



Peer Tutoring

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What is peer tutoring?

Peer tutoring is a flexible, peer-mediated strategy that involves students serving as academic tutors and tutees. Typically, a higher performing student is paired with a lower performing student to review critical academic or behavioral concepts.

Why choose peer tutoring?

- It is a widely-researched practice across ages, grade levels, and subject areas
- The intervention allows students to receive one-to-one assistance
- Students have increased opportunities to respond in smaller groups
- It promotes academic and social development for both the tutor and tutee
- Student engagement and time on task increases
- Peer tutoring increases self-confidence and self-efficacy (Spencer, 2006)
- The strategy is supported by a strong research base (e.g., Calhoun, Al Otaiba, Cihak, King, & Avalos, 2007; Kunsch, Jitendra, & Sood, 2007; Vasquez & Slocum, 2012)

What are the most frequently used peer tutoring models?

Classwide Peer Tutoring (CWPT):

Classwide peer tutoring involves dividing the entire class into groups of two to five students with differing ability levels. Students then act as

tutors, tutees, or both tutors and tutees. Typically, CWPT involves highly structured procedures, direct rehearsal, competitive teams, and posting of scores (Maheady, Harper, & Mallette, 2001). The entire class participates in structured peer tutoring activities two or more times per week for approximately 30 minutes (Harper & Maheady, 2007). While the procedures and routines in CWPT remain the same, student pairings or groups may change weekly or biweekly. In CWPT, student pairings are fluid and may be based on achievement levels or student compatibility. Students may also be grouped to promote social development or opportunities to work with students from a variety of backgrounds.

Cross-age Peer Tutoring: Older students are paired with younger students to teach or review a skill. The positions of tutor and tutee do not change. The older student serves as the tutor and the younger student is the tutee. The older student and younger student can have similar or differing skill levels, with the relationship being one of a cooperative or expert interaction. Tutors serve to model appropriate behavior, ask questions, and encourage better study habits. This arrangement is also beneficial for students with disabilities as they may serve as tutors for younger students.

Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS):

PALS, a version of the CWPT model, involves a teacher pairing students who need additional instruction or help with a peer who can assist

(Fuchs, Fuchs, & Burish, 2000). Groups are flexible and change often across a variety of subject areas or skills. Cue cards, small pieces of cardstock upon which are printed a list of tutoring steps, may be provided to help students remember PALS steps (Spencer, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2003). All students have the opportunity to function as a tutor or tutee at differing times. Students are typically paired with other students who are at the same skill level, without a large discrepancy between abilities.

Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (RPT): Two or more students alternate between acting as the tutor and tutee during each session, with equitable time in each role. Often, higher performing students are paired with lower performing students. RPT utilizes a structured format that encourages teaching material, monitoring answers, and evaluating and encouraging peers. Both group and individual rewards may be earned to motivate and maximize learning. Students in RPT may prepare the instructional materials and are responsible for monitoring and evaluating their peers once they have selected a goal and reward as outlined by their teacher.

Same-age Peer Tutoring: Peers who are within one or two years of age are paired to review key concepts. Students may have similar ability levels or a more advanced student can be paired with a less advanced student. Students who have similar abilities should have an equal understanding of the content material and concepts. When pairing students with differing levels, the roles of tutor and tutee may be alternated, allowing the lower performing student to quiz the higher performing student. Answers should be provided to the student who is lower achieving when acting as a tutor in order to assist with any deficits in content knowledge. Same-age peer tutoring, like classwide peer tutoring, can be completed within the students' classroom or tutoring can be completed across differing classes.

Procedures are more flexible than traditional classwide peer tutoring configurations.

How should tutors and tutees be selected?

One common method for determining dyads, or groups, involves ranking students from the highest performing to the lowest performing student for the particular activity or subject. Pairs can be formed by cutting the list in half and then matching the top performing student with the first lowest performing student, the second highest performing student with the second lowest performing student, and so forth (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Kazdan, 1999). If heterogeneous groups are desired, the number of students in each team should be determined. The list of students can then be numbered from one to the desired number of persons in a group and then repeated until the entire class is included (Harper & Maheady, 2007).

When selecting tutors, teachers should be cognizant of which students can be most helpful in the process. Teachers should be mindful of differing student personalities, needs, and preferences. Dyads or groups should be established accordingly.

How should peer tutoring models be selected?

Peer tutoring models are flexible and can be altered to meet individual student or class learning needs. The academic task should dictate the appropriate model based on content and learning goals. While there is some upfront planning and instruction, once students develop an understanding of procedures, groups or dyads can be altered dependent upon the setting, activity, or desired learning outcomes.

How much instruction is needed to use peer tutoring?

Depending on the subject area and model selected, one to four, 30- to 45-minute sessions

can be devoted to teaching and modeling (see Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2007; Spencer, 2006; Polloway, Patton, & Serna, 2008). Students should master each step of the model selected before learning additional skills. A teacher will need to closely monitor student progress to ensure that established procedures are followed, students utilize interpersonal skills, and content is covered.

How should peer tutors be trained?

- Establish rules for confidentiality of student progress.
- Define and develop procedures for social skills students may need throughout peer tutoring (i.e., sharing, taking turns, using respectful language, and accepting criticism or feedback).
- Define and develop procedures for moving into peer tutoring groups quickly and quietly.
- Explain and model peer tutoring and allow students to practice prior to the first peer tutoring session. Consider using a prepared script for practicing interactions (Fulk & King, 2001).
- Train students how to provide feedback for correct and incorrect peer responses, including praise.
- Teach students how to carefully monitor their own and their partner's progress.

What can be done to support peer tutoring initiatives?

- Provide direct, systematic instruction for the peer tutoring process selected.
- Consider providing cue cards summarizing procedures or post procedures until automaticity is established.
- Model error correction procedures.
- Chart, and consider posting, student or group progress.
- Praise use of tutoring procedures in addition to correct responses.

- Share with students the link between peer tutoring and increased achievement.

What is an ideal schedule for peer tutoring implementation?

Like the models and formation of groups, the development of a peer tutoring schedule is flexible. However, it should be consistent. For example, peer tutoring can occur two to three times per week for 20 minutes, with increasing student responsibility and fading of supports as students master the selected peer tutoring process. However, it is important that student progress and procedures are consistently monitored to ensure that accurate review and error correction occurs.

What steps are needed to plan for peer tutoring implementation?

Planning and Implementing a Peer Tutoring Program

1. Clarify the specific objectives of the tutoring program, including both academic and social objectives when appropriate.
2. List objectives in a form that can be easily measured. For example:
 - “Students serving as tutees will improve reading fluency by 30% on classroom reading materials in the next 12 weeks.”
 - “Performance of all students on weekly spelling tests will improve to an average of 85%; no student will score lower than 60%.”
 - “Within 8 weeks, students involved in tutoring will report that math is at least their third favorite class.”
3. Choose tutoring partners carefully. No firm conclusions can be drawn to direct tutoring choices; nevertheless, several considerations should be taken into account. Some teachers have recommended choosing students as tutors who are conscientious in class, and who generally have to work for their grades. These teachers have believed that the brightest students may have less empathy for students who do not learn easily (Jenkins & Jenkins, 1981), although, exceptions to this are commonly found. Other considerations include the compatibility of the tutoring pair. Teachers should find pairs who will work together well; however, they should also encourage pairing students who are different in gender, race, or socioeconomic status whenever possible, and not exclusively support established groupings.
4. Establish rules and procedures for the tutoring program. These rules should cover how students are to interact with each other, and specify the type of interactions that are not acceptable. Procedures should specify the times and dates of tutoring, the materials to be used, and the specific activities to be undertaken.
5. Implement the tutoring program, monitor it carefully, and be consistent in enforcing the rules and procedures. Modify rule and procedures as necessary.
6. Evaluate the program frequently, and do not wait for the end of the program to determine whether it was effective. Collect information throughout the program, and predict whether it will be successful. If progress is not being made, modify the program.

Note: From *The Inclusive Classroom: Strategies for Effective Instruction* (3rd ed., p. 183), by M. A. Mastropieri and T. E. Scruggs, 2007, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall. Copyright 2007 by Merrill/Prentice Hall. Reprinted with permission.

What are some strategies for avoiding behavioral challenges?

- Use multiple sources of data to establish groups (Sutherland & Snyder, 2007).
- Provide cue cards.
- Post procedures.
- Review and model steps for providing constructive feedback.
- Reinforce students using specific, clear feedback.
- View challenges as teachable moments.
- Evaluate and re-evaluate student pairings to determine success, and if necessary, rearrange pairs accordingly.

What would a CWPT session look like in a classroom?

After determining the desired content for CWPT, three 20-minute sessions were scheduled for the first week. A list of key vocabulary from the current science unit was identified and the method of tutoring was established as flashcard review. Key questions relevant to the unit concepts were printed on one side of index cards while the other side of the card was printed with the answer. Students were ranked from highest performing to lowest performing. The student list was cut in half and the top performing student was paired with the highest lower performing student. In addition, all students were split into two teams, independent of tutor/ tutee pairings.

Students were reminded of procedures, rules, and expectations during CWPT. Students were instructed to collect flash card materials and to select the first tutor. Procedures were outlined to include having the tutor pose each question to the tutee as written on the flash card, and upon

receiving an answer from the tutee, placing the card into either a correct or incorrect pile. Tutors were instructed to praise tutees for correct answers and to providing corrections for incorrect answers.

Once instructions were provided, a timer was set for 10 minutes for the first tutor and tutee rotation. At the end of the 10 minutes, tutors recorded the number of correct and incorrect answers on a progress monitoring worksheet. Tutors and tutees switched roles and the remaining flash cards were used to quiz the second student. Again, at the end of another 10-minute session, the second tutor recorded the tutees progress, tallying correct and incorrect answers. Each student's progress for the daily peer tutoring session was recorded on the class-wide team tally sheet displayed in the classroom. At the end of the week, winning teams are presented with certificates and new teams were generated for the following week.

What would a PALS session look like in a classroom?

To assist students with math concepts, two 30-minute sessions were scheduled for the first week. Math problems from the current math unit were compiled and a worksheet covering each component of the unit was created to highlight the most important material. Students were placed into pairs based on an alphabetical list of student last names. Students were reminded of procedures, rules, and expectations during PALS.

Roles were determined for each pair. A "coach" and a "player" were assigned for the first day. Coaches were instructed to ask the player guided questions as a way to review math problems in each unit component. Each coach in each pair was provided with the same guide as a way to

prompt players to think about solutions to the math problems. In addition, all students were trained to correct peers who made mistakes in a polite and constructive manner. The coach questioned and guided the math problem activity for approximately 15 minutes. For the remaining 15 minutes of the PALS activity, all students received a worksheet that covered the material presented. During the first 10 minutes, each student individually completed the worksheet task that included both review and more challenging problems. During the last five minutes, students exchanged papers and, using a key provided by the teacher, corrected one another's papers. Each paper was scored and collected by the teacher who used the information as a means of assessing student progress. For the second session during the first week, the roles of "coach" and "player" were reversed, allowing each student to assume a tutor and tutee role.

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Peer Tutoring Resources

Websites

<http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/>: Resources and professional development modules for implementing PALS at the primary, elementary, and high school levels

http://aim.cast.org/learn/historyarchive/backgrounderpapers/peer-mediated_instruction_National

Center for Assessable Instructional Materials; provides information and materials for implementing peer-mediated learning strategies and interventions

<http://www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/peer-tutoring/>: K-8 Access Center, provides

information about using peer tutoring strategies in mathematics

<http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals/>: Professional development, teacher materials and frequently asked

questions for teachers implementing PALS

http://cecp.air.org/Peer_Tutoring.pdf: Brief synopsis of peer tutoring from The Center for

Effective Collaboration and Practice's Classwide Peer Tutoring: Information for Families

Books

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