



## *Licensed to Learn (L2L): A Peer Tutor Program Benefitting both Student Tutors and Peers*

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### About the program

**Licensed to Learn (L2L)** is a dual peer tutor program with two concurrent components – (i) to train older and higher achieving students to become *certified* tutors, and (ii) to have them offer, as part of their practicum, after-school tutoring support to younger and more at-risk students. The purpose is thus two-fold – (i) to help foster in the older, more successful students peer helping skills and a caring character, and at the same time (ii) to raise the success level of the younger, more at-risk students. The former, mostly from the senior and secondary school grades, are recruited and trained over a period of one school term about different learning styles, Multiple Intelligences (MI), and how to use a student-centred approach to tutoring. In between their training sessions, these tutor trainees offer regular tutoring services to younger “peers” either in their own school or in a neighbouring school.



This program has been offered by L2L, a community organization, in partnership with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) since 2002. It was first piloted at two schools - Winona Drive Senior Public School and McMurrich Junior Public School. Today, the program is offered in over 40 TDSB elementary and secondary schools.

### About the research

While anecdotal evidence has been collected since its onset, in recent years more concrete data have been gathered from program participants about the training and tutoring components of L2L. The data were part of the regular logs and journal entries documented by individual student tutors during their training and practicum sessions. The entries include information about the background of the tutors and their peers, tutoring sessions, their own learning and tutoring experience, and the attitudes and progress of their peers.

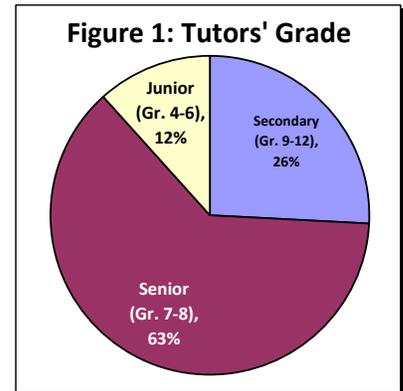
During the 2009-10 school year, data on more than 260 L2L tutors and over 400 peers across 21 schools were collected. This interim report highlights some of the immediate benefits both the tutors and their peers had garnered from the program.

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## Benefits for student tutors

Altogether 262 L2L tutors representing 21 TDSB schools were sampled for this preliminary study. A quick look at their profiles indicates that they shared the following characteristics:

- The majority (67%) were female.
- Almost one-third (32%) were born outside of Canada.
- Most (78%) spoke another home language other than English.
- Almost two-thirds (63%) were from the senior division (Grades 7-8), over one-quarter (26%) from the secondary division, and a small proportion (12%) from Grades 4-6.



## What potential tutors wished to gain from the program

At the beginning of the training program, these students were asked why they would be interested in joining the program. Their reasons can be categorized into three major types of responses.

1. Helping others – Over half of these tutors wrote about how they would like to help younger children, the less-fortunate, and peers. Some tutors further elaborated how they wished to help their peers meet academic standards or personal goals, or simply do their best. A few wanted to make a difference in someone's life, and expressed empathy towards their peers.
2. Feeling that they had something to offer – for example, their knowledge, affable personality, or patience.
3. Personal benefits – About a third of these student tutors also reported how they themselves wished to benefit from the program - for example, to get teacher training, to build their resume, to gain experience, to make friends, to satisfy their curiosity, to help themselves review their own studies, to receive a certificate, or to gain experience in working with people from different backgrounds.

## What L2L tutors had gained from the program

Towards the end of the program, these tutors were then asked how they had benefited from the L2L training and from their tutoring experience. The following are some of the areas they reported that they

had learned about:



- teaching skills – especially about the different learning and teaching styles;
- the importance of patience in teaching;
- how to communicate well with others;
- how to work with and engage young people;
- most of all, the underlying reasons behind their peers' learning difficulties – for example, the lack of self esteem and confidence, different learning styles, and the need for one-on-one support and encouragement.

Through their practicum and through helping other young people, a few student tutors mentioned how they had learned about the importance of community service, and how everyone can make a difference.

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## Benefits for peers

According to the reports submitted by the L2L tutors in this study, a total of 404 younger peers were serviced by these tutors for an average of nine tutoring sessions. That means some tutors supported more than one younger student during their practicum. Below are some of the general profiles of the peers.

- The majority (58%) were male - a contrast to the student tutors who were mostly female.
- The peers were fairly evenly distributed across grade divisions with the highest number in junior division (Grade 4-6, 35%), followed by senior division (Grade 7-8, 29%), primary division (Grade 1-3, 19%), and secondary division (Grade 9-12, 17%).
- The two subject areas in which the peers needed the most support were Math (62%) and Language (44%).



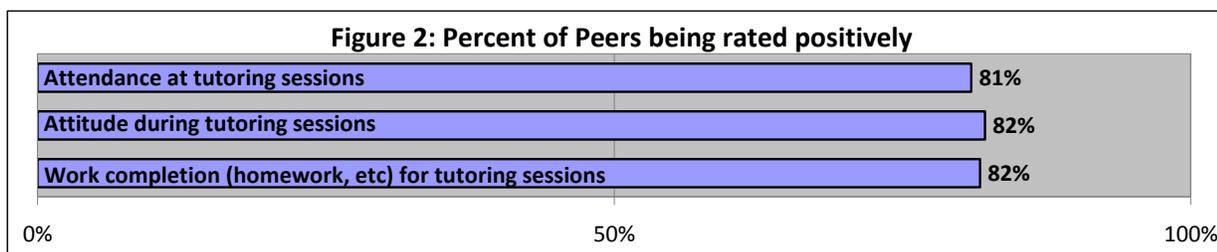
## The needs of the peers

According to the tutors' records, initially the majority (81%) of peers were achieving below standard in the subjects they were being tutored – that is, 60% at Level 2, and 21% at Level 1; and there were 19% of the peers who performed at or above standard (Level 3 or 4). Aside from understanding the academic needs of their peers, the trained L2L student tutors were able to discern during the tutoring sessions and articulate the affective needs of their younger students. For instance:

- About half of the L2L tutors pointed out that their peers needed someone as a role model to discuss problems with, to provide guidance, and to explain things.
- Many tutors also noted that their peers needed confidence and positive encouragement, including being able to freely ask questions for clarification.
- Some tutors further pointed out that their peers needed something to help them relate to their studies – for example, a reason to be interested in what they were learning, and how to be taught in fun and creative ways.

## Peers' positive responses to the tutoring sessions

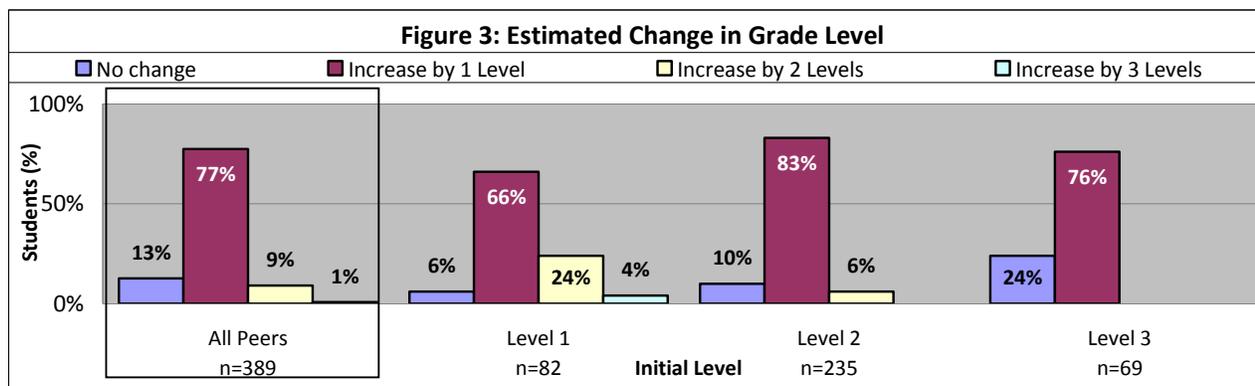
According to the tutors' reports, over 80% of the peers responded very well to the tutoring sessions and were rated positively in terms of attendance, attitude, and work completion (see Figure 2). This could largely be attributed to the fact that their tutors had received intentional training in understanding the needs of their peers (both academic and affective) as well as in effective peer tutoring strategies.



## Academic progress made by the peers

Aside from their positive engagement, most peers were reported to also have made notable progress by the end of the tutoring sessions. According to the tutors' estimates, 87% of the peers' grades improved by at least one level (see Figure 3). For instance:

- Among those who were at Level 1 initially, two thirds (66%) moved up to Level 2, and over one quarter (28%) to Level 3 or 4.
- Among those who were at Level 2 initially, 83% went up to Level 3, and 6% to Level 4.
- Among those at Level 3 initially, over three quarters (76%) moved up to Level 4.



## Affective change

In addition to academic improvement, tutors also reported that their support had made a difference in their peers' lives in the following areas:

- ✓ confidence
- ✓ independence
- ✓ sense of responsibility for their education and future
- ✓ learning attitude
- ✓ pride in work
- ✓ building friendships
- ✓ focus on school work
- ✓ self-knowledge

## Feedback from schools and principals

Principals from six middle schools and one secondary school were asked to rate the program in five areas: student success, achievement, character development, leadership, and positive relationships. They rated the program highly; on a 5-point scale, the overall average rating was 4.5. It was further found that in a secondary school where L2L was used as part of the Credit Recovery effort in Civics and Careers, students who had initially failed either course eventually passed after participating in the L2L tutoring, while those who did not take full advantage of the tutoring sessions remained unsuccessful in the course.

## Conclusion

This preliminary research shows that the benefits of L2L extend beyond supporting at-risk students in their school work. What makes it unique from other peer tutoring programs is its deliberate efforts to train the higher achieving students to be effective certified tutors - not only in their ability to tutor the subject matter, but also in fostering an empathetic understanding of the different learning styles and the emotional needs of their peers. Clearly, the L2L tutoring sessions were successful in supporting the at-risk students academically as well as affectively in terms of confidence, learning attitude, and positive relationships.