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Table of Contents

If you're viewing this document online, you can click any of the topics below to link directly to that section.

Peer-Tutoring: Toward a New Model. ERIC Digest.....	1
A NEW TUTOR-CENTERED MODEL.....	2
SOME STEPS TO THE FUTURE.....	3
MAKING THE MODEL WORK.....	4
A COMPARISON: THE OLD AND NEW MODELS.....	4
-NEW-.....	4
CONCLUSION.....	5
REFERENCES.....	5



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IS PEER TUTORING EFFECTIVE?

Research on peer tutoring indicates that the intervention is relatively effective in improving both tutees' and tutors' academic and social development (c.f., Cohen, Kulik, & Kulik, 1982; Hedin, 1987; Goodlad & Hirst, 1989; Greenwood, Delquadri, & Hall, 1989; Benard, 1990; Swengel, 1991). However, some studies caution that effectiveness may be moderated by similarity in age and achievement level of tutors and tutees (DePaulo et al., 1989), academic deficiency of tutors (Willis & Crowder, 1974), and lack of long-term maintenance of tutee gains (Atherley, 1989).

The literature also shows that the gains for tutors often outdistance those of the students receiving help. This results from reworking what they know in order to make it understandable to their tutees. This learning through teaching is the significant mechanism, and it poses an opportunity to reformulate and extend the use of peer tutoring.

This Digest will discuss a new tutor-centered, peer-tutoring model and offer samples of ways to put the model into place.

A NEW TUTOR-CENTERED MODEL

The Peer Research Laboratory at the City University of New York has been designing a new model to answer the question, "If the tutor role is so effective, why not build on this and give all students the opportunity to be a tutor?" This model is different from usual tutoring approaches where more proficient students tutor the less proficient. A second thrust is to make the tutoring process a central instructional strategy, integrated fully in everyday classroom work, in contrast to current practice that employs tutoring as a peripheral and remedial activity.

These goals have several implications. If every student is to be a tutor, they must be well prepared to perform this task. Thus, in-depth training is essential. Additionally, there need to be students available to be tutored.

In the new model, the tutoring process is viewed as developmental, where all tutors will have had the experience of being tutees as part of their apprenticeship for becoming tutors. For example, in an elementary school, 6th graders tutor 2nd graders; as the 2nd-grade students advance a grade, they tutor younger schoolmates.

What will the tutees and tutors learn in the tutor-centered model? First, they will learn the subject matter that is being tutored. Second, they will learn how to tutor. Third, they will learn how to listen and communicate effectively. Fourth, and perhaps most important, they will learn about learning.

To strengthen the tutee-to-tutor conversion and to build a sense of shared ownership of the tutoring process, tutees meet together with tutors to reflect on their joint tutoring experiences. Students are given the opportunity to share their feelings and thoughts about the tutoring process and expand their understanding of learning through teaching.

Included here are different learning strategies; the significance of indirect and informal learning; the relationship between cognitive and social development; the importance of individualization and attuning the material to the learner's interests and learning style; the use of pacing, repetition, and reinforcement.

Tutees benefit from the tutor-centered program in a number of ways: motivation to learn improves through participatory sharing with the tutors; well-trained tutors heighten the tutees' learning; and the value of being tutored as preparation for tutoring in the future increases their self-esteem. In addition, students recognize their importance as an educational resource; they are not only receivers, but givers and helpers as well. In essence, receiving tutoring serves more than the goal of learning the lesson.

SOME STEPS TO THE FUTURE

The Peer Research Laboratory has been applying the new tutoring model in a number of programs designed to make more intensified use of students as tutors.

* At one school, involving more than 500 students, whole classes of students are tutors to younger students. In spreading the tutor role, all students in the school, regardless of academic ability, have the opportunity of learning through teaching. For example, 6th graders are matched with 4th graders; 3rd graders tutor kindergartners. Upper-grade students in special education classes tutor regular students in the lower grades.

This program refocuses the teacher role toward facilitator of the learning process. As pairs of teachers work together, time is set aside for the teachers to meet to decide on the curriculum to be tutored, plan logistical arrangements, and evaluate program components. All of the participating teachers are also involved in mutual support groups.

* In an alternative high school model, tutees actively take part in the planning and ongoing assessment of the program. By making them equal partners, they are being prepared in an apprenticeship to become tutors in the 2nd semester, if they successfully pass their coursework.

* In a pilot project, high school students participate in a course with a world citizen curriculum, designed to introduce them to cross-cultural and multicultural subject material, as well as to train them to be effective tutors/mentors. The students receive credit for both the coursework and for mentoring students in the school who are recently arrived from other countries. The students' information base about other cultures is enlarged through structured interaction with their mentees, while the mentees benefit from the skilled attention of the mentors.

* Tutoring provides the practicum component of a high school psychology course in another program. Students are paired for the semester with elementary school students as the field requirement that gives them practical experience complementing what they

are learning in class.

* Another high school cross-age tutoring program provides students with community service credit for tutoring elementary/junior high school students. Tutors were recruited from high-, middle-, and low-achieving high schools. Regardless of the achievement levels of the tutors, their effectiveness was consistent across the program.

MAKING THE MODEL WORK

What is required to make the new model work? Clearly, administrative support as well as that of the school-based management team are crucial (Riessman, 1991). The support of the teachers is essential too, particularly because of the shift in their role to facilitators and managers of the learning process. To do this, they need to be trained and encouraged to put the program in place. In cross-age tutoring schemes, they will have to develop a working relationship and the necessary logistics with their teaching partners. The Laboratory has found that establishing teacher support groups that meet regularly is beneficial in breaking down teacher isolation and developing innovative partnerships.

A COMPARISON: THE OLD AND NEW MODELS

-OLD-Less proficient tutored by more proficient student

Remedial help

Tutee dependency

Learning by receiving

Emphasis on tutee improvement

Incremental improvement

Limited use of student resources

Add-on, peripheral activity

Little impact on school

-NEW-

Everyone is a tutor

Reinforcement/enrichment

Conversion of tutee to tutor

Learning by teaching

Emphasis on tutor development

Leap in learning

Multiple increase of help-giving resources

Basic, central educational strategy

Peer focus aims to transform school culture

CONCLUSION

The critical importance of youth having the opportunity to participate in meaningful roles such as youth-helping-youth is a salient factor in preventing social problems, including substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and delinquency. The need exists to expand the opportunity to have all students experience the helping role. The new model:

- * Calls for in-depth preparation and training of peer tutors and their ongoing reflection on the tutoring process;

- * Removes the negativity usually associated with receiving help, since all students participate in giving and receiving help;

- * Sees being a tutee as preparation for becoming a tutor;

- * Leads to the creation of student-centered, peer-focused schools (Gartner, 1992). (An ancillary aim is the spread of other peer opportunities: peer mentoring, peer mediation, peer education, peer helping.)

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