Peer Tutoring: Part of Learning Supports

To teach is to learn twice

Teachers can't and shouldn't be expected to work alone in the classroom. This is particularly the case in schools serving large numbers of students who are not doing well and where class size can range up to over 40 students.

Schools need to develop a variety of ways that teachers can expand and integrate social capital into classrooms to improve resources and strategies for enhancing learning and performance. One readily available set of resources are students themselves. We have explored the topic of students as mentors in another information resource (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mentoring.pdf). Here the focus is on peer tutoring.

What is Peer Tutoring?

The term *peer tutoring* covers a range of activity involving students helping each other practice what they have learned and deepen their understanding. At school, such tutoring commonly involves designating a higher performing student as the tutor and a lower performing student as the tutee. *Cross-age tutoring* is a way to capitalize on experienced students. Teachers identify which youngsters require help on specific skills (including individuals with disabilities) and which students are most appropriate to help them. These individual peer tutoring efforts can be thought of as a form of service learning for the tutors.

Efforts to formalize peer tutoring/teaching as a whole class approach to instruction are becoming popular. These involve *reciprocal peer tutoring* (i.e., pairs of students take turns as tutor and tutee). Two examples are:

>**Classwide Peer Tutoring** (CWPT) – Students pair-up and take turns as tutor and tutee. As described on the University of Kansas website , CWPT "is a comprehensive instructional procedure or teaching strategy based on reciprocal peer tutoring and group reinforcement wherein an entire classroom of students is actively engaged in the process of learning and practicing basic academic skills simultaneously in a systematic and fun way." http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu/?q=instruction/classwide_peer_tutoring

>**Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies** (PALS) – This also is a classwide peer tutoring program. Students are carefully partnered to work on activities addressing the academic needs of both students. Pairs are changed regularly and all students have the opportunity to be "coaches" and "players" over a period of time as students work on a variety of skills. PALS is used across content areas. The What Works Clearinghouse describes the way it is used to improve reading. (See the description in the box on the next page.)

The intent in these whole class approaches is to pair students as they work on different activities so they help each other overcome any difficulties learning.

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*The material in this document reflects work done by Jeffrey Liando as part of his involvement with the national Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA.

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Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)

From What Works Clearinghouse (focusing on reading):

This program supplements the primary reading curriculum. Pairs of students work together on reading activities intended to improve reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Students in the pairs-who alternately take on the roles of tutor and tutee read aloud, listen to their partner read, and provide feedback during various structured activities. Teachers train students to use the following learning strategies: passage reading with partners, paragraph "shrinking" (or describing the main idea), and prediction relay (predicting what is likely to happen next in the passage). The program includes separate versions for kindergarten, grade 1, grades 2-6, and high school.

For example, at the first grade level, PALS includes 70 lessons divided into "sounds and words" and "Partner Reading". In "sounds and words", a teacher introduces new vocabulary and afterwards the student pair goes off to do a step-by-step set of activities. For each activity, the stronger reader performs the activity first and then coaches the other student. After each activity, the student checks it off as completed and then the pair switches roles. In "partner reading", each student has the chance to read to the other. A book is read four times before it is traded in for a new one. Throughout the process, each pair of students reads a book that is at the weaker reader's level, with the stronger reader helping with the vocabulary and comprehension (McMaster & Fuchs, 2015).
(For more details and for relevant research on PALS, go to
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc_pals_013112.pdf)

Potential Benefits

Reviewers of research on peer tutoring programs have designated them as promising. For a summary of the various findings, see
http://www.peertutoringresource.org/research-on-peer-tutoring-impacts-and-outcomes-2/

For the teacher. With respect to enhancing classroom-based supports for learning, peer tutoring establishes another set of resources that helps teachers personalize learning and provide special assistance when needed. Peer tutors who are trained to provide special assistance free up some time for a teacher to work individually with students who need expert help to engage and re-engage them in classroom learning.

For the tutee. Examples of possible benefits for students include increased motivation and learning, improved, personal and social development, reduced misbehavior, support for transitions, and facilitation of the inclusion of special education students.

For the tutor. Students who tutor have an opportunity to improve and deepen their learning, enhance their feelings of competence, and grow personally, interpersonally, and emotionally.

For a general discussion of peer tutoring, see (1) the online review by the National Education Association (http://www.nea.org/tools/35542.htm) and (2) the material on the website of the Peer Tutoring Resource Center (http://www.peertutoringresource.org/). The latter also has resources related to developing a peer tutoring program.

Some Personal Reflections on Observing Classroom Peer Tutoring

As noted, this document reflects work done by Jeffrey Liando as part of his involvement with our Center. Given his interest in the topic, he observed and inquired about versions of whole classroom peer tutoring. Below are his reflections (edited).

At an elementary school, he saw teachers implementing what they indicated was a version of PALS during reading time.

> *The teacher had already ranked each student based on their reading level. And she had organized various books in terms of reading levels. She used different colored stickers placed on the cover of each book to denote the reading level. Students were assigned a color so they would know which books to choose from. The books covered a wide variety of topics. Giving a choice is intended to let a student find a book that interests them, thereby heightening engagement and motivation to learn. The teachers paired students up after they students select their books.*
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> *One student read while the other listened closely. Afterwards, the listener was asked to summarize the main points and provide feedback to the reader. This process intends to hold the two students accountable by requiring each to understand the other's story and provide constructive feedback.*
>
> *At the end of the session, the teacher called each student individually to the back of the room and assessed their reading ability. Overtime, the intent is to gauge how well a student is improving not only in reading but in taking responsibility for learning and helping others learn.*

At a school for 6th through 12th graders, he observed science classes.

> *One class that stood out was a 6th grade chemistry class. The teacher situated his students in a way that encouraged student-student interaction. He created a seating chart situating academically stronger students with weaker ones to form peer discussion groups consisting of four students. At first, I did not realize he paired two sets of students. The intent was to form a balanced group where weaker students can ask questions that academically stronger students answer.*
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> *The teacher wrote a problem on the board, then he allowed time for each student to solve the problem on their own and after a few minutes he told students to talk with others in their group and ask them for help as needed. The teacher provided a scoring chart for each student to record participation (e.g., number of times help was given and received). Grades at the end of the semester reflected these data (e.g., attendance, times they participated, times they helped others).*

I concluded that the peer pairings enabled teachers to enhance the success of students in reading and in understanding scientifically challenging topics that require problem solving. The pairings enabled students to explain ideas and concepts with each other and actively participate in instructional activities. They worked collaboratively, provided and received constructive feedback, and evaluated their own learning. Much of the learning occurred without the teachers' direct involvement. Peer tutoring seems especially valuable given the large class sizes found in many schools.

Where Peer Tutoring Fits in a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System of Student and Learning Supports

The temptation when considering an approach such as peer tutoring is to just to adopt it as one more strategy for teachers to use. However, it is well to remember that

- students who are not doing well at school tend to have multiple problems (e.g., there is a strong interrelationship among learning, behavior, and emotional problems) and
- multiple problems require multifaceted interventions that can address both external and internal factors and enhance not only knowledge and skills, but also attitudes.

Therefore, while peer tutoring can be a part of providing learning supports, schools need a more comprehensive approach. We stress systemic changes that unify all existing student and learning supports and then develop them into a comprehensive and equitable system. One major arena of such a system is classroom-based learning supports. This arena emphasizes the reality that teachers need a range of colleagues, volunteers, and students to work with them in the classroom to enable a personalized approach to instruction and enhance special assistance for students as necessary. Peer tutoring is one part of this facet of a student/learning support system.

Furthermore, we stress that key to transforming current student and learning supports into an effective system is expanding school improvement policy and reworking operational infrastructure for implementation and sustainability. In this respect, it is essential to resist "project mentality." Pursuing changes in how schools provide student/learning supports by just adding another strategy amounts to tinkering rather than fundamentally improving ways to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. Such tinkering tends to exacerbate the marginalization, fragmentation, counterproductive competition, and overspecialization that characterizes efforts to enhance equity of opportunity.

Given all this, we suggest that the aim of schools should be to use interest in peer tutoring and other ways of assisting in the classroom as a catalyst for taking the next step toward transforming student and learning supports. This means proceeding in ways that embed all separate initiatives into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of supports so that each school can effectively address a broad range barriers to student learning. This level of systemic change is imperative in order to significantly enhance equity of opportunity for students to succeed at school and beyond (e.g., see the box on the last page for more on this.)*

Concluding Comments

Peer tutoring is an increasingly popular adjunct for addressing persistent barriers to learning. It would be nice if the process of addressing factors interfering with school success could be handled solely by adding one more practice. Given that teachers can't do it alone, adult and crossage peer tutors and a variety of volunteers are a valuable resource. But, multifaceted and interrelated problems and solutions require a comprehensive and broadly collaborative approach.

Teachers must establish regular in-classroom collaborative working relationships with other teachers, student support staff, and volunteers to enhance equity of opportunity for students to succeed. And schools must transform how they connect with homes and communities so they can work together in pursuing shared goals.

As the *Every Student Succeeds Act* is implemented, tweaking current practices will not be sufficient to significantly counter the problems experienced by some students and enhance the well being of all students. Systemic transformation is imperative. School improvement decision makers and planners must address barriers to learning and teaching comprehensively, cohesively, and equitably.

References and Resources Used in Preparing this Information Resource

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For more resources, see:

- *National Association of Peer Programs* – http://www.peerprograms.org
- *Peer Resources* – http://www.peer.ca/helping.html
- *Peer Tutoring Resource Center* – http://www.peertutoringresource.org/
- *Tutor/mentor Institute* – https://mail.em.ucla.edu/owa/?ae=Item&t=IPM.Note&id=RgAAAAAQywnPTduxRYUvuDlFkqhwBwC7I8%2fqqvAVTb%2bVlB%2fW%2fgeJAAAAVxDhAAAHY2cRcMvMQInmNVKKBY94AAGTqpyvAAAJ

*A Note about Unifying and Developing a Comprehensive and Equitable System of Student and Learning Supports

With respect to transforming student and learning supports, our analyses (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 2006, 2017) indicate the following changes are needed:

(1) Expanding the policy framework for school improvement from a two- to a three component framework. The third component coalesces all efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching (e.g., unifies them as a Learning Support Component); is prioritized and developed as primary and essential; is fully entwined with the Instructional and Management/governance Components.

(2) Operationalizing the third component. Replacing fragmented practices that focus mainly on discrete problems requires reframing student and learning support interventions to create a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports in classrooms and school-wide. A prototype intervention framework has been developed that encompasses

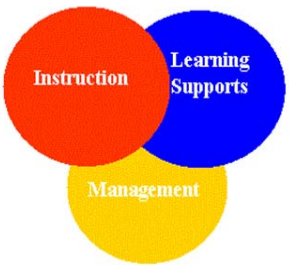
- a continuum of interventions consisting of subsystems weaving together school-community resources (not the typical multi-tiered approach) for
  - >promoting effective schooling and whole child development
  - >preventing problems experienced by teachers and students
  - >addressing such problems as soon as feasible after they arise
  - >providing for students who have severe and chronic problems

and

- a cohesively organized and delimited set of "content" arenas for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students in the classroom and school-wide. These arenas encompass the range of concerns a school copes with each day. They also stress enhancing intrinsic motivation and resilience as protective factors. Mentoring embeds nicely into all of these arenas.

(3) Implementing the third component. This involves

- reworking the operational infrastructure to ensure effective daily implementation and ongoing development of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable systemic approach that enhances equity of opportunity;
- enhancing mechanisms and strategic approaches for systemic change in ways that account for context and ensure effective implementation, replication to scale, and sustainability;
- developing standards and expanding the accountability framework to account for the third component and to do so in ways that encompass both formative and summative evaluation



*For details about a *Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System of Learning Supports*, see

>*ESSA, Equity of Opportunity, and Addressing Barriers to Learning* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essaanal.pdf

>*Piecemeal Policy Advocacy for Improving Schools Amounts to Tinkering and Works Against Fundamental System Transformation* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/tinkering.pdf

>All this is discussed in detail in a new book entitled: *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System.*