



EVIDENCE BASED INTERVENTION NETWORK EBI BRIEF

Cross-Age Peer Tutoring¹

Research has shown that peer mentoring programs in elementary schools can achieve increases in the use of critical thinking skills, improvements in interpersonal skills, academic gains, increased attendance, enhanced self esteem, and increases in the use of conflict resolution skills (Gensemer, 2000). In the brief discussion below, we will look at the cross- age peer intervention and review research, which suggests that this intervention is beneficial for both the tutor as well as the tutee. This is an intervention that works by pairing students from different grades and ability levels to work on an academic skill together. The older/higher ability student will be the tutor; and the younger/lower ability student will be the tutee. The students work together to practice a skill. This is beneficial for both the tutors and the tutees.

Empirical evidence

Several studies have suggested that students who participate in a cross age tutoring program benefit academically and behaviorally from the experience. Three different studies were reviewed that concluded that both the tutor as well as the tutee benefited from cross age peer tutoring. In a study conducted by Limbrick, McNaughton and Glen (1985), six children in a third grade classroom (four boys and two girls, ages 6 to 8) were randomly selected from the lowest reading achievement group. Three older students were randomly selected to tutor three of these children. The remaining three children served as the control group and received no tutoring. This study used a three-phase approach where under phase one the reading baseline was obtained for both the tutor as well as the tutee. Phase two consisted of determining whether useful tutoring behaviors would occur spontaneously. The pair was given instructions: the tutee would read aloud for ten minutes and if he or she needed help he or she were to ask the tutor for assistance. The tutor was to read his or her own book for 10 minutes and then help the tutee if assistance was requested. So, both the tutor and the tutee were expected to read independently for 10 minutes, only interacting when there was a request for assistance. This phase lasted for nine sessions. At the end of phase 2, the standardized reading measures were administered. Phase three consisted of the tutor and tutee meeting three times a week in 15-minute sessions. Students met between six to eight weeks.

Results of this study demonstrated that low progress readers can be tutored effectively by their peers. The gains of the tutees after participating in the three-phase study were substantial. Reading ages were advanced by at least 6 months and as much as 22 months. The tutors also benefited from the tutoring experience. Positive gains were noted with regard to the tutors reading gains. These positive gains during the tutoring phase on standardized reading tests of between 4 and 24 months were supported by measures of classroom performance. Classroom measures, which were essentially a generalization of training, demonstrated equivalent gains of 6-12 months.

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Results of other studies have shown that low achievers in reading made significant gains in reading performance after tutoring younger children in reading (Mavrogenes and Galen, 1979). Dineen, Clark and Risley (1977) conducted a study to determine whether tutoring might be academically beneficial to the tutor. Their study investigated the acquisition of spelling words by three elementary students in a peer-tutoring program. This study was an experimental designed study which allowed a simultaneous comparison of each child's gain in performance on comparable word lists on which the child tutored another child, was tutored by another child, or neither gave nor received tutoring. The results of this study showed that when a child was tutored or was the tutor, their spelling improved when compared to the children that neither gave nor received tutoring.

Finally, Leland and Fitzpatrick (1993) implemented a cross age project where they paired sixth graders with children from kindergarten class for weekly 45-minute sessions. The students were randomly paired, although any who were already acquainted could work together if they chose to do so. The program lasted from October to June. The study concluded that when sixth grade students who were average or below average readers were paired with kindergarten students for weekly 45 minute sessions of collaborative reading and writing both groups showed an increase in positive attitudes toward reading and writing with a partner. Data collected from parents showed about 70 % of the sixth grade participants to be engaging in the target behavior of choosing to read on their own. The sixth grade teacher also noticed academic gains with students showing an increased ability to identify structural elements of novels.

It is often difficult for teachers to meet the needs of all individual students in their classrooms. Cross age peer tutoring is one way that teachers can help students with their needs by involving older students in the learning process. Research has shown that cross age tutoring can be effective programs with various beneficial results such as academic gains, increased attendance and enhanced self esteem.

References

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