

The Innovation Unit Next Practice Project

# Next Practice in Communities for Learning

## RESEARCH REPORT

Domain one:

*Identifying, developing and maximising the  
skills of pupils and students to enhance  
learning*

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## 1. Summary

In what new and effective ways can pupils and students themselves learn while supporting the learning of others? This report looks at existing examples of children and young people learning from their peers. It profiles peer mentoring and peer tutoring schemes in schools in this country, and internationally, and also considers what we can draw from examples of young people learning from peers outside of school, whether formally (as in youth activities like Scouting) or through the more informal sharing of ideas, skills and resources through the internet. Key messages are presented and then more information is provided about the practice and examples that inform this research.

## 2. Key messages

The use of Peer Assisted Learning<sup>1</sup> models in formal education:

- There is an extensive literature on Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) models and methods, and a strong evidence base which suggests that these are powerful ways for children and young people to learn.
- The use of PAL models is well-established (and has been for decades) in the United States, at elementary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.
- In this country, PAL methods (originally modelled on American programmes) are used in many of England's FE and HE institutions. The common model employed here is one in which third year students tutor small groups of first year students, for the benefit of the tutee's academic and social integration.
- As a teaching strategy, PAL has advantages that one teacher described as follows: "Children are often better at explaining things to their peers – they get the right level; and often the tutees are more willing to admit what they don't know to their peers."<sup>2</sup>
- PAL practitioners, however, also emphasise that the learning experience is designed to be reciprocal. Even in the context of schools, most PAL research emphasises that when young people step into the role of 'teacher' for their peers, their depth of understanding of subject content and methods (as well as a range of other study and social skills) is greatly enhanced.

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<sup>1</sup> Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) is a shorthand term for learning models in which peers learn from and with each other, and a current term of choice in research and thinking in this area (other terms include Peer Learning, Peer-to-Peer Learning and Peer Tutoring). I use PAL to indicate a range of peer teaching and learning relationships, including those in which peers of the same age teach each other or learn together, and those in which peers of different ages teach each other or learn together (in cross-age tutoring, for example, in which older students teach young students).

<sup>2</sup> Antonia Hippelsy, a teacher who uses the Dolphin System, cited in Rob Porteous, 'ICT Peer Tutoring Pays Dividends,' *Connected: Online Magazine*, <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/ictineducation/connected/connected10/ictinpractice/peertutoring.asp>

- Despite its popularity in FE and HE institutions, PAL is only found in some emerging 'hotspots' in this country and is far from an embedded practice. Professor Keith Topping (The University of Dundee's Centre for Peer Learning) argues that PAL methods are discouraged by "the stranglehold of the national curriculum"<sup>3</sup>.
- Innovative practice in this area can be found in Scotland and Birmingham (whose Inclusion Strategy has peer learning at its core). Other initiatives worth considering are Rob Porteous's the Dolphin System (an ICT peer-to-peer teaching programme) and the online learning community and mentoring potential of Virtual-Workspace. It is also worth keeping an eye on the findings of SSAT's e-mentoring pilot programme, which uses older students as mentors to younger students.
- PAL models (and the terminology used to describe them) are many and varied. The most radical *do not* follow a strategy (popular in the United States) whereby smart students are tasked to act as surrogate teachers and help their struggling peers.<sup>4</sup> They are, rather, inclusive strategies that allow struggling students to teach, to help them develop skills of planning, communication, and the establishment and management of relationships (see, for example, the projects connected to the Birmingham Improvement Strategy).
- The clearest message from practitioners and researchers is that PAL's potential has not been realised. Despite its advantages – which include its minimal cost and, in some instances, a reduction in work load for teachers – students remain an "unutilised resource". As Martino puts it: "However ancient peer tutoring might be, many schools bypassed it when searching for effective ways to meet academic goals."<sup>5</sup>

Lessons to learn from beyond-school examples of peers learning from each other:

- Schools are still very much reliant on a hierarchical model of teaching in which the teacher is the transmitter of knowledge and the student is the passive recipient. There are, however, many alternative models at work in educational programmes that operate beyond schools, in which young people and children assume much more active and empowered roles.
- The Scouting Movement may be an obvious place to begin a search for alternative educational models which utilise peer learning – they have long been leaders in this field. But current debate within the Movement suggests that their model is outmoded, "surpassed by many youth organisations in this field"<sup>6</sup>. Though it emphasises self-education in collaboration with peers, the

<sup>3</sup> Keith Topping, 'Peer Assisted Learning for Inclusion,' *Literacy Today*, vol. 36, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Topping's attitude on this approach is as follows: "Typically, the helpers are white, female, middle-class volunteers. The tutees are very different. The reek of class-based Victorian philanthropy is hardly compatible with an inclusive philosophy. And what benefits are the tutors obtaining?"

<sup>5</sup> L Martino cited in Page Kalkowski, 'Peer and Cross Age Tutoring,' *School Improvement Research Series*, no. 18, 1994. <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/9/c018.html>

<sup>6</sup> 'Peer Education in Scouting', Tool Box 020, produced by Education and Development

Scouting Movement is very hierarchical and retains an adult/child-expert/novice structure (as the skills and experience of the child increase, child assume a greater role in directing activities and the adult leader gradually steps back).

- The Scouting Movement hopes to learn from other youth organisations and cites Advocates for Youth as an inspiring model. This American organisation creates programs and advocates for policies that help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health. They train young people to work as peer advocates, peer educators, and program planners to improve the delivery of youth-friendly services. The benefits of this are designed to be mutual – young people gain experience and confidence, while the organisation gets a meaningful input of youth culture and experience, and is therefore able to develop more effective outreach. Indeed health education more generally is making particular strides through peer learning initiatives, especially in effort to educate about HIV, in all kinds of international contexts.
- PAL is not just a strategy for children and young people and is often utilised by adults. One instance is the self-help group, with Alcoholics Anonymous and Weightwatchers being two well-known examples. Self-help groups are distinct from other psychotherapeutic approaches in that they are led by peers who suffer or have overcome the same problems the group is trying to address. The lesson here is that learning does not necessarily require the presence or leadership of a professional: peers can and do learn from each other and be their source of advice, guidance and support.
- New technologies and software are facilitating a rise in peer-to-peer learning amongst adults and young people alike. Week-by-week the media reminds us that we have at our disposal the tools we need to produce and share content like never before.<sup>7</sup> Communities are forming through networking sites which rival the authority and influence of older institutions. Increasingly, people are seeking their news and political analyses; their reviews of movies and products; their medical advice and support from independent weblogs and websites.
- Children and young people have been particularly adept at using new technologies, but we certainly do not know enough, and perhaps cannot imagine, the myriad ways in which they are using the internet. At the moment, Myspace is one of the most popular social networking sites for children and young people. Using the site, people can join or form groups around things that interest them. There are groups, for example, that focus on music; on web and graphic design; on sex and sexuality; or on sports of religion. These pages are all interactive and are a place for the exchange of ideas, resources, support and/or knowledge. What is evident here is something that underlies all writings on peer education – that peers have a natural and powerful influence, and that this can be positive or negative. For example, some sites on Myspace provide positive peer support for young people dealing with anorexia and bulimia, while others advocate and

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Department, World Scout Bureau, Geneva, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Jo Twist, 'Co-opting the Creative Revolution,' *BBC News* online, 15 July 2005.

glamourise disordered eating. The question here may be: how do we get the best from peer influence and turn it into positive peer education? Organisations like Advocates for Youth seem to have found answers to this question.

### 3. Practice of interest - Education

#### 3.1 PAL in the USA

In the past few decades, educational researchers have produced a vast array of literature on peer-to-peer learning approaches. Peer learning, the literature suggests, builds on the fact that young people already get a great deal of information from their peers, and that peer influence is one of the more powerful on young people. Peer learning relationships may therefore have a number of advantages. Researchers re-iterate version of the sentiment that: "Being closer in knowledge and status, the tutee in a peer relation feels freer to express opinions, ask questions and risk untested solutions. The interaction between instructor and pupil is more balanced and more lively." Further, peer learning aspires towards developing deep understanding in tutors and tutees: "Tutees and tutors first learn the subject matter that is being tutored. Second, they learn how to tutor. Third, they learn how to listen and communicate effectively. Fourth, and most important, they learn about learning."

The literature frequently refers to the fact peer learning is an underutilised resource. There are obstacles on the road to these models of teaching which include: tradition, teacher resistance, possible disadvantages accruing to the tutor, possible tutor impatience, implications of tutor selection, parent cautiousness, implications for school organisation, variable suitability of different subjects for peer tutoring, and possible lack of expertise on tutor's parts; teachers may lack the skills to train their students properly to be tutors; they may be concerned about possible disruptive behaviour in tutoring pairs, and they may question the quality of instruction offered by students, particularly high-need students. The literature also suggests that many current schemes have researched and overcome these.

Peer Assisted Learning programmes are well-established at postsecondary, as well as elementary and secondary school levels.<sup>8</sup>

##### 3.1.1 Cross Age Learning (CAL)

<http://crossagelearning.net/>

One of the most popular models currently used in American elementary schools is Cross-Age Learning (CAL). Like all peer learning programmes, CAL provides a

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<sup>8</sup> See David R Arendale (ed.), *Postsecondary Peer Cooperative Learning Program: Annotated Bibliography*, Minneapolis, General College, University of Minnesota, (Revised) 2005. "Peer collaborative learning has been popular in education for decades. As both a pedagogy and learning strategy, it has been frequently adopted and adapted for a wide range of academic content areas throughout education at elementary, secondary and postsecondary levels due to its benefits...Increased attention has been placed on this practice due to claims by some programs that carefully coordinated and managed learning programmes with specific protocols can increase student persistence rates towards graduation, supporting both goal aspirations as well as boosting institutional revenues."

means for stimulating children to grow both academically and socially. It involves older students helping younger students in reading, writing, arithmetic, and almost any other subject area, including the arts and physical education. CAL programs have found that the optimal age difference between older and younger students is about two to three years. Older students typically gain as much or more than younger students, both academically and socially. Academic and social gains among their students have typically been made when only some of the teachers in a school use CAL from time to time. However, especially strong gains have been made when everyone in a school voluntarily participates in CAL regularly for a number of years. This high level of participation effectively creates a school 'culture' of significantly increased mutual respect, responsibility, and focus on learning. Students feel more positive about each other, themselves, and school. Teachers share more ideas and support with one another and develop increased job satisfaction. Parents and other community members become more supportive of the school.

For CAL case studies, see **Gallinas Elementary School** in San Rafael, California, USA and **Neil Cummins Elementary School** in Corte Madera, California, USA.

### 3.1.2 Peer Tutoring – the 'Buddy System'

Another popular approach in American schools is one-to-one peer tutoring. It usually involves confident students (of the same age and usually in the same class) being paired with less confident students. One maths teacher explains how he first learned to use this method, and in so doing explains why peers can play an important role in the learning process:

"My maths teacher in school (Year 8) paired us in the classroom, a weak maths pupil with a good maths pupil...After he would explain the lesson or the maths problems to the whole class, it was our turn to solve problems, any one struggling would be paired with others doing fairly well. He never stressed himself with corrections; peers were correcting and explaining to each other. In my teaching practice, I tried this strategy. It worked. I realised, at times, I was unable to explain in simple terms and was making things more complicated for some pupils. Peers explain things to each other in very simple terms and in their language. Although it came as a shock initially to some pupils when I asked them to relate to their friends who have not understood, but after experiencing peer tutoring the self-esteem and confidence of the explainers was boosted and were always looking forward to such an opportunity. Now like my teacher, I was now relaxed most of the time, as I had found an effective solution to the problem. Introducing peer assessment helped me to overcome behavioural problems in class as pupils were engaged in an adult-like activity that is usually done by the teachers, hence they felt valued."

## 3.2 PAL in the UK – FE and HE Practice

Models of peer-to-peer learning are used in many of England's FE and HE institutions.<sup>9</sup> It is commonly referred to in this context as Peer Assisted Learning

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<sup>9</sup> Including Leicester University, Nottingham University, UCL, University of Sussex, Bournemouth University and University of Manchester. See for case studies:

(PAL), though other terms in use include 'Student Academic Mentoring Scheme', 'Proctoring' or 'Supplemental Instruction'. There are a number of variations of the PAL model, but all utilise cross-age approach in which students from higher years (usually third year, but sometimes second year) facilitate learning amongst a group of first year students. In PAL programmes, student leaders (who are trained and often paid, and may also receive an accreditation) meet regularly with small groups of first year students. The aim is to integrate new students into higher education and to impart an understanding of the subject matter and the approaches to learning needed to succeed in their course. The character of PAL sessions is co-operative and collaborative. Student leaders are not there to teach, but to offer an additional source of support in subject areas and to help develop the new students' confidence as learners in a higher education context.

### **3.2.1 Bournemouth University**

<http://www.peerlearning.ac.uk/>

The University has a well-established PAL programme. On its website, it suggests that PAL is intended to benefit everyone it involves: the student leader; the tutored student; the academic and the institution. This detail is summarised below.

#### **Benefits to student leaders:**

Student leaders have themselves identified a number of skills useful in future study and employment that their PAL training and experience has allowed them to develop. These include: management skills; confidence; communication skills; critical thinking/ problem solving; leadership; ability to work in and manage a team; self-awareness; organisational and time management skills; mediation and negotiation. Student leaders also report their own enhanced understanding of the subject matter and better study skills, as well as better knowledge and understanding of assessment procedures.

#### **Benefits to students:**

PAL supports first years with their course material, study skills and social integration. PAL sessions allow students to set their own agenda to review, discuss, practice and collaborate on course subject matter and to discuss the language of the subject discipline. PAL creates a supportive environment in which students feel they can bring up any problems they have in a context that is informal, confidential and discrete. It allows students to understand university culture, bridging the gap between college and university, to make friends and to develop confidence. Research also suggests that students who regularly attend PAL sessions can expect an increase in their grades.

#### **Benefits to the academic:**

PAL allows students to review and consolidate the course material. Students therefore have an enhanced understanding and are better prepared for classes. PAL takes pressure off the academic's workload. Student leaders deal with many of the first years' problems surrounding course content and study skills. Staff support and involvement is required for a PAL programme to work, but the net effect of PAL should be to lower demands on staff time by having student leaders as a first point of contact for first years.

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[http://www.peerlearning.ac.uk/case\\_studies.html](http://www.peerlearning.ac.uk/case_studies.html)

**Benefits to institution:**

PAL has been shown to lead to higher grades and lower attrition and failure rates. It is not uncommon for universities to run courses with attrition rates as high as 50%. PAL is able to explicitly target high-risk courses, through its support mechanism. It is also a cost-effective; a relatively inexpensive method of supporting the academic development of large numbers of students. It improves integration and cohesion within courses and between years. It increases the employability of graduate student leaders.

**3.3 The Centre for Peer Learning (CPL) – Scotland**

<http://www.dundee.ac.uk/fedsoc/centres/cpl/>

One of the most relevant research initiatives in this area is The University of Dundee's Centre for Peer Learning (CPL). CPL develops and researches tutoring systems for use by peers, parents, volunteers and others who are not professional teachers. It has interests in the role computers can effectively play in such interactions. Beyond tutoring, it also works in related areas such as mentoring and cooperative learning. It is internationally known for its pioneering work, including: systems for peer, parent and volunteer tutoring of reading, spelling, writing, maths, science and language; systems for peer tutoring in complex concepts and skills in university, professional and other workplace settings; and systems for family literacy and community education.

CPL tutoring systems are active and interactive. Like PAL programs, CPL systems report enhanced educational outcomes, are designed so that both tutees and tutors benefit and claim to be cost-effective. Some of the projects they have worked on in the specific sphere of primary and secondary education include: upper primary children tutoring younger ones in process writing; primary school children tutoring classmates in spelling; and reciprocal tutoring with children with learning/emotional disabilities; and peer assessment.

CPL's Professor Keith Topping is highly critical of the traditional model of peer tutoring in high schools:

which has often involved final year or sixth form pupils volunteering to act as teacher surrogates by helping first year pupils with reading. Typically, the helpers are white, female, middle-class volunteers. The tutees are very different. The reek of class-based Victorian philanthropy is hardly compatible with an inclusive philosophy. And what benefits are the tutors obtaining?

Topping argues that peer tutoring should be modelled in ways that benefit both the tutors and the tutees. He points out that PAL connects strongly with PSHCE (Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education). Generic tutoring skills include many aspects of planning, creative adaptation, communication, and the establishment and management of relationships. Teachers commenting on the effects of Pal reported striking gains not only in motivation and confidence, but also in social skills and self-esteem, and that these generalised across the curriculum. Peer assisted learning, he says, offers a wide range of means of achieving some of the relevant goals of inclusion, without major resource demands other than teacher reflection and planning time to ensure good organisation and a successful outcome.

Topping has identified examples of current good practice in the area of peer learning, highlighting particularly the merits of Birmingham's Inclusion Strategy. The Strategy incorporates a vision for 2020, which specifies peer assisted learning as a central feature of the authority's forward thrust for inclusion, stating, "peer tutoring will be a common feature of all learning experiences." Specific examples of current practice in Birmingham include:

### **The Broadway Project**

Birmingham has a distinguished record in deploying high school students with serious emotional and behavioural problems as tutors in primary and special schools. These young people usually present a completely different and much more positive aspect of their personality and capability in such settings. The Broadway project seeks to extend this by developing cross-age peer tutoring in reading for pupils with behavioural difficulties in the Lower School of a high school, prior to developing a scheme for Upper School pupils to do likewise with Lower School pupils. Broadway is a two-campus high school in an intensely multicultural area.

### **Fox Hollies Special School**

The School is for pupils who have severe learning difficulties. It has a national reputation in the performing arts. Both within and outside the school, pupils are involved in peer assisted learning through the MENCAP Transactive Project, in performing arts (such as the Cafe Atlantique project and Birmingham Royal Ballet project), and in work experience. They work with pupils with similar difficulties and with pupils from mainstream schools. The school also receives peer helpers through the Valued Youth scheme (see below). The Fox Hollies Project is also being qualitatively evaluated.

### **Dame Ellen Pinsnett Special School**

This special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties has also developed a same-age peer tutoring in writing project. It is startling that they have succeeded with such challenging pupils in arguably such a challenging curriculum area. The objectives were to raise writing standards, especially in creative/expressive writing (where there was a social-emotional agenda); to increase variety of writing; to increase vocabulary in and through writing; and to develop social and communication skills (especially in those pupils on the autistic spectrum or with a different linguistic heritage). This work is being qualitatively evaluated.

Topping also points to significant innovation in this area in Scotland (something, he argues, is discouraged in England by "the stranglehold of the national curriculum").

### **The Reading42 Project in Scotland**

A high school in Dundee is using peer learning to address a concern about a plateau in achievement growth in the first two years of high school. In this programme, middle ability second year readers act as cross-age tutors to low ability first year readers (including many special needs pupils), using high motivation books of a level of challenge which engages both tutor and tutee, and serves to enhance the reading capability as well as the self-esteem of both. Reading42 features experimental research with control groups. Collection of post-test data is still proceeding at the time of writing.

Other pockets of Scottish innovation in this area include:

### **Menzies Hill High School**

At Menzies Hill High School in Dundee, peer tutoring is a scheme involving senior pupils volunteering to assist identified pupils/classes in their mainstream subjects. Senior pupils give up their non-timetabled periods and commit themselves to a long-term programme whereby they assist classroom teachers. Depending on the individual class, this may be as a tutor to a specific pupil who may need some extra help, or as a general assistant to the teacher for the entire class. This year, a particularly large and enthusiastic number of senior pupils volunteered their services and they have proved to be particularly effective in carrying out their duties. Various departments, from Music to Modern Languages, Social Subjects to Business Studies, have voiced their delight with the peer tutors this year. Comments like, "Very supportive", "loads of initiative", and "Superb - a tremendous help in the classroom", reflect the excellent role the peer tutors are playing in the classes they support.

## **3.4 PAL in England**

Closer to home Peer Learning is not a widespread practice in primary and secondary schools, though there are signs that this is changing. Schools are beginning to trial approaches to teaching and learning which allow students to take on much more active roles. In addition to the Birmingham Inclusion Strategy, there are a handful of current and recent programmes which utilise peer-to-peer learning (often also harnessing the potential of ICT).

### **3.4.1 The Dolphin System**

<http://www.dolphinlearning.co.uk/>

The Dolphin System is a peer-to-peer learning programme which allows pupils to teach ICT to each other (and sometimes their teachers and parents) in a way that reinforces their own learning as they pass on skills to their classmates. The System was designed by Rob Porteous whilst he was working at the Dolphin School in Berkshire. His intended to create a simple hierarchy of skills which pupils could work through to ensure that they were fully able to use a computer independently. He experimented with designing a set of internet-style instruction pages for the children to follow and, in so doing, began to wonder whether from this the children could teach each other. This gave rise to a resource – the Dolphin System – that is now used in over 200 schools in England and Scotland. The System covers all strands and levels of the 5-14 ICT guidelines and boasts the outcome of improved standards and confidence in ICT. It has also given many teachers who are less secure in ICT the confidence to try new activities with their children, and allows students who are experienced in this area to share and enhance their skills.

Cathy Taylor, ICT Coordinator at St Bernard Prep School in Slough explains what it's like to use the System: "After initial instruction by the teacher, children work in pairs, one child learning and the other acting as a tutor. The children take their role as tutors very seriously and so they are keen to learn.

The fact that they can demonstrate skills to another is proof of their understanding. Peer tutoring also promotes teamwork and develops interpersonal skills."

### **3.4.2 E-Mentoring Pilot Programme (SSAT)**

<http://www.schoolsnetwork.org.uk/newtechnologies/e-mentoring/default.aspx>

During the summer term of 2005, SSAT ran a pilot program to help schools in developing their own e-Mentoring and e-support schemes. The project had four priorities: to increase achievement of students within a safe, secure environment through a short term e-Mentoring experience; to explore different collaborative software environments; to explore the use of non-teachers as e-Mentors; and to create a replicable, sustainable framework for future use by other schools. The pilot looked at developing general and subject-specific mentoring roles using online technologies such as chat and discussion forums. It offered personalised access to other resources and support outside the normal school hours. The project explored, developed and evaluated the roles of mentors from different backgrounds. Mentors included active teachers, retired teachers, supply teachers, PGCE students, support staff, Sixth Form students and university students. All were paid. The pilot found that Sixth form students and support staff are a "very valuable, previously untapped resource." Thirty nine schools were involved in the pilot.

### **3.4.3 The Virtual-Workspace**

<http://www.virtual-workspace.com>

The Virtual-Workspace is a joint initiative by Worcestershire and Wolverhampton LEAs developed by NordAnglia. It is a dynamic web-based learning environment designed to engage learners aged 14-19 (Years 10 to 13), in and out of school/college. The aim is to raise attainment at all levels through helping them to become confident, independent and motivated learners. The Virtual-Workspace brings together 21,000 children through an e-learning portal which enables them to create their own learning communities and access diverse resources. Commenting on the learning communities established here, DEMOS note the range and depth of topics that are being hotly debated in the Pastoral Community. With a particular focus on the topic of 'drug use', the DEMOS case-study demonstrates how the large student population of this community is actively examining, debating, exchanging information and offering support/advice to each other in the community's discussion forum. Essentially, this case study highlights the significance of offering social support to students, as well as academic support.

A student from Nunnery Wood High School in Worcestershire, having used Virtual-Workspace, comments: "I'd love to continue with this kind of work when I'm older. I'd love to be an online teacher or something like it. However I'm off to sixth form first to study ICT and then train to become either something in ICT or teaching, or mixtures of both. This site has definitely helped me choose the line of career id like to go into..."

### **3.4.4 Other schools engaged in interesting practice**

#### **Beardwood High School and Westholme Girls' School**

These two schools are working together to break down barriers. Sixth formers from Westholme (an independent girl's school) come into Beardwood (a community comprehensive) once a week, to help GCSE students with modern foreign languages, while comprehensive staff go next door to tutor girls in Urdu. Year 12 and 13 girls worked with Year 8 underachievers on their literacy. Some Year 8's moved up from level 3 to level 5 by the end of the year.

#### **Falmer School**

At the Falmer School, students work as fitness instructors in the school gym which is open to local community.

#### **Grange Primary School**

The school has established its own town – 'Grangeton' – offering a scaled-down but fully-functioning model of a real society, complete with political structure and working economy. The aim is to ensure that each child's curriculum is reinforced through practical experiences. Outcomes include: Key Stage test scores have dramatically improved. A marked change in pupil attitudes and behaviour

#### **Hareclive Primary School**

At this school, pupils teach other pupils and teachers about the use of Room 13, a self-expression area that includes access via the internet to other settings, parts of the world.

#### **Holmfirth Primary**

Some of the oldest pupils at Holmfirth primary have honed their maths skills on interactive whiteboards and are using them to coach children in Year 4. The children now regularly give their young schoolmates 10-minute warm up sessions in the subject before the Year 4 teacher takes over. Pupils also gave a presentation on how they teach maths to a conference of 40 teachers recently. Pupils have also shown Kirklees teachers how pupils can mediate between other pupils as part of a befriending and counselling service.

#### **Preston Manor City Learning Centre**

The school achieves very high standards in pupils' performance with an ethnically diverse pupil profile. It is very focussed on teaching and learning and in particular in supporting pupil self esteem through encouraging pupil participation and actively promoting pupil voice. From October 2003 - September 2004, a team of students from Preston Manor, Alperton, Copland and Queens Park schools in Brent have been working with Blaze Radio and the National Youth Theatre to produce The Manor, an innovative radio soap opera and website designed as a learning resource for the PHSE and Citizenship curriculum. Through consultation with students a proposal was developed to create an issue-based soap opera and website. It was felt that the issues that arose naturally when devising drama with students in this way could form the basis for an excellent resource for teaching PHSE and Citizenship, and that a soap opera and website developed towards this aim could then be disseminated to a wider audience across the web. After securing funding for start-up from the DfES Innovation Unit, The Manor began in October 2003. In

the execution of their project students have designed and constructed a website using cutting edge technology to promote interactive aspects of the site. They have presented live performances, including a performance at the Lyric Hammersmith. They are about to promote the project through a series of roadshow presentations. Staff have identified a number of learning outcomes which they have monitored regularly throughout the project.

### **St Crispin's School**

At St Crispin's School, the older Science students support younger ones carry out experiments and investigations once a week during Wednesday lunchtime.

### **St Ivo's School**

All Year 7 pupils at St Ivo's School are invited to join 'Books over Breakfast', a twice weekly club that serves comics and magazines with the muesli and where sixth-formers help their younger school mates with reading. Not only do the Year 7s get extra help with their reading but the scheme plugs into the sixth form's community service and the volunteers are given training.

### **SW Newham EAZ**

This EAZ is using Virtual On-Line Co-Operative environment (VOLCO) – developed in partnership with UeL m3 Research Lab – to deliver citizenship and develop ICT skills. VOLCO is an evolving planet in cyberspace currently being constructed by children aged 8-13.

## **4. Practice of Interest – Beyond Education**

### **4.1 The Scouting Model**

Scouting is probably one of the most obvious educational models that utilises peer learning strategies. The Scouting Movement was founded on the idea that children and young people needed to be given opportunities to learn in ways that fostered greater levels on independence than were possible in the traditional school model. In 1916, Baden-Powell, founder of the Movement, wrote:

The child wants to do things, so let us encourage him to do them by pointing him in the right direction, and allowing him to do them how he likes. Let him make mistakes; it is through making mistakes that his experience is formed.

The Scouting mission "to contribute to the education of young people, through a value system based on the Scout Promise and Law, to help build a better world where people are self-fulfilled as individuals and play a constructive role in society."

Scouting is designed as a supplement to the school education – it describes itself as a non-formal education process, though it has a number of structures and 'laws'. Scouting is an active education; they key element is 'learning by doing'. It is based around activities, though these have become much more diverse than in an earlier day. Outdoor activities (like camping, kayaking, hiking and mountaineering) are the most visible aspect of Scouting.

A key aspect of Scouting is the level of agency it invests, or seeks to develop, in the child. The Scouting method is designed so that each individual is made "the principal

agent in his or her development as a self-reliant, supportive, responsible and committed person." It is about teaching people the skills they will need to act as moral citizens – so that they can participate in society and in the decision-making processes that will affect their lives.

The basic model is flexible; designed so that the child has the space to explore things that interest and so that different scouting communities make themselves relevant and interesting to the local context.

Scouts use the 'patrol system' or 'team system'. Young people who are similar in age share common interests and are willing to cooperate, form small groups which enable them to develop a relationship among peers. The small group is led by one of the young people (the team leader). They are responsible for managing the team and passing on experience and knowledge to the young members. Scouts are segmented into age groups – and the movement tries to address the needs of each. For example, 12-16 express a keen interest in outdoor activities and the protection of the environment; 16-22 are very concerned about their professional futures.

Scouting is a progressive programme of self-education, in partnership with peers. The role of the leader can work in two ways. The leader prepares and proposes an activity to young people which is likely to offer learning opportunities in line with the educational objectives for that age section and corresponding to the interests expressed by the group; the leader encourages young people to express their interests and then helps them to build an activity which corresponds to them. The leader will identify the learning opportunities which the activity could offer. As both leaders and young people gain experience and have a clearer idea of what they're able to do, they find it easier to think of new activity ideas.

## 4.2 NGOs

Peer education projects have been set up at the grassroots level by NGOs, community and spiritual organisations and youth organisations, to address matters that affect young people, from risk taking-behaviours to educational and professional development. Some examples include:

### 4.2.1 Advocates for Youth

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/peereducation.htm>

Advocates for Youth, an American organisation, creates programs and advocates for policies that help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health. It provides information, training, and strategic assistance to youth-serving organisations, policy makers, youth activists, and the media in the United States and the developing world, advocating for a more positive and realistic approach to adolescent reproductive and sexual health. The organisation is particularly notable because it nurtures direct youth involvement. That "young people gain more from an experience when they are actively involved" is their core premise. Its programs for youth are developed through a partnership of young people and adults working together to solve community problems. Advocates train hundreds of young people a year to work as peer advocates, peer educators, and program planners to improve the delivery of youth-friendly services. The

benefits of this are designed to be mutual – young people gain experience and confidence, while organisations gain a fresh perspective on youth culture and develop more effective outreach. Advocates for Youth have found this strategy to be highly effective in both building young people's skills and reducing their sexual risk-taking behaviours.

#### **4.2.2 YouthNet (part of Family Health International)**

<http://www.fhi.org/en/Youth/YouthNet/index.htm>

YouthNet is a global program to improve reproductive health and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among people 10 to 24 years old. Like Advocates, the program works with – not for – the young people whose lives it is designed to improve, in collaboration with parents, schoolteachers, employers, policymakers, the media, health professionals, nongovernmental organisations, religious and community leaders, and other youth networks. Supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development, YouthNet conducts research, disseminates information, improves services, and strengthens policies and programs related to the reproductive health and HIV/AIDS-prevention needs and rights of young people around the world. YouthNet also trains young people to work as educators and act as an informed resource for their peers.

#### **4.2.3 UK Youth Network**

<http://www.ukyouth.org/>

UK Youth develops and promotes innovative non-formal education programmes for and with young people, working with them to develop their potential. It supports more than 750,000 young people, 7000 youth groups, clubs and projects and more than 40,000 volunteer and part-time youth workers throughout the UK. UK Youth is one of the few organisations that have young people governing it alongside and in equal capacity to older people. The National Members Group (NMG) is made up of young people aged between 15 and 25 who are elected by their peers. Each year NMG run events promoting participation and the voices of young people. Their Annual Conference hosts the elections and additionally offers youth-led workshops on topics such as life-long learning, young people's rights, harassment and bullying. These events offer a platform for young people to express their views, formulate their opinions and effect real changes to their lives and in their communities.

#### **4.2.4 Digital Education Enhancement Project (DEEP)**

<http://www.open.ac.uk/deep/Public/web/why/why.html>

DEEP is a research and development program investigating the use of new information and communications technology (ICT) for teaching and learning. It works in schools serving disadvantaged communities in different parts of the world. They use programmes of peer learning which imparts skills to the most confident students in a community so that they can teach others.

### **4.3 Self-help groups**

Self-help groups are distinct from other psychotherapeutic approaches in that they are led by peers who suffer or have overcome the same problems the group is trying to address. The lesson here is that learning does not necessarily require the presence or leadership of a professional: peers can and do learn from each other and be the source of advice, guidance and support. Well-known examples include Alcoholics Anonymous, whose publicity approach stresses: "We in AA know what it is like to be addicted to alcohol ... We are not professional therapists. Our only qualification for helping others to recover from alcoholism is that we have recovered ourselves, but problem drinkers coming to us know that recovery is possible because they see people who have done it." Other popular self-help groups focus on and cater for addictions, bereavement, caregivers, cancer, chronic illness groups, mental health and weight loss.

### **4.4 Social networking on the internet**

'Social networking' refers to a current and growing phenomenon of relationship building and information sharing via the internet. At the moment, Myspace is one of the most popular social networking sites for children and young people. Using the site, people can join or form groups around things that interest them. There are groups, for example, that focus on music; on web and graphic design; on sex and sexuality; or on sports or religion. These pages are all interactive and are a place for the exchange of ideas, resources, support and/or knowledge. What is evident here is something that underlies all writings on peer education – that peers have a natural and powerful influence, and that this can be positive or negative. For example, some sites on Myspace provide positive peer support for young people dealing with anorexia and bulimia, while others advocate and glamourise disordered eating. The question here may be: how do we get the best from peer influence and turn it into positive peer education?

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