Chelsea's Journey

Laura and Chelsea, two young women, had both come to tertiary study straight from school. Both were still living at home but came from two very different families, who provided different levels of support. Laura is the second year student in this partnership and Chelsea is in her first year of the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE). Chelsea had successfully completed a level 5 certificate at Wintec the year before she commenced on the Degree programme.

In the initial interview I asked Laura how she had found her first year of study. She commented:

Overwhelming and busy and hard, but also because people were saying, "Oh you can't do it", so it gave me the extra foot to kinda do it. So it was good in a way but it was very hard, trying to meet everybody; and getting used to all the assignments was a big thing, and the tutors, and meeting all their expectations, because it's not just one tutor; it's all of them and all the assignments and the resources you had to make was huge (Int. 1).

Chelsea's experience of her first semester on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) was similar. She said "Busy, extremely pressured, stressful; what other words can I describe it? I felt like quitting 'cause it was a huge commitment" (Int. 1).

Laura and Chelsea had similar experiences during their first year of study on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE). However, because she had already completed a level 5 certificate successfully in the previous year Chelsea had felt that she

would sail through the first year of the Degree programme. She said of her expectations: "... considering this year is level five and last year was a level five and it was completely different. It was just packed with assignments, which I wasn't expecting" (Int. 1). Chelsea's expectation of what the first year of the Degree programme would be like was a major impact on her study. She identified workload and family commitments as a big hurdle for her, alongside having to work. She commented "Financially supporting my family; it's really hard while you're studying" (Int. 1).

In the initial survey the year two students identified workload as being the biggest barrier for them. Laura related this to being employed as opposed to being a volunteer in her early childhood practicum setting. She said:

I found it hard to begin with but I think a little bit easier because I wasn't actually a staff member. I was volunteering so it was a lot easier because I could fit my volunteering around my study, so it wasn't the other way around, but it was good. But it was hard to kind of get in the mode of study, but yeah I think it was pretty good (Int. 1).

The difference between being an employee (Chelsea) and being a volunteer (Laura) in their practicum settings and what this meant for Chelsea and Laura in terms of their different experiences highlights one of the tensions of a field-based initial teacher education programme. Students who are employed by their practicum setting face the additional responsibilities that sit alongside this. Finding time to just be a student is often challenging. This was further highlighted by Laura, who during the course of the programme had now become an employee at her practicum setting.

I'm finding it a little bit difficult, trying to keep up with the study and expectations I have at work, and all the staff meetings. I've got to go home and do learning stories and stuff so it is a challenge. But if I can get it done, at the end of the day; it's pretty good. I've just got to encourage myself, 'Okay, I've got to get this done' or I give up my weekends for one week to do it. But yeah, just keep trying to get it done (Int. 1).

When asked about the support systems available at Wintec Laura and Chelsea had different experiences and viewpoints here too. Both had accessed various support services over the course of their tertiary study. Laura found her

experience to be beneficial, whereas Chelsea had not. Although she had used these services during the previous year when she was studying on the level five certificate Chelsea had no intention of accessing the available support this year: “... because I used them last year and I didn't find them as good as what they were described to me” (Int. 1).

However, Chelsea did find the services offered by the onsite counsellors to be beneficial, and she had been using them regularly. Both Chelsea and Laura identified Lecturers as being a good place to go to for support; however this could depend on the Lecturer. Laura said:

It depends on the lecturer and that whether they're welcoming and say, “Yep we can help you” or the ones that kind of don't want to help you, so it depends on what you think the lecturer is like, and the assignments that they've got. If it's way beyond your means you should go to them ... (Int. 1).

In the initial interviews the participants were asked to comment on what they thought they would get out of being involved in a peer coaching partnership personally, study wise and if it would impact on their teaching practice. Laura could see that there could be some personal gains from being involved in the partnership. She said:

Personally, it will be better because I'll be able to give ideas to the person and we can kind of swap ideas or experiences we had about being students, because we both know what it's like. I can help her because she's beginning it [the degree] and I'm already second year (Int. 1).

Chelsea, on the other hand, could see more benefit for her studies. When asked about what she might gain personally she commented:

Hopefully a way of talking to different people, seeing other people's views, because they're in Year two so they'll be able to like give us an outline what we're gonna do ... and what to look for too (Int. 1).

Both Laura and Chelsea could see benefits for their teaching practice stemming from being involved in a peer coaching partnership. Laura said:

Yep, because it will help me become more able to teach other people and help them learn, as well as me learning off them. Because, yeah, I would like to learn more off other people so yeah it will definitely help me (Int. 1).

On this point Chelsea commented “Well obviously, there's gonna be a time at work that we'll all share different techniques and strategies and things like that; so obviously that can add to my little booklet of tools” (Int. 1). It appears for this partnership that the main thing that both Laura and Chelsea hoped to gain from peer coaching was some benefit for their teaching practice.

Louise and Charlotte's Journey

Louise and Charlotte are both 'mature' students. They had both come into tertiary study well after they had completed their secondary schooling. Louise and Charlotte are both employed at their practicum setting and they both live in rural locations, but not near each other. Louise is in her second year of study, Charlotte is in her first. The impact that their time away from formal education had on their initial experiences was evident for both Louise and Charlotte. When asked about her initial six months at Wintec Charlotte said:

Ups and downs, rollercoaster. That's probably the best way to describe it. Unsure to start with on how I'd get on. Pleasantly surprised with some of my marks. Stressed I suppose towards the end, but then I accept that. That's part of tertiary education. You've got to go with that. Just teaching myself to use my time better. Get used to the fact that I've sort of got fingers in each pie. Whereas before I've always finished everything. So that was the hardest thing I think (Int. 1).

Charlotte went on to comment that although the first semester had been a challenge for her she had really enjoyed it and was looking forward to returning to Wintec after the midyear break (Int. 1). When asked how the first year had been for her Louise focussed on the assessments. She said “Essay writing was hard. Getting back into it after such a big long gap and not really knowing how to do it properly” (Int. 1).

Louise had enrolled on the Diploma of Teaching (ECE) in 2008, as part of a midyear intake. At the beginning of 2009, with the introduction of the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE), these students were offered the opportunity to transfer onto the Degree programme. This obviously had an impact on Louise's first year of the Degree, for two reasons. Firstly, the Diploma students who transferred were very disillusioned, feeling that they had wasted six months. Of this experience Louise

said “That was awful” (Louise, Int. 1). However, the change to the degree programme did have some benefits initially:

I guess for us, we found last year a little bit easier than most because they [Wintec] cross-credited those papers. But yeah, when we came back though and it was second semester, it was really full on. It was like holy, what are we doing (Int. 1).

Unlike Laura and Chelsea who had both found workload to be a barrier to successful tertiary study, Louise and Charlotte had different barriers. When asked to identify what had been the main barrier for her Charlotte commented:

Learning to work in a group. If you want something done you do it yourself. So I found it really difficult to sort of trust other people to do their bit. So that was a bit of a barrier for me. But, other than that, no I don't think so (Int. 1).

I followed this up by asking Charlotte if she had noticed any barriers that other students in her cohort had encountered during the first semester. She said:

Same thing for me really. Some of them sort of stamp their feet like petulant children, but that's also their age I suppose. Being that much older than a lot of them, I've noticed that. But I think possibly similar barriers really (Int. 1).

Louise's largest barrier was time management. She said “Mine was procrastination, leaving it a bit long.” (Louise, Int. 1). Louise found that the solution to this was to work closely with another student who was in the same class. Of this relationship she said “For me it was us egging each other on. Have you done this, have you done that, what about this and what about that? Then it would be, right this is what I did” (Int. 1).

Charlotte has developed a strong support network with her Community of Practice group. When I asked Charlotte if she worked closely with this group she said:

We do and we help each other out. So we've sort of made this pact at the beginning of the semester that all of us, all four of us, were going to pass this degree and we would drag each other along (Int. 1).

Both Louise and Charlotte were already involved in a form of peer coaching, Louise with her class mate and Charlotte with her Community of Practice group. Through these relationships and although neither Louise nor Charlotte had

explored peer coaching before they were already demonstrating the attributes needed for successful peer coaching.

When asked about how being involved in a peer coaching partnership might benefit them personally Louise and Charlotte, as with Laura and Chelsea, had differing views. Louise thought that being in this relationship would help to reassure her that she had retained what she had learnt during her first year of study and that she would be able to give something back through sharing this knowledge. Whereas Charlotte; like Chelsea; linked the personal benefits to her study. Where Charlotte had a similar vision to Louise was that she hoped that she would be able to give something back to her peer coaching partner.

I think it will help with my confidence. I think just to go over that [assessments] with somebody who's been there, can put it into English and might be able to describe it to me that will just click in my head. So I'm looking forward to that. I'm also looking forward to being perhaps a bit of support to them as well, because they're under pressure. They might find it better if they can talk to me as well. I have got loads of life experience, so I'm hoping that would help them as well (Int. 1).

In regards to help with study issues once again Louise saw that the relationship would benefit her by being able to reflect on what she had previously learnt. Charlotte hoped that the developing relationship would help keep her on track with her study. She commented "They [her peer coach] might be able to just centre me, ground me - say, look hey, don't panic, that sort of thing as well. Because you do have these like hissy fits don't you? Well I do" (Charlotte, Int. 1).

As with Laura and Chelsea, Louise and Charlotte hoped that working with their peer coach would have an impact on their teaching practice, particularly in challenging situations. Louise said "Learning different techniques when dealing with situations. Or learning how to not be maybe quite so harsh in some things" (Int. 1).

Charlotte could too see benefits to be gained here. She commented:

To be able to talk to somebody who's that much further along and to help me with strategies when I come across something I'm not sure about. Because as you know with children, it changes daily, hourly, minute by minute. So they [peer coach] might be able to come up with strategies if I'm having trouble dealing with something, or perhaps even dealing with something with a work colleague. I'm hoping that would help as well (Int. 1).

In this comment Charlotte has identified one of the potential benefits of being in a peer coaching partnership while undertaking a field-based Initial Teacher Education programme where the challenges of balancing being an employee and a student can cause tensions. She hopes that with the support of her peer coach that she will be able to find ways to lessen these tensions.

Lucy and Cindy's Journey

Lucy and Cindy's partnership is quite different to the others in this study. Lucy is a 'mature' student with teenage children. She lives rurally and is employed by her early childhood education practicum setting. Lucy is in her second year of tertiary study on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE). Cindy had entered the degree programme straight from school. This is a big year for Cindy as she has been flatting and has been struggling to find a flat where she is supported in her studies. She had just moved again at the start of the data collection phase of this study.

When asked about how she had found the first semester of tertiary study Cindy compared the experience to school. Like Charlotte she too described her Community of Practice group. However Cindy has experienced a different level of support from her group. She said:

There were a couple of months which were very easy compared to high school, but these last couple of months have been pretty intense. Other than that it's pretty good. It's not so good with the community of practice group but I think that's because there was just too much difference between the members or something (Int. 1).

Lucy, like Louise, had completed six months on the Diploma of Teaching (ECE) before transferring to the degree programme. This experience had coloured her view of tertiary study but she, as did Louise, was able to benefit from a lighter workload in the first semester of the programme.

Lucy's identified barriers to successful study differed from Cindy's. Lucy acknowledged that time management could be an issue for her. But unlike others when they talked about this she did not mean procrastinating but rather spending too much time on assignments. She said:

Sometimes I'd put so much effort into my research or into my obs [observations], which were all very important, but in the scheme of it it's actually just a part of it, and just learning how to balance stuff and what you need to put all the emphasis on to (Int. 1).

Lucy identified the challenges of being an employee and a student as well. She acknowledged that it was sometimes hard to differentiate between the two. She often felt that being an employee must come first so this made finding time to be a student difficult on occasion. However, Lucy was able to justify the benefits of being employed in an early childhood education setting while studying. She commented:

I think it's great working in a centre at the same time and being able to be paid while we're studying. I think just to be able to put everything into practice straightaway, it's not just knowledge. I find that really helpful. I know as a teacher, I definitely got better just by practicing (Int. 1).

Lucy stated that she could use her role as a student to her advantage, even while being employed at her centre.

I like being a student as well as my role of employee. I ask lots of questions and I query lots of things. Because I can use my student hat to say, well I'm learning or I need to know those things. So in a way it's quite good not just being just an employee. But because you're in training and you are a student, I use it a lot to my advantage (Int. 1).

Cindy's barriers, on the other hand, had strong links to her present flatting situation, for which she was receiving support from her parents, and how different tertiary study was from secondary school. She commented:

It is a bit different from high school, not getting up every hour to change room. Just concentrating; it takes a lot more for me to concentrate because when I was at high school I was getting up every hour and having a walk, even if it was just between classes; it just freshened my mind. It made it a lot easier actually (Int. 1).

However, when Cindy was talking about the support she had accessed to overcome her perceived barriers she identified a further barrier, that of procrastination.

I've gone into learning services and they've helped me to set up a time table for my study. I'm a procrastinator; an actual procrastinator and it'll be, "No, I'll do the laundry first" or "no I'll go and do the dishes", or something like that because, another thing is I hate mess. I'm having to learn, "No I'll leave that, someone else can do that" and that's kind of hard to do (Int. 1).

Lucy found support through her colleagues at her early childhood education practicum setting. Particularly from those who were a year or two ahead of her in their own tertiary study. She quickly identified this support as a form of peer coaching. She said:

I found the support in my centre was really great. That was a big thing for me actually, having the support of other students in my centre also coming along with other students as study buddies. I think that's what made the difference for me, being able to talk to other people in my centre that were in Tech [Wintec] a year ahead of me (Int. 1).

It was apparent from the interview that Cindy was concerned about her study and whether she would pass or not. She had already identified this concern as a potential future barrier and it seemed that this was playing heavily on her mind.

The worst thing I'm worrying about is whether I actually pass this year. I am trying my best, but there's only so much I can do myself. I'm worried if I don't what's going to happen. I've pretty much got my heart set on teaching and that's why my parents are doing so much to help me (Int. 1).

Through being involved in a peer coaching partnership Cindy was hoping that this fear of not succeeding on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) would be eased. She saw the relationship as a 'first port of call' when she needed help. Cindy had identified that she found it difficult to ask for help from those in a power position because of an incident at primary school so she saw her peer coaching partner as potentially someone who could fill this gap.

Just having someone there to talk to; someone that I can go to for help before I have to go to the higher stages of getting help, especially when it's something very simple as to what does this question mean? Because, yeah, going to my tutors all the time; it could become a bit over the top for them as well as myself (Int. 1).

Both Lucy and Cindy could see benefits attached to being part of a peer coaching arrangement. For Lucy, like Louise, she was hoping to be able to reflect back on her previous year of study and to be able to share this knowledge with her partner. Lucy related this to own experience as a student. She said "As a student I feel like I learn by talking to others. And so I often ask other people for help, so therefore it's good to be available to other people to actually help them" (Int. 1). Lucy saw her role as a peer coach as one of encouragement. Because she had already been where her partner currently was she thought that she would be able to empathise with them and through this provide extra support. For Cindy, being part of a peer coaching relationship again came back to having someone to go to to ask the "simple questions" (Cindy, Int. 1). She saw this relationship as one that would complement the already existing support networks she had such as her family, classmates and her mentor.⁶

Liz and Carol's journey

Liz and Carol have a lot in common. They are both 'mature' students with young families. Both are married and both of their husbands run their own businesses. Liz and Carol are both employed as Education Support Workers (ESW) providing one on one support and education to children with special needs within early childhood education settings. Liz lives rurally and volunteers at her local preschool, whilst Carol lives and works locally. Liz is in her second year of study on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) and Carol is in her first.

As Liz and Carol have such similar lives it wasn't surprising that they identified the same barriers at the beginning of their study, and both were relishing the challenge. Both women had to organise a household as well as fit in

⁶ Each student on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) is supported by a Mentor. The mentor is a qualified early childhood teacher who works at the students' practicum setting and they provide support and guidance to the student. This is an unpaid position.

time for assignments, which when they came all seemed to come at once. When describing tertiary study both Liz and Carol felt like they were on a new journey.

Liz said:

I think too maybe just the fact that everything was so new that you hadn't gained those organisational skills yourself, to get organised and know what to start on first. So it was a combination of a heavy workload and actually walking through it completely blind. That's what I think because I didn't have any clue (Int. 1).

Carol shared this belief:

It's been really good, it's been challenging; you know getting organised, with obviously family and all the other bits and pieces that you've got to organise to get into the whole study thing. But I found it relatively easy 'cause I just felt that if you just kept being there and kept listening and kept asking questions, you soon got any questions answered that you needed to answer. I'm finding it really supportive; I really enjoy the fact that the tutors are really, really supportive and I like the fact that you're working in your COP [Community of Practice] groups and with all your friends (Int. 1).

From Carol's comment I wondered if she had actually needed to access any support services so I asked her if she ever needed to use specific coping strategies. With her typical humour she responded:

Oh, yeah I've had moments where I got a little bit stressed. I'm a bit kind of irky on a couple of assignments and I'm kind of like, "Ahhhhhrrr". ' Well, you've just gotta get on and do it. So when those little stress moments happen its like, "Okay, hang on; whose fault is it? It's only my own. What am I gonna do about it? How can I fix it? Get on with it, sort it out" (Int. 1).

Liz's strength of character and determination was particularly evident when she had a personal crisis during her first year of study.

I was here four weeks and mum got diagnosed with terminal cancer. She passed away in September. But I made the call to carry on because I said; no I needed something to keep my mind off it. I probably just kept my sanity through a lot of it. Individually you've just got to make that call and ask for help (Int. 1).

Throughout this difficult period Liz sought support when she needed it. She kept in regular contact with her Lecturers and because of the strong relationships she had already developed in her few short weeks at Wintec she got through. Many other students wouldn't have made it. It is these relationships that appear to be an important factor in successful study. Many of the participants commented that without their friends they would not have got through their first year. Carol

expanded on this when talking about the importance of outside influences on successful study:

Faith; I'm a very avid, loyal Christian belief. We go to Destiny Church, so we're very strong. We've got a large group of friends. I've got a number of people within that that have also done study. One is studying her Master's and then also another friend whose done hers through Wintec. And so, just being able to bounce ideas off them (Int. 1).

The importance of these relationships for Carol raises the question of whether a peer coach can be someone who is in a field or career different to your own.

It is evident that Liz and Carol already have well established support networks and are organised and focussed women. Because of this I wondered what each of them thought that they would get out of being in a peer coaching partnership. Liz said that she wanted to do it to be able to give something back:

Well I'm the kind of person that just likes to share knowledge. So I kind of think if you know something, the more people that you share it with the better that you are. So that's my attitude to life anyway. For me it's just supporting others. Hopefully it might strengthen my learning if I can talk through issues or make pointers to other people. Then it kind of gives me an idea of how far I've come. But yeah, for me it's just more a chance to give back I guess (Int. 1).

Liz could see increased communication skills as a benefit of being in a peer coaching partnership. She identified the extent to which early childhood professionals work with adults, and hoped that through peer coaching she would be able to learn new and better ways to communicate with adults.

Carol had a different reason for wanting to engage in a peer coaching relationship. She said:

At the beginning of the year I was thinking, "I need to find a second year, I need to find a second year", and that's what I'd been thinking, "I need to find someone who's a second year so I can pick her brains" (Int. 1).

Finally, Carol and Liz both thought that being part of a peer coaching partnership was like being offered an extra benefit for them to be able to achieve at the high levels they had set for themselves. Carol summed it up nicely when she commented:

I think it just gives another kind of experience to the whole thing. It's another COP group is the way I see it. So it's just another added, extra bonus that you can pick brains! It sounds like I'm greedy but 'pick your brains' (Int. 1).

Summary

At the outset of their peer coaching journeys all of the participants were looking forward to being part of the research. They all assumed that being involved in a peer coaching relationship would be beneficial to them, personally and professionally. The 'beginnings' chapter has identified that the participants in this study are all very different people and have had different experiences during their tertiary study. Each peer coaching partnership is therefore unique and the outcomes at the end of the study will be different for each relationship.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PEER COACHING JOURNEYS - THE CONCLUSION

This chapter investigates the conclusion of the peer coaching journeys as the participants tell their stories of what the process has been like for them. Through these stories the success (or not) of the partnerships will be identified as the participants discuss the benefits they have personally experienced from being involved in a peer coaching relationship. We start with Laura and Chelsea.

Laura and Chelsea

The peer coaching process didn't start well for Laura and Chelsea. Laura was unable to attend the workshop so didn't have an opportunity to practice the peer coaching skills with Chelsea at the beginning of the relationship. At the workshop Chelsea joined in with another pair to practice the skills but this was not ideal and although the others tried to include Chelsea their main focus was on establishing their own peer coaching partnership. I asked Laura and Chelsea how the process had been for them. Laura said:

It's been good; we've been emailing each other every now and then and that, just touching base, seeing how things are going. It's good to hear she went to the Marae⁷ and that, so she told me how good it was, and to expect that would be heaps of fun, which was good 'cause I was so nervous (Int. 2).

Laura had not stayed on a Marae before and Chelsea's previous experience of this was something that she found really useful. Of the process Laura continued "It was good to get to know someone else as well from year one and then just to help them out when they needed it, and just to see what was going on" (Int. 2).

When Chelsea reflected on the peer coaching process she focused more on the way it was designed and the support given by me as facilitator. She said "I have found the process clear and easy to understand. The Peer coaching has

⁷ All students on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) stay on a Marae. A Marae is the cultural and spiritual home of Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. While attending the Marae stay students are exploring tikanga (Māori culture and customs) and learning te reo Māori (the Māori Language).

been set up great, and there was always contact made to keep us all on track and up to date with what is happening” (Int. 2).

Laura and Chelsea had gained different things from the process. For Chelsea it had been more about the relationship she built with me than with her peer coach, which she didn’t see as successful. However, when asked if any skills that were taught in the workshop had been beneficial Chelsea said:

When we did get in contact my partner asked me some good reflective questions which made me think about things more in depth. Having good communication would be the key to making a good peer coaching team (Int. 2).

Laura too felt that the reflective questioning had been a good skill to learn. She commented “We reflected on things. I was just encouraging her saying, “Keep going” you know, “don't give up”, cause she did have problems with it [study]; just to help her out” (Int. 2).

Laura commented on what she thought was least helpful skill that was taught in the workshop. This was goal setting, because she thought they didn’t use this skill. However she commented:

We didn't really set a goal but we kind of had within ourselves, I think, goals to set. I really set myself to really enjoy the Marae cause that's so out of my comfort zone. Mine was that and I think her one was to keep going and keep trying I think (Int. 2).

This comment shows that Laura did in fact have a goal which Chelsea was able to help her with and that was to prepare for the Marae stay. Laura appeared to set a further goal for herself in her relationship with Chelsea and that was to encourage her to keep going.

Laura and Chelsea expressed similar benefits from being involved in their peer coaching partnership. They both felt they had someone extra to talk to and that this provided some additional support. Laura reflected on the fact that they were both young students and how a peer coaching relationship with someone similar could produce good results.

I think it was good to see that someone else is going through the same things I kind of went through, because we’re both young; it’s just like a lot harder for us. I

enjoyed being able to talk to her through emails and I was able to touch base, just to see how things were going; so that was good (Int. 2).

However, from Chelsea's comment it was becoming clear that she didn't get as much out of the relationship as it appeared Laura had. Of the benefits Chelsea said "Someone to talk to, similar experiences, and advice, sometimes" (Int. 2).

The fact that Laura was unable to attend the workshop obviously had a big impact on the ability on Chelsea's part to form a trusting relationship. When the pair did make contact it was not always a satisfying experience for Chelsea. She said:

At the start of this peer coaching programme I did not get to meet with my partner which I feel made the relationship of peer coaching harder for me. From what I discovered, it seemed both myself and my partner had crazy lives and found it hard to make contact. Things did not work out as planned (Int. 2).

Chelsea went on to further elaborate how not meeting up at the workshop had impacted on her and Laura's relationship. She said "At the start not meeting my partner, also made things feel a little weird when contact was finally made it felt like I was talking to someone random or a stranger over the internet" (Int. 2).

When designing this study I intentionally invited participation from students who attended Wintec on the same days⁸ to hopefully give the participants a common day on which to find time to meet. Laura and Chelsea did not meet, either formally or informally, with each other at all during the 6 months of data collection. I asked Laura why she thought this was the case.

I think our work schedules and everything and all the assignments 'cause they were [due] at different times. It just got a lot harder, 'cause she had all these assignments due and I'd just finished a couple and so I think it was quite hard to get together even though it was a way to communicate, and that, and when we were able to get to a computer. But no it was good (Int. 2).

So, Laura felt that even though they didn't have any face to face contact that their communication through emails and Moodle was still beneficial. Chelsea, on the other hand, had a different view of this. She said "Me and my peer coaching

⁸ Students on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) attend classes for 1 evening and 1 day per week so this means that there are only a few groups of students on campus at the same time.

partner never meet up, only emailed a few times which was really irregular” (Int. 2).

Even though Laura and Chelsea did not develop a strong relationship through the peer coaching process they both had similar views as to what attributes were needed by peer coaches to ensure that the partnerships were a success. Both highlighted the need for good communication skills and regular contact. Chelsea noted that the opportunity at the beginning to meet face to face and begin to develop a relationship was extremely important – “Meeting in person at the start to develop the peer coaching relationship” (Chelsea, Int. 2). They both agreed that having some form of training before embarking on a peer coaching relationship is beneficial. Laura said:

Yeah, yeah definitely important, just to be able to touch base with each other and talk to each other, and kind of break the ice and just get to know each other and that so that they can keep talking. Yeah, I definitely think that workshop’s important; even though I didn’t go (Int. 2).

When asked if she thought that a peer coaching relationship would be beneficial for all tertiary students Chelsea had mixed views. She could see the benefits but because of her experience she could see the disadvantages and frustrations as well. Laura said that all tertiary students would benefit from this form of support. She commented:

I think so yeah, I think we would be able to give them a little bit of, more *oomph* to keep doing it because they’d be receiving encouragement from each other; not only in the class but from someone that’s either been there or they’re encouraging someone whose - just started. I definitely think it’s good to help someone out, and ‘cause it is hard; it’s not easy at all (Int. 2).

So would Laura and Chelsea continue to have a peer coaching relationship with each other? Again their views differed. Laura could see the relationship continuing. She said:

Yeah. Keep talking to her and that, ‘cause I wanna see her pass; I do feel like, ‘Mm, get her to pass’ you know, cause that could be another teenager that does that and I’m like, “Yay, I won’t be the only one” (Int. 2).

Chelsea couldn’t see the relationship progressing any further. The experience was obviously a disappointing one for her and she again referred to not meeting

at the initial workshop to being the catalyst for this. She commented “I do not think we will. As we haven’t really developed a peer coaching relationship from the start, I think due to circumstances of not being introduced in person at that first meeting” (Int. 2).

It is interesting that Chelsea and Laura had different views about their peer coaching partnership. Laura could see a future for this relationship; however Chelsea assumed that it would not continue. They appeared to have gained different things from the partnership. Laura’s ambition of ‘giving something back’ and sharing knowledge, in her view, was met. The support that Chelsea so desperately wanted, though, seemed to not be forthcoming enough for her.

Louise and Charlotte

Louise and Charlotte had a completely different experience to Laura and Chelsea. These two women absolutely embraced the peer coaching concept and gave it their all. Louise describes the experience “I found it really awesome and really beneficial to me, as well as, I think for *Charlotte*” (Int. 2).

Louise had embarked on this journey expecting that she would be the main coach. She thought that as a year two student she would have a lot to give to Charlotte and would be able to share the knowledge she gained over her first year of study. She was surprised to find that it was a two way process. She said “Yeah, it was really a two way thing. I thought it would be more of a one way thing but it wasn't” (Int. 2). This demonstrates the reciprocity of the peer coaching partnership.

Interestingly, at the beginning of the peer coaching process Charlotte also thought that it would be more about Louise supporting her. In her initial interview Charlotte did identify that she hoped that she would be able to provide some support to Louise, but because she was a year one student she thought this may be limited. Charlotte noted however that she had been able to support

Louise during the process. When asked how being in a peer coaching partnership had been for her Charlotte said “Great. Yeah my partner’s great. We have so much in common and we support each other actually. I sort of helped her along as well which has been good, she’s been absolutely great; I loved it” (Int. 2).

Louise and Charlotte found the same skill taught and practiced in the workshop to be the most beneficial. They agreed that active listening had been really helpful. Of this skill Charlotte commented:

Active listening was good; to actually sort of sit back and wait, you know cause it’s very tempting sometimes just to step in; you know like, but no to actually listen to what people are saying is very interesting. I’ve actually used that at work as well; sit back and listen to them (Int. 2).

Charlotte identified that she had used this skill in other relationships aside from the peer coaching partnership. She stated above that she has used it at work with her work colleagues; she found that she was using this skill at home with her family too.

Louise and Charlotte experienced similar benefits from having a peer coach. Support in times of stress was definitely the common denominator in their relationship. When reflecting on the benefits of this relationship Louise said:

For me, it’s benefitted me in just reminding me that you’re not the only one, and you know everyone’s getting fed up or everyone’s stressed, and everyone’s got bigger things going on outside of Tech [Wintec]. It’s kind of nice to know that someone else is dealing with the same stuff as you, definitely (Int. 2).

Charlotte echoed these sentiments when she said:

Benefits would be support, having someone there if you need them, talking to someone that’s been through it; especially if you just think, “Oh I’ll never really do this” and that shifts it into perspective for you. Someone that knows the stress levels you’re going through, if you talk to other people that aren’t doing this course they go, “Oh yeah, you’ll be alright”, but talking to someone that’s already been through and knows our stress levels, knows how you’re feeling; I thought was very helpful (Int. 2).

As with any relationship Louise and Charlotte did encounter the occasional barrier which prevented them meeting up and staying in contact with each other. Charlotte defined this barrier as ‘life’. She said:

Probably just life sometimes. *Louise* and I've arranged to meet and something's happened at her end or something's happened at my end; and it's just possibly life really, and other commitments, but other than that I haven't had any hurdles (Int. 2).

However, Charlotte and Louise did find strategies to overcome this. They made good use of the fact that they were at Wintec on the same day and regularly met up in the hour between class when Charlotte had finished for the day and Louise was about to start. In addition they regularly sent text messages to each other and stayed in touch with phone calls.

Louise and I met here on Wednesdays often because I'd finish and she'd have that hour before she did her evening class, so we'd meet here at the hub, or we texted. We often texted each other just really to touch base; see if we're okay, and phone calls as well, we used (Int. 2).

Having the time commitment shown by Louise and Charlotte is a key factor in maintaining a successful peer coaching relationship. By not having the ability to meet, as shown in Laura and Chelsea's story, the trust needed in the relationship never fully develops and the partnership does not grow.

It appears from the success of Louise and Charlotte's relationship that having some things in common with your partner is a key component. Having these similarities and commonalities meant that from the start Louise and Charlotte had something to talk about. Louise commented "I guess for *Charlotte* and I, we were quite similar, so it was really easy to be really open and communicate really easily with her about everything; not just about tech" (Int. 2).

Although Laura and Chelsea also had things in common, such as coming to tertiary straight from secondary school and still living at home, their relationship did not develop like Louise and Charlotte's. This highlights, once again, the importance of having the time to get to know one another, such as the workshop which was provided for the participants at the beginning of this study.

The factors important in maintaining a peer coaching relationship identified by Louise and Charlotte, such as effective communication and trust, are identified by the literature as being key elements of such partnerships (Robertson, 2005; Zwart et al., 2009; Lu, 2010). Moreover, Charlotte included consideration in her list of important factors. She said "... yeah consideration; I think you just need that, consideration, respect and communication" (Int. 2).

Charlotte went on to say that in her view it was important that the people involved in a peer coaching partnership wanted to do it. She talked about the fact that sometimes, as with any relationship, to make a peer coaching partnership work you had to give more than you received. She commented "You know if you haven't heard from that person, pick up the phone yourself, and there's a certain amount of commitment needed for that and I don't think you get that unless you want to do it" (Int. 2).

It is this time commitment that has been identified by the literature as being one of the largest barriers to maintaining a successful peer coaching partnership (Donegan et al., 2000; Robertson, 2005). It would appear, therefore, that the need for peer coaches to make a time commitment to the partnership is crucial.

When asked if she believed if a peer coaching partnership would be beneficial for all tertiary students Charlotte said:

It would be nice for it to be offered. I don't think everyone will take it up. I can think of people in our stream that wouldn't take it up even if they did like working with other people; I just think the way they are they wouldn't let somebody else in. But I think it should be on offer because there are also a lot in there that would like and benefit from this sort of thing (Int. 2).

If a peer coaching system was to be offered, according to Charlotte, it would be essential that it be voluntary for it to work. Louise, on the other hand, could see benefits for all tertiary students if the relationships were well thought out and a strong support system was maintained by the facilitator.

Louise and Charlotte have built a strong and solid relationship through being involved in a peer coaching partnership, one which would have never come about if they hadn't been offered this opportunity. They both think that they will continue the relationship throughout the remainder of their study and perhaps beyond.

Lucy and Cindy

As already identified Lucy and Cindy were quite a different pairing from the other partnerships in this study. Lucy had children of her own who were a similar age to Cindy so there was a danger that this relationship could fall into almost that of mother and daughter. At the workshop Lucy and Cindy talked quietly to each other. They finished the tasks well before the other pairs and didn't appear to have much in common to talk about after they had finished doing what I had asked them to do. However Lucy did find the workshop beneficial. She said:

I found when we got together at the beginning really good and really helpful and I was really excited about it. I found it's taken a little bit of effort just to try and make contact with the person I was teed up with, and feel like I haven't done it justice, but the actual process has been good (Int. 2).

At the beginning of the relationship Lucy had a period of ill health for which she was hospitalised so initial contact after the workshop was made much later than most of the other pairings. Lucy identified this as being a barrier to forming a relationship with Cindy. Cindy was surprised at how much she didn't need her peer coach, which was interesting as in the initial interview she supposed that she would regularly use her coach for support. She said:

I found it really good. It's nice to know that there's someone at the other end of the phone if you need some help. I didn't need her help as much as I thought I would but it was good knowing that there's someone there, and when I do need it I can contact her (Int. 2).

This lack of regular and planned contact impacted on the relationship, just as it did on Laura and Chelsea's relationship. For Lucy and Cindy this was further impacted by where they lived. Lucy lived rurally and Cindy lived in the city. There

was a significant distance to travel if they decided that they wanted to meet up. However, in saying this, Lucy and Cindy did not take advantage of the times they were at Wintec together, as Louise and Charlotte did. Because of this lack of contact Lucy said “We didn't do it enough; we didn't form a relationship I guess” (Int. 2).

To combat this Lucy and Cindy did try to utilise the Moodle forum and emails to stay in touch but this didn't work well for them either. This was because of the lack of instant response from emailing each other or sending messages through the online forum. Lucy admitted that she often didn't pick up when Cindy had left a message for her on Moodle until some days later.

It seems that because of these issues in the early stages of the partnership that Lucy and Cindy struggled to maintain their relationship. However when asked about the benefits of their relationship they had conflicting views. Lucy stated “There wasn't any benefit for me, just because I felt it was quite one-sided, and just... the workshop was the most beneficial thing for me” (Int. 2).

However, Lucy did place some of the blame on herself for her lack of commitment and dedication to ensuring the relationship had the opportunity to flourish. She said:

I don't feel like I gave it adequate time. I probably should have put in more effort and I didn't. I think that would have made a little bit more difference but it also needed it to be reciprocated. And face to face would have been probably easier or maybe building up a better relationship at the beginning just to get it going (Int. 2).

Cindy, on the other hand, could identify some personal benefits for her. She felt that she was supported by Lucy. This support was particularly beneficial for Cindy because she was the first in her family to study and although her family was supportive they didn't understand what it meant to be a tertiary student. She said “Being the first in my family to go through tertiary; it was helpful having someone who's actually been through it, to help” (Int. 2).

I asked Cindy if she believed that she would have been able to establish a relationship with Lucy if she had not been involved in a peer coaching relationship. Was she someone who she would approach of her own bat for support? She said:

I don't think so. I wouldn't have had the confidence to get to know *Lucy*. She's an older lady; she's not in my classes. I don't think I would have had the contact that I did with her after that initial meeting and getting to know her (Int. 2).

It seems that there were many contributing factors as to why Lucy and Cindy's peer coaching partnership didn't work. Lucy's illness played a role in a lack of initial communication but once the lines of communication had been established Lucy felt the relationship was one-sided. She wondered if part of the problem was the matching up. She commented "So maybe it was the matching up and maybe it was too much of a mother-daughter thing maybe, and maybe she was a bit threatened; I don't know" (Int. 2).

Or perhaps a simple matter of differing personalities and ideals, or maybe she was just too busy. Lucy said "And whether it's also just personality or just for that semester I found really hard and so it was just another thing" (Int. 2).

So what did Lucy and Cindy see as important factors in maintaining a successful peer coaching partnership? What personal attributes did they value? Lucy was adamant that both partners needed to be prepared to share. In addition, she thought that they need to be motivated, and that the motivation needed to be for the right reasons.

I think motivation of why they [the students] want to be in a peer coaching partnership you know, that someone may think that they can do it just to get us to help with assignment stuff or for what reason (Int. 2).

For Cindy the most important attribute for her was that coaches be non-judgmental. She valued the opportunity to ask any question and for it not to be seen as a "silly question" (Int. 2).

Lucy and Cindy differed as to whether they thought that peer coaching opportunities would be beneficial for all tertiary students. Lucy thought that the

arrangement would be good for all students as long as they could decide as to how often to use the peer coach – “I think it’s something that you can use as much or as little as you want” (Int. 2). Cindy took more of an individualistic approach. She said:

I don't think it's suitable for everybody because some people work better alone and some need that extra support of somebody who has been there. It would definitely benefit for those students who need it if you don't have that want it's not gonna help (Int. 2).

Lucy and Cindy had differing viewpoints as to whether their peer coaching partnership would continue. Lucy couldn't see a future for this relationship mainly because of time and distance. However when I asked Cindy if she thought the relationship would continue she said: “I hope so, I really do” (Cindy, Int. 2). If this is to happen I think it will need to be Cindy who makes first contact.

Liz and Carol

Liz and Carol had already had some contact with each other prior to beginning their peer coaching partnership. As they both worked as Education Support Workers they had been involved in meetings where they had both been attendees. When I decided on this pairing I didn't know that they had already met and had in some ways already developed an informal peer coaching relationship. Because of the fact that they already knew each other Liz and Carol's peer coaching partnership developed easily. Carol found the process “Easy and helpful throughout the year” (Int. 2). Liz enjoyed the fact that she had been able to support someone and ‘give back’. She said:

It's been good for me to feel that I can support somebody, and be there for her. And *Carol* has really probably self-managed anyway so it's been more, you know like I've been able to ring her up before TE [Teaching Experience] and say you know, “Good luck” and things like that. But probably, because she's sort of been busy with study, we haven't had lots of meetings as such so we've had a lot more phone calls and things, but I think it's been valuable (Int. 2).

Early on in their relationship Liz had identified Carol as what she termed “self-managing” and because of this she saw her role as more of an encourager than a supporter. She said “Well for me it was kind of nice to just track

somebody else's progress, I guess you know and encourage somebody else" (Int. 2).

Liz was happy to share her experience as a first year student with Carol, who, because of this, was able to see that she was on the right track with her study. Of their peer coaching partnership Carol said "It gave me the knowledge there was someone I could talk to if I needed it" (Int. 2). Like Cindy, Carol felt a benefit of a peer coaching partnership was being able to ask someone the simple questions. Liz too identified this availability as a 'question answerer' as part of her role as a peer coach when she commented "I'm guessing for *Carol*, maybe she felt that she did have somebody; just sometimes knowing that you've actually got somebody that you can ring up and ask a question" (Int. 2).

An added benefit that Liz identified for Carol was that because she now had a relationship with Liz, Carol had been able to establish relationships with many other year two students. Liz surmised that this may not have happened if they were not involved in the peer coaching partnership.

Another nice thing too was quite often if we're standing in a hallway waiting to go into class, *Carol* will come past and like, "Oh hi *Liz*", and so she's now met a lot of the Year 2 students and so she's got lots more people now that she knows so that's been quite nice for her (Int. 2).

Liz and Carol identified active listening and reflective conversations as the most beneficial skills taught and practiced in the workshop. Carol said "Active listening and reflective conversations, it gave me the tools to have effective conversations and be a good conversation partner" (Int. 2).

Liz gave an example of the way they had used active listening and reflective conversations in their peer coaching partnership. She commented:

like one example I might use was that *Carol* was sort of unsure about spirals⁹, so it was just probably good for her to maybe just talk about that with somebody or just get it off her shoulders that she was not sure type thing. Sometimes you just

⁹ In their first year of study students on the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) complete Cycles which are small action research projects where students plan and implement strategies to support children's learning. In year two and three they complete Spirals. Spirals have an extra step where students are required to plan for the children's emergent learning.

need to vent that with somebody, and so hopefully I allowed her to do that (Int. 2).

Both Liz and Carol are high functioning students who are very organised and capable so the barriers to maintaining a successful peer coaching partnership for them were minimal. Liz did acknowledge that they both went on Teaching Experience¹⁰ during the data collection period which interrupted the process but they were able to share their experiences. Carol stated that she thought that finding time to meet was an issue “Timing to meet and fitting in personal meetings, these soon became impromptu meetings around campus on a Wednesday” (Int. 2).

During the final interview Liz highlighted what she could see as a downfall of a peer coaching relationship. She proposed that it is essential that peer coaches pass on the correct information. She gave the example of Carol’s question around a particular book used in the year two research methods paper.

I think a downfall in peer coaching is that the person who’s already done the year needs to know not to give out certain information. But it wasn't about secret information; it was more about ‘okay what was the book for research and research methodology?’ So I said, “Well look, it’s better that I don't give you the book name and you go out and buy it. For the name of the book you need to find out what your book list is for the year in case it changes or something” (Int. 2).

Liz has identified a very important issue that needs to be addressed when setting up peer coaching partnerships for tertiary students. Sometimes what students hear through the ‘grapevine’ and pass on to each other can be misconstrued and causes frustration and discontent so it is essential that peer coaches are sure of the information they pass onto their partners.

As with the other partnerships in this study, Liz and Carol identified communication, staying in contact and putting time into the relationship as fundamental components of a successful peer coaching partnership. When talking about the time factor Carol commented that the meetings need to be

¹⁰ Teaching Experience (TE) is a period of sustained teaching practice in an early childhood setting which is not the student’s home centre. Year one students complete a three week TE, year four a four week and year three complete a five week placement.

beneficial for both partners. She said “Making the time so that both parties get something positive out of the meetings is important” (Int. 2).

Liz talked about the important of regular contact and how this was a responsibility of both members of the peer coaching partnership. She commented:

You know maybe making sure that if you hadn't heard from them after a fortnight or a month that you got in touch. So you'd need to, really either diary it in and say, “Right, once a month I need to make that point of contact” because it could easily slip away, I think (Int. 2).

Like Lucy and Cindy, Liz and Carol also had differing views as to whether all tertiary students would benefit from a peer coaching partnership. Liz was concerned that some students may use this relationship to get information about their assignments. She said:

Some people would use it as a way of getting information out of other people, or if they're a bit lazy they'd use it as a last minute, “Can you help me with this?” sort of a resource. So I don't think it would suit everyone. And the other thing is that some people probably are confident enough to go and ask tutors or student services, and things like that, for help (Int. 2).

Carol could see the benefits of a peer coaching partnership for all tertiary students, particularly because it is a relationship that is removed from their family and because of the coaches' experiences of being a student. She commented:

Yes, as all students can benefit from having someone who is able to give them guidance and ideas to help with their studies. Because the person is not an immediate family member and they understand what the person is going through as a student (Int. 2).

Liz and Carol have obviously benefited from being involved in a peer coaching partnership and they intend to continue this relationship. Carol was sure that the relationship would continue because “... we have some common things in our lives” (Int. 2). Liz thought that their relationship was strengthened through the peer coaching process and that because of this that there was no doubt that their relationship would continue.

I think we formed a relationship just for the fact that [being involved in peer coaching], yeah because we've had that you know, so absolutely. I mean I would

always make sure that I was there and if she came and approached me I would help her if I could. So yeah, definitely (Int. 2).

The things that Liz and Carol had in common will continue to bind them in some way. It is unclear whether this relationship will be maintained as a peer coaching partnership or will exist in some other form.

Summary

The narrative stories shared by the peer coaches in this study show four very different journeys. Each story told of the benefits of being involved in a peer coaching partnership as a tertiary student. The stories also highlighted potential stumbling blocks of such a relationship. Several common themes have emerged from the stories told by the peer coaching participant's narratives. Some of these themes are similar to those discussed in other literature investigating peer coaching relationships, such as the time commitment needed for peer coaching (Robertson, 2005; Donegan et al., 2000) and the importance of training (Britton & Anderson, 2010; Lu, 2010). Some new themes that are not well covered in the peer coaching literature have also surfaced; these will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: THEMES

In chapter two the process of identifying themes through narrative inquiry was described. This chapter summarises the themes that emerged from the participants narrative stories in chapters four and five. It will go on to discuss these themes and will identify the benefits (and barriers) of being involved in a peer coaching partnership for students completing a Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) in a field-based initial teacher education programme.

Time commitment

Finding the time to do anything extra in our day to day lives can be challenging for many people. For students who are completing a tertiary qualification in an initial teacher education programme this can be further heightened by study, family and employment commitments. The literature focussing on peer coaching is very clear that time is an important consideration when embarking on a peer coaching partnership (Donegan et al., 2000; Robertson, 2005). Having the time to meet has been clearly identified by the participants in this project as a barrier to forming successful relationships. Lack of time management was also identified by a high proportion (70%) of the respondents to the initial survey as being a barrier to successful study. The difficulty of juggling work schedules, study timetables and family commitments to find the time to meet up was again mentioned by the participants in the mid-way survey, some acknowledging that they hadn't found time to physically meet up at all. Time commitment was further exacerbated by the fact that the programme of study that the participants were enrolled in was field-based and that six of the eight participants were in employment for at least 3 days per week.

One of the advantages of being involved in a peer coaching partnership is that the meetings do not need to be long, also identified by Donegan et al. (2000). They suggest that 15 minute meetings can be sufficient for peer coaches to reflect on their current issues or practice. This briefness of meeting can be

further enhanced by using other means of communication. Some of the participants in this study found other ways of maintaining contact which meant that they did not need to meet face to face so often. By utilising technology two out of the four partnerships maintained what they understood to be successful peer coaching partnerships. However, these partnerships also maintained a level of contact with each other both inside and outside of Wintec (Waikato Institute of Technology), through planned and unplanned meetings. This was highlighted in Louise's reflective diary when she reflected on a planned meeting:

I went over to *Charlotte's* house today and spent a few hours going through her assignments and helping her to break things down into bite size pieces. As I am having trouble at work it was nice to get it off my chest with *Charlotte* and she helped me to come up with some new strategies to do things (31-07-10).

Later also in her journal Louise commented on an unplanned meeting:

Charlotte and I met today between classes. It was good to have a chat with her. She feels the same way I do with study at the moment. The over whelming pressure we are under was very much the talking point (27-10-10)

These journal entries highlight the importance of finding the time for peer coaches to meet with each other as well as keeping regular contact by using other methods such as text messaging and email. *Charlotte* reiterated the importance of this in the relationship between her and Louise when she said:

Louise and I met here [Wintec] on Wednesdays often because I'd finish and she'd have an hour before she did her evening class, so we'd meet here at the hub¹¹, or we texted. We often texted each other just really to touch base; see if we're okay, and phone calls as well, we used (Int. 2).

The other two partnerships relied on technology¹² to communicate and because this was the only form of communication used, their relationships didn't appear to develop on the same level. There were conflicting views from these participants as to how successful their relationships were. For example in *Laura* and *Chelsea's* case, *Chelsea* alleged that no part of the partnership had benefited

¹¹ The hub is the central meeting place for students at Wintec. It contains the library, cafeteria, prayer rooms, computers for study and a large space for relaxing.

¹² The use of technology is a further theme which has been identified in this study. It is discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

her, whereas Laura could identify what she perceived having been benefits for Chelsea:

It was good to get to know someone else as well from year one and then just to help them out when they needed it, and stuff, and just to see what was going on and that. So yeah, no it was good (Int. 2).

It is clear that having the time to be involved in a peer coaching partnership is an important consideration that participants must take into account before embarking on such a venture. When asked about what factors needed to be considered when beginning a peer coaching partnership every participant identified time as being a major consideration. If peer coaches cannot find the time to make regular contact, including face to face meetings then the peer coaching partnerships will not reach their fullest potential, or indeed, succeed at all. Carol expanded on this when she highlighted that the time set aside for meetings must be enough so that it is beneficial for both coaches. She said “Making the time [is important] so that both parties get something positive out of the meetings” (Int. 2).

The time commitment required for a successful peer coaching partnership should be highlighted early on to participants, perhaps even before they have embarked on the relationship. The time factor should then be reiterated during the initial training session, where the facilitator can support the process. It is possible that it is necessary to set times for meetings early in the development of the partnership so that there is more of a likelihood of these meetings occurring. This could also be done with the support of the facilitator at the initial training session.

Use of technology

As previously mentioned all of the participants communicated with each other during this study using various forms of technology: email, text messaging, Moodle (Wintec’s online learning management system) and phone calls. The use of technology to enhance a peer coaching partnership is not discussed fully in the literature (reviewed for this study, apart from Murphy et al. (2005) who

investigate online discussions) surrounding the topic, and is an area worth further exploration. It must be noted however, that it is clear from the above discussion that a level of face to face contact must be maintained in order to establish successful peer coaching partnerships for tertiary students.

When responding to the mid-way survey the participants identified how utilising technology had aided their developing relationships, particularly text messaging, as a way to keep in touch. The participants felt that by texting their partner they were maintaining a good level of contact. This was identified in the mid-way survey where the participants made comments such as “[texting] is easy and I tend to communicate with most people that way” and “because it [texting] is a simple way to find out if each other is free”. Charlotte also acknowledged the benefits of this form of contact in the final interview when she said “We often texted each other just really to touch base; see if we’re okay” (Int. 2).

Charlotte and Louise, in particular, maintained regular contact with each other through texting and this form of contact is often mentioned in their reflective journals where they have kept records of when (and how) they had contacted each other.

It is apparent, then, that by utilising various technologies peer coaching relationships can be enhanced and strengthened. The danger would be that this form of contact becomes the norm and the personalised contact which occurs in a face to face meeting is lost.

Increased communication skills

Having the necessary communication skills has already been identified as an important characteristic of a peer coaching partnership (Donegan et al., 2000; Robertson, 2005). However an unexpected outcome of the study was *increased* communication skills. Four of the participants reported how their communication skills had increased over the course of the study. Carol thought this to be the case for her. She indicated that her own communication skills had

increased as a result of being involved in reflective conversations with her partner. Liz felt that her communication skills had got better, particularly with other adults (mostly parents) at her early childhood education practicum setting. Murrehy (2009) also found this to be a beneficial offshoot from her study with a group of leaders (3) who were peer coaches. Two of the coaches in Murrehy's study also identified increased communication skills, predominantly with their own families.

All of the participants in this study identified good communication skills as being crucial to a successful peer coaching partnership. For example when asked what personal attributes may be needed to be a good peer coach Charlotte said:

Communication; respecting each other because you might need help instantly, but that might not be suitable for the other person so, yeah consideration; I think you just need that, consideration, respect and communication (Int. 2).

Good communication is the basis for all successful relationships, whether they are professional or personal (Buzbee-Little, 2005; Robertson, 2005; Zwart et al., 2009). Not all people, however, inherently have the necessary skills; some may need to be taught. It is possible, that through being involved in a peer coaching partnership, participant's communication skills could be developed and strengthened. This was highlighted by Carol when she described the communication skills that she thought were the most valuable that the participants had been taught in the workshop. "Active listening and reflective conversations, it gave me the tools to have effective conversations and be a good conversation partner" (Int. 2).

Facilitators of peer coaching must therefore keep this in mind when designing training programmes for the participants to ensure that the necessary skills are developed and maintained by the peer coaches.

The importance of training

All of the participants in this study highlighted the significance of learning the skills required to be a successful peer coach; this view is supported by the

literature (Lu, 2010; Zwart, et al., 2009). The research notes that the techniques (or skills) needed to be a peer coach can be taught and are easy to learn (Britton & Anderson, 2010; Lu, 2010). Lu (2010) notes that initial training for peer coaching differs in duration and content depending on the study or situation. It is not clear how much (or how little) training is needed to be an effective coach or indeed if this training should be on-going throughout the peer coaching process. For example would it be beneficial for peer coaches to undergo regular refresher workshops or is it adequate for the skills to be taught once in an initial training session?

What is clear from this study is that participants who want to engage in a peer coaching partnership must be open to learning the required techniques/skills and be prepared to put in the time needed to practice them. A workshop or training session may be able to 'teach' these techniques but it is imperative that peer coaches put a lot of time into practising them. It is with this practice that peer coaches become skilled in the necessary techniques – as it is commonly said 'practice makes perfect'.

The skills taught to the participants in the initial training session in this study were *active listening*, *reflective conversations* and *goal setting*. Participants found active listening and reflective conversations to be the most beneficial skills taught and some of them were using these skills in their personal and work lives as well. Charlotte had found this to be the case for her:

Active listening was good; to actually sort of sit back and wait, you know 'cause it's very tempting sometimes just to step in ... to actually listen to what people are saying is very interesting. I've actually used that at work as well; sit back and listen to them [work colleagues] ... I've used it at home as well actually; stop and listen and give them [her family] my full attention, yeah (Int. 2).

Active listening and reflective conversations were useful for Carol as well. She stated "Active listening and reflective conversations gave me the tools to have effective conversations and be a good conversation partner" (Int. 2).

Not only is it important that potential peer coaches are taught these skills but it is imperative that participants are given time to practice these skills with one another. By having time prior to commencing on a peer coaching partnership to learn and practice these skills together participants are already developing a relationship which will hopefully grow into one based on trust and respect, which are the fundamental principles of a successful peer coaching partnership (Jackson, 2004; Ladyshefsky, 2006; Robertson, 2005; Slater & Simmons, 2001). The role of the facilitator is significant in this process if it is to be of benefit to the participants. Training must be run in a way that participants feel comfortable and supported in developing their fledgling peer coaching partnerships (Britton & Anderson, 2010; Lu, 2010).

The worth of this training was highlighted in this study in Laura and Chelsea's story. Because Laura could not attend the workshop the initial relationship didn't develop and they never met face to face, in fact they may not have even known what each other looked like! Chelsea acknowledged just how important this initial time to get to know each other is. She said "... we haven't really developed a peer coaching relationship from the start, I think due to circumstances of not being introduced in person at that first meeting" (Int. 2). In hindsight rather than working with Laura individually to teach her the required skills it would have been useful to offer Chelsea the opportunity to come to this session as well. By having this facilitated time to work with one another Laura and Chelsea's relationship may have flourished.

Having the opportunity to get to know each other at an initial facilitated meeting is therefore essential so that participants feel confident when meeting without the facilitator. The role of the facilitator in this process is central but not only in the initial training. My participation with the peer coaches could have been more in depth and focussed. Although I maintained a presence through email contact and Moodle I think that I needed to play a greater part in the developing and on-going relationships, particularly in the case of the two partnerships who were struggling. Further enquiry into the role of the facilitator

is warranted, in particular investigating ways that 'dysfunctional' peer coaching partnerships could be further supported by their presence and whether it is important to provide continued training throughout the process.

Encouragement

Being able to provide encouragement to their partner was a theme shared by many of the participants, predominately the year two students. For three of the year two students this was one of their main motivations for being involved in the study. Liz said that it was rewarding to be able to encourage someone to do well. Laura felt that by providing encouragement to her partner she would be helping her to be successful in her study – just by having someone say “you can do it”. Being able to encourage someone to succeed links closely to the goal setting skill taught in the initial workshop prior to the commencement of the peer coaching partnerships. By using this skill the peer coaches perceived that they were able to encourage their partners towards the chosen goal. Laura thought that she had been able to do this in her relationship with Chelsea as she further reiterated her role in encouraging Chelsea to succeed. She said “I was just encouraging her saying, “Keep going” you know, “don't give up”, kind of thing, cause she did have problems with it [academic study] just to help her out and stuff” (Int. 2).

Being able to 'give' something to their partners was a theme shared by many of the participants. Knowing when to use encouragement is not a skill that every person may have so again this could be a possible personality attribute that is necessary for someone to become a successful peer coach. Encouragement is a theme which is not identified in the peer coaching literature reviewed for this research, but can be likened to support which is commonly recognised (Donegan et al, 2000; Stanley & Lapsley, 2008). In their study of student mentors (13 mentors) in a nursing programme at Curtin University of Technology in Perth, Australia, Stanley and Lapsley (2008) found that one of the key objectives for the mentors was to provide support to the new student nurses. The mentors hoped that this support would reduce the stress levels associated with beginning

tertiary study. Many of their respondents (beginning student nurses) noted that the support given to them by the student mentors had a direct impact on the reduction of this stress and enabled the new students to continue on the programme.

By providing encouragement to their peer coaching partners the successful peer coaches in this study were also supporting their partners to achieve their shared goal of becoming qualified early childhood education teachers. It was noted by participants, however, that this support and encouragement was not always a two way street.

'Give and take' - the importance of reciprocity

Reciprocity is a crucial part of a peer coaching partnership and needs to be sustained if the relationship is to flourish (Robertson, 2005). Both partners need to sometimes be the coach and sometimes be coached. That is why, for this study, the participants were all taught the peer coaching skills (active listening, reflective conversations and goal setting) so that they would be able to act in both roles when needed. However, an interesting theme that has surfaced in this study, which is not identified in other peer coaching studies (reviewed for this research), is the value of acknowledging 'give and take'. Two participants identified that to receive the most benefit from a peer coaching partnership peer coaches, in some situations, needed to be prepared to give more than they take. Some relationships can seem one sided, but as Liz pointed out, if you are prepared to keep up the communication with your partner, even though you seem to always be the one to make contact, you will get some benefit out of it. For those participants that identified that they wanted to be part of a peer coaching partnership so that they could 'give something back' then it would appear that this suggestion would be acceptable. Lucy, however, who had stated that she had wanted to be part of the study to give something back, did not perceive the possible benefits of give and take. She said of her relationship with Cindy "There wasn't any benefit for me, just because I felt it was quite one-sided" (Int. 2).

On the other hand if participants were involved because they wanted support from a more experienced peer, which was Cindy's initial reason to be part of the study, then, if they were to be the ones always making contact, they could feel as if they were being a nuisance to their partner. The interesting thing in this relationship is that both Lucy and Cindy identified that they were responsible for initiating most of the contact; however I think that the systems that they each used did not suit the other partner. For example, Cindy would send messages through Moodle which Lucy would not pick up until sometime later and by that stage felt it was too late to respond. This communication misunderstanding may have contributed to the breakdown of this particular partnership.

Peer coaching partnerships that appear to have more give on one partner's side face the very real possibility of becoming more of a mentor/mentee relationship, unlike the model chosen for this study which is based on reciprocal relationship between the coaching partners (Robertson, 2005). The successful pairings of Liz and Carol and Louise and Charlotte highlight the importance of reciprocity. As peer coaches these participants took turns at being the coach and being coached depending on the situation or relevant issue. There are many definitions given in the literature as to what a coach or a mentor may look like and as identified in the initial literature review for this study these definitions are often blurred and unclear (Cox, 2003; Fletcher, 2007; Laird, 2008). This highlights the importance of finding a definition of coaching or mentoring that fits the particular aim of the study. It may be the case, that current definitions of coaching (and mentoring), may form only the basis and a specific definition should be developed for each situation or study depending on the desired outcome.

Being able to ask the 'silly' questions

Three of the participants in this study identified having someone whom they could go to to ask what they perceived as being 'silly questions' as a benefit

of being involved in a peer coaching partnership. Although this particular theme is not identified in the peer coaching literature there is mention of the importance of non-evaluative feedback and open communication (Munson, 1998; Showers & Joyce, 1996). The acknowledgement of the significance of these aspects of peer coaching clearly highlights that for some tertiary students a peer coaching partnership where they feel valued and safe could provide the required support to enable them to complete the qualification necessary to work in their chosen field.

In this study Cindy, in particular, hoped this would be of benefit to her. She identified that tertiary students do not always feel comfortable asking a question in class for varying reasons, such as being too shy or not wanting to look stupid in front of their cohort (or in fact be labelled by their Lecturers). So for Cindy she hoped that she would be able to approach Lucy to ask these questions without repercussion or being judged. Even though their relationship had not developed into a successful peer coaching partnership Cindy did think that on the rare occasions that they did actually make contact that she was not judged and could ask any question she liked. She said "... [there was] no judgment from anything; any question, it's not a silly question" (Int. 2).

Liz also recognised the importance of having someone that was available to answer questions. Of her relationship with Carol she said "I'm guessing for *Carol*, maybe she felt that she did have somebody; just sometimes knowing that you've actually got somebody that you can ring up and ask a question [is worthwhile]" (Int. 2).

Carol also identified that this was an important part of their peer coaching partnership. She said "Having someone to talk too – to ask simple questions; I was able to ask her anything" (Int. 2). Having the confidence to ask your peer coaching partner anything without being judged or thought of as 'silly' again highlights the necessity that successful peer coaching partnerships are based on mutual trust and respect (Robertson 2005; Slater & Simmons 2001). This also shows that it is essential that the relationships are reciprocal, where

communication is open, and participants can engage in effective dialogue with one another in what they consider to be a safe and collaborative environment (Buzbee-Little, 2005).

The importance of pairings and personal attributes

In this study the pairings were made by the researcher prior to the participants meeting each other. As I already knew the students well I felt well equipped to make these selections. For facilitators of peer coaching partnerships who do not know the participants this would obviously present more of a challenge. It is not addressed in the peer coaching literature reviewed in this study as to whether it is better that peer coaches are matched with their partner by someone who knows them well, if random selection is the way to go or if participants should choose their partners for successful partnerships to occur.

In this study some of the participants highlighted the significance of carefully selecting peer coaching partnerships. Charlotte expressed this in her final interview when she said:

I don't know how you did it, but how you paired *Louise* and I up was just amazing because we're so alike; it's just, you know, that's possibly why we have a really good sort of relationship because you knew that we'd be good for each other (Int. 2).

Carol shared this idea when she commented about her pairing with Liz. When asked if she thought it was a good initiative for peer coaches to be matched up by someone who knew them well she said "Yes, as we have some common things in our lives" (Int. 2). Only a facilitator, who knew the participants, or at least some of their background, would be able to make such pairings.

Not everyone has the ability, or right motivation, to be a good peer coach, and this became evident for the sample of participants in this study. All the participants thought that some crucial personal attributes are needed to be worthwhile in this sort of partnership. Five of the participants suggested that it is

important for a peer coach to 'want to do it' and that they have to be committed to the relationship. Charlotte highlighted this when she said "... there's a certain amount of commitment needed for it and I don't think you get that unless you want to do it" (Int. 2).

Liz agreed that this personal attribute could be needed for peer coaches and also mentioned that she thought that to be a successful peer coach people need to be 'self-managing'. Of the participants involved in this study the most successful peer coaches were those who were organised and managed their time well, in both their personal and professional lives.

Another personal attribute that was mentioned by a number of the participants was 'wanting to learn'. In her initial interview Lucy noted that one of her main motivations for being involved in the study was because "As a student I feel like I learn by talking to others" (Int. 1). Liz shared this motivation when she said "...hopefully it might strengthen my learning if I can talk through [challenges] or give pointers to other people" (Int. 1).

As it must be the goal of tertiary students to commit to learn (life-long learning) then this motivation would be a driver in a successful peer coaching partnership. Motivation, though, can be for the wrong reasons. Liz was particularly worried about this. She thought that the motivations of some students could be to 'get the answers' and reflected that this would be the role of a peer tutor not a peer coach [although peer tutors shouldn't be providing students that they are tutoring with the answers either!]. She was very careful in her relationship with Carol that she did not provide Carol with the 'answers' when she was struggling with her course work. Instead Liz presented her peer coaching partner with some strategies which she hoped would enable her to find the 'answers' out for herself. This concern can be linked back to the worth of training for peer coaches (Britton & Anderson, 2010; Lu 2010). Through this initial (and as previously suggested on-going) training facilitators of peer coaching partnerships would be able to ascertain the participants motivation and would then be able to provide further guidance in this area. This early

intervention by the facilitator would then ensure that peer coaches are supported in their involvement in the peer coaching arrangement for the right reasons.

Summary

This chapter has identified and discussed several common themes:

- Time commitment
- Use of Technology
- Increased communication skills
- The importance of training
- Encouragement
- 'Give and take' – the importance of reciprocity
- Being able to ask the silly questions
- The importance of pairings and personal attributes

These common themes have identified the benefits of being involved in a peer coaching partnership and also identified some barriers to maintaining the relationship. Some of these themes have been well covered in the peer coaching literature, such as time commitment (Donegan et al., 2000; Robertson, 2005), trust and respect (Jackson, 2004; Slater & Simmons, 2001), support (Stanley & Lapsley, 2008), and training (Britton & Anderson, 2010; Lu, 2010). However there are some premises from this study which differ from or are not discussed in the literature. The following chapter will comment on the new knowledge that has been generated from this study and the implications for further research into the benefits of peer coaching for tertiary students.

CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

It must be the purpose of any study to gain new knowledge and insight into the field that is being researched. This study has identified some benefits (and barriers) of peer coaching for tertiary students who are involved in field-based training for an initial teacher education qualification, the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) at Wintec. The findings also indicate that there are a number of areas for possible further research.

The majority of the participants in this study were able to identify benefits of being in a peer coaching relationship as a tertiary student, both for themselves and their partners. There were, however, conflicting viewpoints from the peer coaches in two of the partnerships as to whether they personally benefited. These identified benefits included, being able to give something back, providing encouragement and support and learning from each other. These findings are well documented in the coaching literature as being consistent benefits of peer coaching (Anderson et al., 2005; Donegan et al., 2000; Swafford, 1998). This study, however, indicates that there are other benefits in being involved in a peer coaching partnership as a tertiary student. Having someone to ask the 'silly' questions was clearly a benefit for many of the participants. By having this peer coach to go to participants felt that their questions would be answered in a non-judgemental way and in a safe environment. Being able to talk to their peer coach in this way showed that many of the relationships had developed the necessary level of trust and respect needed for the partnership to continue. This trust and respect is identified in the literature (Jackson, 2004; Ladyshevsky, 2006; Slater & Simmons, 2001; Robertson, 2005) as being crucial components for successful peer coaching partnerships. This was further expanded on by the participants in this study who identified that because of this level of trust and respect from both partners they could seek advice and support without being judged or feeling threatened.

Increased communication skills were also identified by the participants as being an unexpected benefit. It is obvious that to be a successful peer coach participants must have good communication skills and be able to engage in open and effective dialogue (Robertson, 2005). These skills or attributes can be inherent or they can be taught. Four of the participants in this study noticed that their communication skills got better outside of the peer coaching partnerships. They felt that their communication skills were enhanced because of the techniques taught in the initial workshop at the beginning of the study (active listening, reflective conversations and goal setting). These participants, in particular, noted that they were able to use these increased communication skills, with beneficial outcomes, in both their employment with other adults and in their home life with their families. It is imperative, therefore, that for peer coaching to be successful potential peer coaches must undertake training to learn (or enhance) the necessary skills. As Lu (2010) notes length and content of training for peer coaching programmes differs from programme to programme. An investigation into how much training is needed and the content necessary would be interesting. The role of the facilitator also needs further investigation, as the importance and influence of this role remains unclear.

This study has also highlighted the importance of the pairings. This finding is not well documented in the coaching literature but appears to be an important factor which must be considered when facilitating peer coaching partnerships for tertiary students. For peer coaching to be truly successful in a tertiary environment the facilitator must know the participants well, or at the very least have some background knowledge in order to pair up the participants effectively. For the two coaching partnerships in this study that were the most successful, Charlotte and Louise and Liz and Carol; the participants all had a considerable number of things in common. In these two partnerships one of the significant commonalities was the participant's motivation to be involved. All four of these women were well organised and were what could be termed 'high functioning students'. They all wanted to be involved in a peer coaching partnership so that they could share their knowledge and provide support for

someone else. For some of the younger participants it seemed that one of the predominant motivations was to get help with their work and as noted by Liz, this may not prove to be the best motivation. Purposeful pairing of peer coaches by the facilitator requires more examination and could deliver some important conclusions. The purposeful pairing in this study was successful for two of the partnerships but not successful for the other two, particularly the partnership with a large age difference. Both participants in this relationship commented that this could have been a contributing factor for them not developing a strong peer coaching partnership.

Acknowledging the importance of 'give and take' has also arisen from this study. It seems that for a peer coaching partnership to be successful that participants must be aware that at times it will feel that they give more than they receive. However, if they are in the partnership for the right reasons this shouldn't become a barrier to maintaining the relationship, but it does highlight the importance of reciprocity in a peer coaching partnership. Without reciprocity the danger is that the partnership may become one of a mentor/mentee rather than a coach. As discussed earlier the definitions of mentor and coach are conflicting in the literature (Cox, 2003; Fletcher, 2007; Laird, 2008). It would seem that each study or situation needs to formulate its own definition depending on the purpose of the coaching or mentoring. Although the coaches who identified these one sided partnerships in this study all saw this as an obstacle, they thought that it could be overcome if each coach was dedicated and motivated enough to continue the partnership. I disagree with this premise. For peer coaching to truly be peer coaching then a high level of reciprocity must be maintained by both coaches or else it is not a coaching partnership.

One difficulty in maintaining a successful peer coaching partnership for tertiary students is that of the time commitment needed to sustain a peer coaching partnership. This is consistently discussed in the coaching literature (Donegan et al., 2000; Robertson, 2005). Many people struggle to fit everything they want or need to do into already busy lives. Being involved in peer coaching

could become an added stress for tertiary students. This applies in particular to students in a field-based initial teacher education programme, as they juggle family, study and employment commitments. However, if the participants have the right motivation and personal attributes (such as being organised and committed) to be a successful peer coach then, as this study shows, these partnerships can flourish and provide another avenue of support for tertiary students undertaking a field-based programme of study. The participants all agreed that peer coaching for all tertiary students could be worthwhile, as long as they wanted to be involved and had the right motives.

The use of technology was a main factor in maintaining three of the peer coaching partnerships in this study. It is clear that this is only one form of communication exchange that is necessary in maintaining a thriving peer coaching partnership. The most successful partnerships in this study were those that used technology alongside the more traditional methods of communication, such as face to face meetings, to strengthen their peer coaching relationship. The use of technology as a component of a peer coaching partnership is not widely discussed in the coaching literature reviewed and therefore more enquiry into the use of technology to sustain a peer coaching partnership is warranted. This is particularly important in the 21st century with the advanced technologies now available to the tertiary student. More and more students are digital natives (those who have grown up with computers and other forms of technology) and who come from generation 'Y'. An instant response is the norm, and is what is expected. Further research could be carried out into how the use of social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, could contribute to a successful peer coaching partnership.

It is evident that there are significant benefits for tertiary students to be involved in a peer coaching partnership, and in fact that these relationships can contribute to successful study and student retention. As noted by Zepke et al., (2005) student retention continues to be a problem for tertiary institutions nationally and internationally and is one that must be addressed. By providing

another means of support for tertiary students in a field-based initial teacher education programme, retention rates can be increased. The participants in this study all agreed that peer coaching is an effective support network for tertiary students if the right training is given, if students are involved for the right reasons and if pairings are thoughtfully made by the facilitator. There is plenty of scope for continued study in this area. A longitudinal study may be particularly useful in determining what factors remain important in maintaining peer coaching partnerships across the three or four years of initial teacher education, and if in fact the partnerships continue when the students emerge as beginning teachers. While the peer coaching outlined in this study was not a success for all the students involved, the problems have been identified. If these identified barriers are taken into account experience in this area will be beneficial to the students who choose to be involved in peer coaching partnerships. It is clear that the concept of students supporting students is underutilised in tertiary institutions and by developing and maintaining peer coaching partnerships the experience for all students who want to participate can be rich and rewarding.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Initial Survey

Peer Coaching Initial Survey

1. Please identify any barriers that you encountered during your first year of study at Wintec. Select all that apply to you.

Employment Commitments	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to Lecturers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time Management	<input type="checkbox"/>
Workload	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to Mentor	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please Specify)	<input type="text"/>

2. Please rate how much impact you believe these barriers have on successful study.

	No Impact	Not much Impact	Impacted Somewhat	Hugh Impact	N/A
Employment Commitments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to Lecturers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Workload	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to Mentor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Please identify which support you accessed to overcome the barriers selected in question one.

Lecturers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peer Tutors	<input type="checkbox"/>
Counselling	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student Learning Support	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>

Family	<input type="checkbox"/>
Class Representatives	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>

4. Please rate how effective you found this support.

	Not effective at all	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective	N/A
Lecturers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peer Tutors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Counselling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student Learning Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Class Representatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix B – Mid-way Survey

Peer Coaching Mid-way Survey

1. How often have you met with your peer coach formally to date?

- Once
- Twice
- Three times
- Four times
- More than four times

2. How often have you met with your peer coach informally to date (eg: run into each other at Wintec, phone calls etc)?

- Once
- Twice
- Three times
- Four times
- More than four times

3. Have you been corresponding with your peer coach by email?

- Yes
- No

Why/Why not?

4.

- Yes
- No

Why/Why not?

5. Have you been corresponding with your peer coach through text messaging?

- Yes
- No

Why/Why not?

6. Have you been corresponding with your peer coach by telephone?

Yes

No

Why/Why not?

7. Which method have you found to be the most beneficial way of communicating with your peer coach?

Formal meetings

Informal meetings

Email

Moodle

Text Messaging

Phone

Please explain why:

8. Which method have you found to be the lease beneficial way of communicating with your peer coach?

Formal meetings

Informal meetings

Email

Moodle

Text Messaging

Phone

Please explain why:

9.

Study

Employment issues

Personal issues

Other:

Appendix C – Initial interview questions

Initial Individual Interviews – Year One Students

1. Tell me about your first semester of study at Wintec.
2. Can you describe any barriers to completing study successfully that you personally experienced during this time?
 - a. How about barriers that you have seen other students come up against?
3. What coping strategies did you use to overcome these barriers?
 - a. What strategies have you seen other students use?
4. Can you identify support available to students at Wintec?
5. How about personal support systems?
6. Did you access any of these support systems, either personal or offered by Wintec?
 - a. If yes, what and how did you find them?
 - b. If no, why not.
7. Can you see any future barriers over the next few years of study?
8. What do you think you will do to overcome these?
9. How do you think being part of a peer coaching partnership will benefit you?
 - a. Personally;
 - b. With your study;
 - c. With your teaching practice.

Initial Group Interview – Year Two Students

1. Tell me about your first year of study at Wintec.
2. A survey of year two students identified that the largest barriers that was encountered in their first year of study was workload. Can you tell me about that?
3. The next largest impact identified was time management. Has this been an issue for you?
 - a. If yes, how have you overcome it?
4. Work commitments were also identified as a barrier to successful study. Can you expand on this?
5. Are there any other barriers that you would like to discuss?
6. Now thinking about support that second year students accessed during their first year of study, 89.5% of respondents identified friends as their biggest support. Why do you think this is?
7. Lecturers were also highlighted as a good support network. Why do you think this is?
8. Are there any other supports that you would like to discuss?
9. How do you think being part of a peer coaching partnership will benefit you?
 - a. Personally;
 - b. With your study;
 - c. With your teaching practice.

Appendix D – final interview questions

Final Interview Questions – Year one students:

1. How have you found the process?
2. What skill from the workshop have you found to be the most helpful in maintaining your peer coaching partnership (eg active listening, reflective conversations, goal setting)? Why?
3. What about the least helpful? Why?
4. Can you identify the benefits of your peer coaching partnerships over the last 6 months?
5. Can you identify any barriers that you have encountered?
6. What have you found to be the best form of communication/meeting?
7. Following is a list of common themes identified from initial interviews about the potential benefits of being in a peer coaching relationship. Have you experienced any of them? Can you tell me a bit about the experience?
 - **Relationship with someone who has already been there;**
 - **Having someone to talk too – to ask simple questions;**
 - **Boost my confidence;**
 - **Provide strategies – children, colleagues;**
 - **Share life experience;**
8. What factors do you think are important to maintaining peer coaching partnerships?
9. Do you think you will continue to have a peer coaching relationship with your partner?
10. Do you think this form of coaching would be beneficial for all tertiary students? Why/Why not?

Final Interview Questions – Year two students:

1. How have you found the process?
2. What skill from the workshop have you found to be the most helpful in maintaining your peer coaching partnership (eg active listening, reflective conversations, goal setting)? Why
3. What about the least helpful? Why?
4. Can you identify the benefits of your peer coaching partnerships over the last 6 months?
5. Can you identify any barriers that you have encountered?
6. Best form of communication/meeting?
7. Common themes identified from initial interviews:
 - **Share my knowledge;**
 - **Chance to give back;**
 - **Refreshing and reflecting;**
 - **Increased communication skills;**
 - **Can empathize;**
 - **Swap ideas.**
8. What factors do you think are important to maintaining peer coaching partnerships?
9. Do you think you will continue to have a peer coaching relationship with your partner?
10. Do you think this form of coaching would be beneficial for all tertiary students? Why/Why not?

Appendix E – Participation invitation

INITIAL LETTER OF INVITATION TO POTENTIAL RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Kia ora,

This year I am undertaking a research study for my Master of Education Thesis. I am excited to be embarking on this research as I believe the content of the study will be relevant and of interest to tertiary students and those who work in the tertiary industry.

The research project is entitled “*An Investigation into the benefits of Peer Coaching for Tertiary Students: Students supporting students.*” In this project I intend to focus on developing peer coaching relationships between year one and year two Wintec Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) students and exploring the benefits these relationships produce.

Over the last two years I have begun to wonder if these types of relationships would be beneficial for students embarking on their tertiary journey as a form of support. Although students are able to access ‘Peer Tutors’ this relationship is limited to academic support only. I have noticed a number of students withdraw from the programme who possibly would have stayed if they were able to draw support from someone who ‘had already been there’.

All of those interested are able to become involved in a peer coaching partnership however only a small group of participants will be part of the data gathering process. I intend to work with a group of eight students, four year ones and four year twos. The majority of the data collection will be carried out on an evening or day that you are already attending Wintec, before, after or between classes. It is up to each partnership to decide how often they meet and where. There will also be one workshop to attend. This will be 2 hours in length and will be held either in the weekend or evening at a time mutually agreed on by the participants and myself. Participants will also be required to keep a reflective journal over the period of the study. At the end of the project I may include a case study and would require access to your reflective journal as a data source for this. Involvement in this would be optional by invitation. This would involve one peer coaching partnership only. The time frame for data collection will be April 2010 – November 2010. At the beginning of the study all year two students will be invited to participate in an online survey. The invitation will be by email.

I am thrilled to be finally at the point where I am able to carry out this research and hope that you will share my enthusiasm. Please return the enclosed expression of interest slip indicating if you would like to accept or decline the invitation to take part in this study. Returning the slip does not commit you to being a participant. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to give me a call.

Na,

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Other contacts:

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Early Childhood Education Team Leader

Christine Coombes

Wintec

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Email: christine.coombes@wintec.ac.nz

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- Your participation in this research is voluntary;
- The information that is collected will only be used for the purpose of the research study;
- Participants will be given a pseudonym (different name) to protect their anonymity in publications resulting from this research;
- Participants will be interviewed and will be able to read their transcripts enabling them to amend or withdraw any information collected;
- At the end of the project a case study may be included and would require that access to the reflective journals of the chosen peer coaching partnership be given to the researcher;
- Extracts from the data (using pseudonyms) will be used in the thesis and associated publications such as conference proceedings, journal articles and lectures;
- An electronic copy of the thesis will become widely available, as Masters Theses are required to be lodged in the Australasian Digital Thesis (ADT) database;
- Data with pseudonyms will be stored securely for five years after completion of the project then destroyed;
- You can withdraw from the study at anytime up until the completion of the data collection phase, being the 31st of December 2010.
- You can ask further questions at anytime.

If you have any concerns about the study that cannot be answered by the researcher please contact Bill Ussher from the University of Waikato, the researcher's supervisor. Phone number for queries or concerns: Bill Ussher, ph (07) 8384534 or (027) 4869169 or email bussher@waikato.ac.nz

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

I, _____ accept / decline the invitation to participate in the research project for completion of a Master's Thesis - "An Investigation into the Benefits of Peer Coaching for Tertiary Students: Students supporting Students."

Please contact me further to discuss this project.

Appendix F – Consent form

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICPATION

*“An Investigation into the benefits of a Peer Coaching Relationship for Tertiary Students:
Students supporting students”.*

I (*please print your name*) _____ have read all the information and fully understand what it means to be involved in this research project.

- I understand that my participation in this research project is voluntary and I may withdraw, totally, or partially, at any time.
- I accept that my participation will have minimal impact on my work or study and that confidentiality will be safeguarded
- I accept that information generated during this project will belong to Tracey Hooker as researcher, and will be retained securely and anonymously after the research is completed and archived for 5 years as per the *University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations 2008*.
- Accordingly, I am willing to participate in this research project and to have my interview and the focus group conversation audio recorded.

Signed _____ Date _____