

Tutoring in Canadian Adult Education Settings:

A Program Overview

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Abstract

Herein the nature of adult learners was explored via a historical review of how tutoring systems have evolved in spite of common problems encountered in adult tutoring. Perceptions of tutoring, and tutor training programs have been examined via the experiences of Canadian tutors working in learning support centers while offering face to face and virtual learning supports. The nature of the adult learner, in contrast to tutor training, the experiences of tutors, and tutoring supports commonly offered to adult learners was examined within a Canadian context. Recent changes in learning supports offered to adults as well as advantages and advancements in tutor programs were presented and reviewed. The evolution of the tutor model was detailed in light of technologic advancements that culminate in a discussion of what areas still need to be researched and evaluated to move tutoring into the future.

Keywords: Tutoring, Adult education, Learning support

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore tutoring in an adult education setting which looks and feels quite different than it does in elementary and secondary settings. We present a historical view of tutoring and contrast this with the current widespread use of tutoring which we suggest is a relatively recent attribute within Canada; especially within the Canadian college landscape. “The tutoring industry has recently received increasing attention and undergone significant growth in North America, [as] . . . the number of tutoring companies grew between 200% and 500% in major Canadian cities during the 1990s” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, p.1). Canadian colleges also responded by adding staff to meet the demands of students (Jelfs, Richardson, & Price, 2009).

Tutoring at the college level is somewhat unique, for instance the first difference often noticed is the often substantial age gap between the tutor and the tutee. Sometimes the tutor is younger than the tutee even though the tutee is typically 18 to 24 years of age (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Often tutor pairs are from differing ethnic backgrounds and they may not share the same first language (culture). Increasingly, as adult education institutions reach out to diverse student populations, the need for academic support increases. Hughes (2008) noted how important it was to know the learners in order to identify and meet their needs;

In providing learner supports, we should focus on what the learner needs, not on what we want to or are able to supply.... Therefore, we must ask questions about the learner’s readiness for learning, access to, and familiarity with the technology required, proficiency in the language of instruction, individual learning style, and educational goals, as well as about how aspects of the individual’s culture can affect learning. (p. 368)

Admittedly, our adult educational institutions depend on tutors and other academic supports to reach some of their most important goals. For example, student success and student retention are aided by quality tutoring and other supports which have grown out of the tutoring concept. Questions arise from problematic situations. We ask: How can quality tutoring be ensured? Second, how can effective tutoring, which enables students to reach their full potential, be available to all who need it? If we can describe what an effective tutoring program would look like, and then assess our progress as we move towards these criteria; can we begin to discover how we can improve tutoring in an adult education setting?

Purposefully herein the nature of adult learners is explored by describing how Canadian tutoring systems have evolved, as well as common problems encountered in adult tutoring. Some perceptions of tutoring, and tutor training programs have been examined via the experiences of tutors, learning support centers, virtual learning supports, and the next steps used to evaluate tutoring for adult learners. Although past practices are relevant to a study of tutoring programs, most of the focus was concentrated on current practices and possible changes for future consideration.

2. Methodology

This descriptive analysis was developed partly via a chronological historical review of how tutoring systems have evolved in Canada and partly via the author’s reflective accounts of specific adult tutoring experiences (narratives) over the last twenty years. While the task was

largely qualitative it did include quantitative research (Creswell, 2007) accounts as they were located and reviewed. We believed our perspectives were lacking within the Canadian context and needed to be developed to both inform and demonstrate how tutoring in Canada has evolved. We aimed to include how the perceptions of tutoring, and tutor training programs have grown and changed in learning support centers. Our review addressed the adult learner, tutor training, the experiences of tutors, and tutoring supports commonly offered to adult learners within a Canadian context.

A search of electronic sources from the database EBSCOhost through the Nipissing University library was the basis for this literature review. Descriptors for the search included “adult tutoring,” “perceptions of tutoring,” “tutor training programs,” “learning support centers,” “the adult learner,” “tutor training,” “experiences of tutors,” and “tutoring supports.” From these results, reference lists from relevant articles revealed popular scholarly authors and relevant articles and these authors and articles were then researched. The “get it” function allowed for articles to be searched outside of EBSCOhost (<http://www.ebscohost.com/>) that were not available in full-text format through EBSCOhost. Articles were chosen based on their relevance to keyword searches and publication dates. Articles spanned the years 1970-2010 to attempt to keep all results current while still providing a historical foundation. Key tutor scholars were identified and research prior to 1995 was used as background information that connected the reader to current research (Creswell, 2007). Searching within Google we discovered other recent changes in learning supports offered to adults, as well as advantages and advancements in tutor programs which were reviewed and presented herein.

Both authors have had extensive tutoring experience with adults in the larger Canadian community context and within post-secondary institutions hence the presence of an authoritative narrative (Creswell, 2007) voice surfaced periodically from within this review.

3. The Nature of Adult Learners

Over the past few decades educators have often expressed the belief that adult students differ in significant ways from their younger counterparts. Knowles (1973) explored this belief in the groundbreaking book entitled: *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*. Within this text we learn that he concluded, adult learners have more experience both inside the education system and more importantly in the world outside of the classroom (p. 46). Because adult learners have more experience, Knowles (1973) believed that a problem-centered orientation to learning should be adopted because unless the adult can see a problem and then seek his or her solution by learning new information or skills, the learning would not be effective (p. 43). Knowles (1984) criticized education, particularly higher education, because he believed the education system was producing students who do not know how to learn, only how to be taught (p. 12). Knowles also contrasted the reactive learner with the proactive learner suggesting a reactive learner listens uncritically and seeks to retain information to regurgitate on an exam (p. 17). The reactive student then has difficulty applying learning to real life situations. The proactive learner would formulate questions about information, identify data, and then test this data for reliability. Knowles further (1973) explained that traditional education encouraged reactive student behavior and so it is “progressively regressive” and behind what we know about learning (p.41).

Although it has been more than 30 years since the publication of *The Adult Learner*, many Canadian colleges today continue to encourage students to become reactive learners we believe. The curriculum is often pre-determined by provincial governments and regional community stakeholders with little opportunity for students to explore their own problems and seek personal solutions (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Many classes are lecture format and class sizes are large (Cross, 2002). As Knowles (1973) discovered, the dependency on others should decrease as we mature and our self-concept should become self-directing (p 62). Instead, many college programs continue to teach in ways that foster dependency (Bresciani, 2006, p. 6). If we consider adult learning theory and apply it to the topic of tutoring, some might consider that tutoring encourages more dependency. After all, the instructor gives the assignments and tests, should students not be expected to complete them on their own, with no support at all? There are the varied reasons why we offer academic support to adult learners including the concern that many adult learners are not successful in their studies unless this support is provided. A skilled tutor would hopefully increase student independence by encouraging the student to seek and discover their own solutions (discovery learning). The key is to support and facilitate change since,

it is generally acknowledged that adult learners are seeking some form of *change* in their lives or that *change* has provoked them to engage in learning. The lives of adults affect how, what, why and when they learn, and at the same time their lives are affected by the learning process. There is a great diversity in the nature of these changes and interactions. Some students are seeking to enhance their chances of promotion or of gaining employment or a change of career; some are seeking to broaden their minds; others feel that they have been unfairly judged by the educational system in the past, and want to prove to themselves that they are capable of academic study. They want to overcome the feeling of 'rejection' by the employment-educational system. Some students are taking up learning again after redundancy or some other personal crisis. Being an adult learner is thus inextricably linked with human *change*. (Morgan, 1995, p. 1)

Years earlier it was Morgan (1993) who noted, that many adult students often envision learning as a constantly moving ever-changing conveyor belt (metaphor) and are “too busy rolling along to worry what it is all about” (p. 54). Students memorize factual bits assuming these are important. The larger issues and the problems that are addressed in learning are discovered later in the students’ academic lives. Morgan advocated a cycle of learning which included four steps. The first was immediate concrete learning. The second caused the student reflect and to consolidate the learning. A third was personal observation when considering new implications and a fourth step was experimentation. As Morgan outlined, learning is a complex process and these steps can be facilitated and supported by tutoring and other academic supports, if these supports encourage a deep approach (Higher Order Thinking Skill – HOTS) to learning and encourage students’ understanding. Morgan suggested, study skills instruction can encourage a superficial approach to study and that is why quality academic supports encourage students to actively engage with learning materials to move deeper into the content.

In recent years, Taylor (2009) addressed some challenging issues facing post-secondary educators in 'Generation Next', those students up to the age of 27 in 2009, were "not into books" (p. 3). These students often had little motivation for academic tasks and many viewed education as a commodity to be purchased or accumulated. Taylor suggested these students were coming to college with lower academic skills than previous college students yet believed that they were entitled to good grades (p.3). Taylor further explained that too often college teaching involved a traditional lecture format which encouraged students to passively listen, as college assessment practices encouraged rote memorization and low level content (comprehension), and employers realized that college graduates lacked social skills (p. 7). In Taylor's view, most college courses assumed full time residential students with few outside responsibilities. This was not appropriate at most community colleges as students had a tendency to attend college while working at least part time and had many outside family responsibilities. Taylor (2009) therefore advocated a change in the college teaching methodologies and believed that students would benefit from active learning methodologies (progressive education), more online courses (technologic enhancements), and more collaborative relationships with faculty and students (p. 5). Taylor delved deeper into the problem and explained what the problem was with class discussion (p. 9). For example, most often just a few students participated, yet if the class had more than six students, there was not enough time in one discussion forum for everyone to meaningfully deal with class material. In Taylor's view, the instructor's job was to facilitate student success by whatever means necessary and the student's job was to learn.

Considering the views of adult learners presented, common elements emerge. Knowles (1973) and Taylor (2009) believed post secondary education needed to change significantly to properly meet the needs of adult learners. Both writers advocated active learning and collaboration. Passive listening and lecture format, it was decided, did not encourage the kind of deep learning advocated by Morgan (1993). However, post secondary institutions have had budgetary limitations and small class sizes were difficult to fund (College Student Alliance, 2006). Other ways to encourage active engaged learning must be found in order to support students. Could tutoring help educational institutions change the way they teach by providing individual support while ensuring a social, interactive means to learn?

3.1 Tutoring: A Definition

Any discussion about tutoring cannot be properly understood unless the meaning of tutoring is supplied for the reader. Hence we turn to Topping (2000) who described Tutors "as people who are not professional teachers helping and supporting the learning of others in an interactive, purposeful and systemic way" (p. 3). We learn that tutoring should be an interactive, purposeful and systemic process. Although tutees may feel that the purpose of a tutor is to help get homework completed, tutor programs today take a larger view. The tutor is able to offer explanations and root out problems that a teacher may not have time to address individually. The tutor's role is always to work toward supporting the student now while encouraging the growth of independence. While Topping's definition is straightforward, some changes were needed because tutoring has evolved. Currently there are many professional tutors working in diverse educational settings who are in fact trained teachers or possess other professional training. These individuals claim the name professional tutor or

learning specialist. What differentiates them from the professional teachers? They work in a supportive way with individuals or in very small groups. Teachers in adult education settings often work with larger classes. In addition to professional tutors, there are volunteer tutors from the community, as well as peer tutors who enjoy the personal interaction that tutoring encourages and deliver learning supports to individuals in need of support. Therefore, our refined definition states: Tutoring provides learning supports to individuals or small groups in a systemic, purposeful and interactive way. Tutors may be professionals who have specialized training, peer learners who can assist other students, or community volunteers who donate their time to facilitate learning for others.

3.2 Tutoring Systems: An Evolution

Gardiner, Nobel, Hessler, Yawn and Heron (2007) described how tutoring has evolved with early tutoring being informal and required the matching of tutor and tutee and the groups were almost always dyadic, as well as subjectively evaluated. As interest in tutoring grew, more formal systems evolved during the 1970s, as interest in behaviorism developed, educators were seeking a systematic way to tutor. Specific tutor programs were introduced with specialized training for tutors and consistent methods of evaluating tutoring effectiveness which often focused on reading or mathematics (Frey & Reigluth, 1986; Gardiner et al., 2007; Shelton, 1990). Topping (2005) addressed the trends within peer learning from 1981 to 2005 as elements originating from peer tutoring, and co-operative learning which produced peer assessments that fundamentally changed how tutoring was perceived. Interest grew in tutoring because there were both social and cognitive benefits. Students who participated as tutors, and tutees and then switched roles benefitted from the experience by building relationships with others as academic skills improved. Other studies (Dzubak, 2009; Gardner, 2007) credited tutoring programs with providing other social benefits and Opp (2002) concluded that colleges which provided peer tutors were more likely to have high completion rates.

Perceptions of tutoring continued to evolve and change as tutoring was seen as an informal arrangement which benefitted and helped the tutee to reach higher academic standards than would otherwise be possible. This arrangement was not officially evaluated and gradually this informal arrangement was carefully and systematic crafted into tutoring systems that were methodically planned and implemented. Tutoring was not always a dyad; smaller groups were sometimes tutored and these changes encouraged educators to evaluate the tutoring system formally. As more evaluation occurred other beneficial aspects of tutoring were discovered. Tutoring was revealed to provide benefits to both the tutor and tutee. These benefits were both communal and cognitive. Other studies claimed that tutoring promoted equity for disadvantaged groups, maximized student talent through social interaction, and were cost effective (Frey & Reigluth, 1986; Gardiner et al, 2007; Learning Opportunities Task Force, 2002; Shelton, 1990; Topping, 2000; Topping, 2005).

3.3 Tutor Training

Tutor training is widely discussed in the literature about adults and tutoring. Frey and Reigluth (1986) investigated a variety of tutoring programs and noted certain commonalities: practice and feedback, programmed format with hierarchical or sequential arrangements, explicit management procedures and the training of tutors in pre-determined instructional

strategies. Shelton (1990) reported on a fifteen hour tutor training program which included video clips used in classes to illustrate tutoring scenarios and how best to assist tutees. A tutor handbook, evaluations of training and teaching materials were also included in this report. Gattis and Jorgenson (2001) investigated and reported on a university two semesters training program introduced for North Carolina State's peer tutor program. Their program focused on productive tutoring techniques and video scenarios to explain various techniques. Although tutor training has been clearly described and detailed curricula articulated, little assessment and/or evaluation of the value of tutor training was provided.

3.4 The Experience of the Tutor

Tutors are in short supply in many colleges (Jelfs, Richardson, & Price, 2009). Recruiting successful tutors and retaining them are extremely challenging facets of a tutoring program (Rekkedal, & Qvist-Eriksen, 2004). For example, researchers Jung, Tryssenaar and Wilkins (2005) conducted an ethnographic study to identify learning needs of novice tutors. Their study focussed on tutors in a medical setting which used problem-based learning. Although first year tutors would have somewhat different problems and solutions compared to tutors in a college setting, many of the challenges seemed familiar. Tutors felt uncomfortable with the culture of learning especially if they had not been exposed to problem based learning in their own training. Tutors felt unsupported in their role until they had a chance to connect with their tutor guides. A tutor handbook was valuable to the novice tutors because they could quickly check out how to deal with tutoring problems and gathering with other tutors to share common experiences helped to keep the novice tutors motivated. As an outcome, it was suggested that the assembling of an anthology of tutor experiences, to make public the story-telling part of the tutor learning, was essential (Jung, Tryssenaar, & Wilkins, 2005).

4. Learning Support Centers

A trend in adult education today has been the development of learning support centres or learning assistance centers. For example, Assiniboine Community College in Brandon, Manitoba, (Canada) established a learning support centre which co-ordinated all learning supports including the previously existing peer tutor program. At this centre, called "The Learning Curve", students were offered study skills, assistive technology (which assists reading, writing and calculation, workshops to facilitate the understanding of learning strategies), drop in peer tutors to assist with learning computer software, math, health care courses such as anatomy and physiology, as well as one-on-one content specific tutoring. The Learning Curve staff has assisted faculty by presenting workshops in their classrooms to explain learning strategies and has assisted with writing tasks such as essay preparation and APA formatting. Professional tutors have been working one-on-one with some students to act as mentors and assist their tutees to become engaged successful learners.

The development at Assiniboine College is part of a larger trend building on what Sheets (2009) described as the very purpose of learning centers, to provide,

educational support in a flexible manner . . . an opportunity for students to achieve academically to their fullest potential, encouragement for students to become confident and effective learners, encouragement of an understanding of cultural

diversity and learning styles, and opportunities to work with faculty and students . . . to provide supports. (p.3)

Tutoring in many of today's adult learning environments is part of a complete academic support service. Students who wish assistance can choose from a variety of supports according to their requirements.

4.1 Perceptions of Tutoring

Some adult educational institutions consider tutoring an "extra" and less worthwhile than other aspects of educational programs causing Walsh and Zajchowski (2008) to propose the establishment of a Canadian learning specialists' association. Advocating for this association they believed that learning skills practitioners needed to establish a conceptual framework for practice. Walsh and Zajchowski (2008) also advocated for an applied research role for learning skills practitioners. They explained that many educational institutions in Canada consider cutting learning supports when budgets are reduced institutionally. Forming an association would give learning specialists a professional body to advocate for unreduced learning supports (Walsh & Zajchowski, 2008).

Often learning supports are associated with disability support providers. At Assiniboine Community College, peer tutoring is provided to any student who requests such support and who is willing to work with a student advisor and his or her instructor to facilitate improved learning outcomes. There are a maximum number of hours of tutoring provided at no cost to the student. However, a student registered with disability services, will have more hours and enhanced supports, sometimes with professional tutors, to enable success. This could be contrasted with many other colleges and universities which provide limited tutoring support and often this support is at the student's cost (eCampusAlberta, 2010, p. 11). Most post secondary institutions provide learning supports to any student who has a documented disability. Tutoring and other learning supports provide a measure of equity for students with disabilities (Learning Opportunities Task Force, 2002). Yet it has been recently observed and concluded: "Lead and Partner institutions seem somewhat unclear on funding of supports for students with disabilities; the funders and the Duty to Accommodate provision in human rights legislation clearly indicate financial responsibilities" (eCampusAlberta, 2010, p. 11).

4.2 Tutoring: A Typology

Many types of tutoring are offered to today's adult learner including private tutors, peer tutoring, and academic coaching. Private tutors are available to teach specific subjects and work one-on-one with students in many institutions. Most are familiar with the advertisements of Canadian tutoring companies which offer assessment of skills and then an individualized, "proven" program based on student need. These tutors work at their office or the student's home and are offered after school hours (Learn more about Sylvan learning today, 2009). Peer tutoring or student tutoring is offered at all levels of education. Elementary schools have recognized the potential of students teaching students and this attention has also been noted in both the secondary and post-secondary levels (Gardiner, 2007). Academic coaching is a means to reach and assist struggling students as they attempt to improve and achieve (Taylor, 2009; Undergraduate Academic Life, 2009). The coach meets with the student collaboratively on a regular basis, and develops ways for the student to work

successfully in the academic environment. Work can focus on how to study, read difficult text effectively, how to use educational documents such as course outlines or calendars as well as how to manage time.

In a similar way, learning strategists have been introduced to the post secondary system via training programs for learning strategists such as the one offered through Cambrian College in Sudbury, Ontario (Canada). In this program, candidates learn to understand disability issues and are given training to teach specific learning strategies which help students with disabilities learn (Learning Disability Support Specialist, 2009). The introduction of learning strategists and assistive technologists occurred in the province of Ontario largely as a result of the four year study conducted by the Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOTF) from 1998 to 2002. This task force, under the leadership of Dr. Bette Stephenson (past Minister of Education for Ontario) and Eva Nicholls studied supports effective for students with learning disabilities (Learning Opportunities Task Force, 2002).

4.3 Tutor Programs: Common Problems and Solutions

Rogers (2001) addressed some of the difficulties encountered in tutoring adults noting that adults can humble us as they point out our mistakes (p. 3). For example, in a small group Rogers made the mistake of spending too much time talking with the ‘good’ students and the others were purposely late for the session to allow her extra time with her favorites (Rogers, 2001, p.3). As Rogers (2001) discovered, adult students usually do not “have” to be there so if tutoring was disagreeable, they could stop coming. Rogers concluded that “the customer, not the subject, comes first . . . and the customer is the learner” (p.4). Rogers noted that there were common problems in teaching and learning such as motivating, simplifying without losing integrity and finding ways to help people learn. If these are the common problems associated with putting learners first, many can be addressed in a personal, direct way by quality mindful tutoring.

Over 25 years ago Frey & Reigluth (1986) noted five advantages of tutoring as a supplement to classroom instruction such as,

- Tutoring is cost effective.
- Tutoring offers the learner individualization of instruction.
- Tutoring encourages the active involvement of the learner.
- Tutoring allows for immediate corrective feedback.
- Tutoring allows for practice of skills as well as rapport between the tutor and tutee.

(p. 21)

These advantages addressed only some of the problems described by Rogers (2001). By individualizing instruction, we can simplify a message to the level that the learner brings to the session. By encouraging active involvement of the learner, we can discover how best to approach the learning task and establish rapport to motivate. Immediate corrective feedback also allows the correction of errors early, so that mistakes are not perpetuated as the student practices these skills. We believe good tutoring truly puts the learner first.

Tutoring can benefit any adult student at some point, whether or not that student experiences a disability (Dzubak, 2009), and one of the benefits of tutoring is “that it provides an opportunity for scaffolding” (Dzubak, 2009). Scaffolding is the term first used by Vygotsky (1978) described a process whereby a learner can move out of his current ability level to the next by acquiring skills and knowledge from a tutor. The tutor helps the tutee by providing support while the tutee needs it and then encourages the tutee to develop independence in that skill (p. 86-87). Dzubak (2009) explained that this process saved significant amounts of time, allowed for immediate support, allowed for question cues or hints by the tutor and that these functions were very hard to duplicate in a college classroom setting. The social benefits of scaffolding included increased self confidence and motivation of the learner (Dzubak, 2009). This is another reason why tutoring benefits an adult learner, especially a learner who may have returned to school needing to build confidence as well as academic ability. “Professional advice is critical in helping students meet their degree or certificate objectives Student services during the learner support phase must offer study tips, test-taking tips, and external instructional resources such as tutoring” (Floyd & Casey-Powell, 2004, p. 60), to fully enable the development of the adult college student.

4.4 Virtual Learning Support

Taylor (2009) mentioned that many students today prefer online courses as most have access to computers and the internet. “Adult learners are looking for more flexibility within learning opportunities. Distributed learning is gaining popularity because it provides learners with this flexibility – any time, in any place, and at any pace” (Alberta Education, 2010). Students may then engage in other activities in the virtual world, and some would like to engage in learning this way as well. How does this change the methods used to provide tutoring and other learning supports? Learning Centres have been described as the education provider’s “Point of Presence” with the distance learner (Sheets, 2008). In this sense, students should be able to access tutoring through their distance education site. Our challenge as educators then is to provide distance tutoring that is as effective as live tutoring. Wood (2001) investigated tutoring and computer-supported learning pointing out that learner-tutor interaction changes as a function of age (p. 290). Older students were more likely to seek the assistance of the tutor. This would lead us to conclude that adult students should benefit from virtual tutoring hence the suggestion by Krauth and Carbajal (2001) to provide online tutorials and documents to assist learners (p. 4). However, Wood (2001) also noted that the students, who need tutoring most, often do not seek it. He advocated that designs should allow the tools of learning to remain in the hands of learners and stated that computer-based tutoring environments were not designed to emulate human tutoring (p. 283). Computers are now able to give students immediate feedback. If the student answers incorrectly, he or she can not only find out that the answer is incorrect, but receive a rationale for the correct answer. (An example of this type of software is the Lippincott's Review for NCLEX-PN, Timby, 2008). Another advantage to this type of support would be that students could repeat the questions over and over, beneficial particularly for those students who have a difficulty moving information to long term memory.

Price, Richardson and Jelfs (2007) looked at face-to-face versus online tutoring. In their study,

conventional tutoring meant some face-to-face appointments, some contact by email and a few telephone conversations. This was compared to computer mediated tutoring. Computer mediated tutoring meant computer conference with webcam and some email. Those students who were using computer mediated tutoring reported a poorer tutoring experience. This study found that tutoring was a valued pastoral activity for the students involved in distance education. Tutoring was conceived of as a subjective and personal activity that allowed constructive thinking and learning together. It was suggested that the difficulty with computer mediated tutoring may be the lack of paralinguistic cues and suggested that training opportunities for computer mediated tutoring include effective online communication strategies (Price, Richardson, & Jelfs, 2007). Once the training is completed researchers such as Kondra, Huber, Michalczuk, and Woudstra (2008) endorsed the plan of establishing a value-added call centre that would benefit all learners: traditional and distributed (p. 9).

This type of tutoring support has several challenges. When distance learners ask for support for written assignments for example, they send their assignment by email. Changes must be entered on the assignment in differing colours so that the student can see what changes have been made (Word© – review function). Then an email must be written to explain the nature of the changes and corrections made. This can be very time consuming. For example, one student appointment is usually one hour in length. The feedback for distance learners' assignments will take from 1.5 to 2 hours. Often distance students do not improve in their writing at the same rate as those who receive assistance in person. When the discussion is in person, the tutor can ask questions based on non-verbal cues to gauge understanding; this is not as simple for the tutor working at a distance as messages are somewhat homogenized without non-verbal affect.

Similarly, attempting to tutor by webcam can be demanding. A struggling student often cannot get the camera to work properly, the picture is often not steady, and it is very challenging for both parties to read the non-verbal cues. The technology is imperfect but improving. Many distance courses work with online software such as Moodle or Blackboard. These computer software programs offer many features that make live discussion possible. Unfortunately they often require the student to be a proficient keyboarder and computer operator. This frequently is not the case with learners who need tutoring support.

Virtual tutoring is evolving. As we become more proficient with computers, software and effective online communications methods, virtual tutoring will become more accessible (eCampusAlberta, 2010, p. 11). For instance, Brigit software (Smart Technologies, 2008) has been used to facilitate distance tutoring. This software allows parties to see each other's desktops and speak over the webcam simultaneously. This software facilitates worthwhile sessions with students who are working with a tutor at a distance. The potential to bring learning supports to students wherever and whenever they need them is promising.

5. Evaluation and Next Steps

Tutoring systems have existed for many years. Adult learning settings employ tutors and out-of-classroom academic supports such as learning centers, academic coaches, learning strategists and assistive technologists (Learning Disability Specialist, 2009; Learning

Opportunities Task Force, 2002; Sheets, 2009). The literature has indicated that tutoring is useful to tutees (Dzubak, 2009; Gardner, 2007). Tutors benefit from monetary remuneration, consolidation of learning and increased social skills (Jung, Tryssenaar & Wilkins, 2005; Shelton, 1990). Although some tutoring programs have attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of tutoring programs, more study is needed to determine where the gaps exist. (Gattis & Jorgenson, 2001; Shelton, 1990) Certain questions need to be explored, for instance: Does tutor training help the novice tutor to adjust to the tutoring role? What supports do tutors require to do their jobs? How do tutees perceive the tutoring programs? What necessary changes would tutees suggest? How can virtual tutoring for distance students improve? As tutoring programs for adult learners move into the next decade these questions should be investigated and suggestions for further improvements implemented.

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