Peer Tutoring...
a proactive intervention for the classroom

This Intervention Tip Sheet has been developed to assist teachers and parents in providing the best possible educational opportunities to students with emotional and behavioral disorders. This Tip Sheet was published by the Institute on Community Integration, College of Education, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis and was authored by Kareen Smith of the Institute.

Introduction

Peer tutoring is an organized learning experience in which one student serves as the teacher or tutor, and one is the learner or tutee. It gives students an opportunity to use their knowledge in a meaningful, social experience (Conrad, 1974). Tutors reinforce their own learning by reviewing and reformulating their knowledge. Tutees gain one-on-one attention. Both tutors and tutees gain self-confidence (Howard et al., 1986), the tutor by seeing self-competence in his or her ability to help someone and the tutee by receiving positive reinforcement from peers.

Who should be a tutor?

All students with some level of responsibility should be given the opportunity to be tutors. Research has shown that the achievement level of the tutor does not matter in terms of tutee gains (Conrad, 1974).

How do I train tutors?

In order to have a successful peer-tutoring program, tutors <u>do</u> need to be trained. Basing a tutor-training program on the following method has been shown to produce effective peer-tutors:

<u>Positive verbal feedback:</u> Teach your tutors the importance of positive verbal feedback. Prompt students to come up with a list of standard statements which they feel may be positively reinforcing. They also need to be taught how much positive feedback to give. Giving feedback after each and every response can take too much time and diminish its effect. Teach tutors to give genuine praise after every third or fourth correct response and after particularly difficult problems. Make sure to have them practice.

<u>Corrective feedback:</u> Teach your tutors how to respond when an incorrect answer is given. When an incorrect answer is given, the tutor should promptly give and explain the correct answer *without being critical of the tutee*, and then give the tutee an opportunity to repeat the correct answer.

<u>Modeling by you, the teacher:</u> Model these behaviors for the tutors-in-training. Give correct and incorrect examples of how to give positive and corrective feedback. This is a good opportunity for the tutors to ask any questions they may have.

<u>Role-playing between teacher and tutors:</u> Role- play the tutoring process with each tutor, alternately playing the role of both tutor and tutee. This is a good time for those observing to practice using their positive and corrective feedback knowledge, to give suggestions, and to share any ideas for improvement.

<u>Role-playing between students:</u> This is identical to the role-playing between teacher and tutors except that, in this step, the teacher observes and coaches tutors.

How do I initiate peer-tutoring?

Tutor-training, including those components listed above, should take place over several sessions so that the tutors have plenty of opportunity to practice and begin to feel comfortable. It will probably also be necessary to provide assistance during the onset of tutoring.

It is important that the tutor is trained specifically for each type of activity or topic they will be tutoring. The tutor should understand, for example, how to use the flashcards, what the rules of the game are, or other activity specific knowledge.

What are some ideas for using peer-tutoring?
Peer tutoring is most effective with drill and practice activities rather than with the introduction of new information. With this in mind, the following are some ideas for implementing peer tutoring:

Reading:
- reading books together
- sight word practice (i.e., flashcards)
- writing a story together
- completing reading comprehension tasks together

Math:
- practice math flash cards
- solve word problems together
- seriation tasks (tasks which involve a series of steps)

Just about any kind of seat work can be worked on in tutor-tutee pairs. With a little creativity on the part of both teachers and students, games and activities can be adapted to learning tasks for tutors and tutees.

Should I monitor progress?
Monitoring the effectiveness and productivity of tutoring sessions is necessary in motivating students. This can be accomplished by quizzing students on the material they have covered, having them turn in their work, or having students monitor themselves, for example, by having the tutor keep track of correct and incorrect answers by making marks on a card. The results from each monitoring card from a tutoring session can then be used to fill in a progress chart which, over time, will be an indicator of progress.

How should I deliver reinforcement?
Reinforcers should be given to reward productive tutoring sessions and to motivate students. The reinforcement schedule can be based on the amount of work completed and how much of that is completed correctly; student self-monitoring cards can be very useful in keeping track of this aspect of the program. It is important to distribute reinforcers equally to both the tutor and tutee, whether they are edibles or a preferred activity for the student.

Final points on peer-tutoring...
Not all tutor-tutee pairs will work well together. And, while pairs may need to be changed, it is not necessary that they are homogeneous. Students can benefit socially from a partner who has a different gender, ethnicity, age, etc. Not every method will work for every student in every situation.

While peer-tutoring can not replace direct teacher instruction, it is a tool which can strongly enhance the students' overall achievement. In addition, it is inexpensive and relatively easy to implement.

References

Conrad, E. (1974). *Peer tutoring: A cooperative learning experience.* Tucson: Arizona. Center for Educational Research and Development, University of Arizona. ED108 747.

Howard, W.L., Heron, T.E., Ellis, D.E., & Cooke, N.L. (1986). Teaching first grade peer tutors to use verbal praise on an intermittent schedule. *Education and Treatment of Children, 9*, 5-15.

Jorgensen, E.S. (1978). Cross-age, multicultural peer tutoring in an elementary resource room. ED153 419.