
Synthesis

Peer tutoringⁱ

Moderate impact for very low cost, based on extensive evidence



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Peer tutoring includes a range of approaches in which learners work in pairs or small groups to provide each other with explicit teaching support, such as:

- cross-age tutoring, in which an older learner takes the tutoring role and is paired with a younger tutee or tutees;
- peer assisted learning, which is a structured approach for mathematics and reading with sessions of 25 –35 minutes two or three times a week; and
- reciprocal peer tutoring, in which learners alternate between the role of tutor and tutee.

The common characteristic is that learners take on responsibility for aspects of teaching and for evaluating their success.

Peer assessment involves the peer tutor providing feedback to the tutee relating to their performance and can take different forms, such as reinforcing learning or correcting misunderstandings.

How effective is it?

Overall, the introduction of peer tutoring approaches appears to have a positive impact on learning, with an average positive effect equivalent to approximately five additional months' progress. Studies have identified benefits for both tutors and tutees, and for a wide range of age groups. Though all types of pupils appear to benefit from peer tutoring, there is some evidence that pupils who are low-attaining and those with special educational needs make the biggest gains.



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Peer tutoring appears to be particularly effective when pupils are provided with support to ensure that the quality of peer interaction is high: for example, questioning frames to use in tutoring sessions, and training and feedback for tutors. In cross-age peer tutoring some studies have found that a two-

year age gap is beneficial and that intensive blocks of tutoring are more effective than longer programmes.

Peer tutoring appears to be more effective when the approach supplements or enhances normal teaching, rather than replaces it. This suggests that peer tutoring is most effectively used to consolidate learning, rather than to introduce new material.

Latin American Evidenceⁱⁱ

Most of the studies in Latin America and the Caribbean on peer tutoring present consistent evidence about its positive effect on the teaching and learning process and also on students' performance. For example, an experimental study conducted in Brazil shows that tutored students obtained benefits in the acquisition of complex spatial concepts. This research argues for the importance of the practice of demonstration during the peer tutoring process. It has been also shown that peer tutoring constitutes a valuable strategy to support learning which is aided by computer programmes.

In general, the Latin American evidence shows that this type of intervention encourages students' collaboration, because it helps them to get involved with their peers' academic activity. They also highlight the idea that the amount of time giving and receiving tutoring are equally important. Overall, the quantitative and qualitative research in Latin America and the Caribbean on peer tutoring shows that this educational strategy is consistently positive.

How secure is the evidence?

There have been extensive studies done on peer tutoring, the majority of which show moderate to high average effects. High-quality reviews have explored the impact of peer tutoring at both primary and secondary level, and in a variety of subjects.

Though overall the evidence base related to peer tutoring is consistently positive, most recent studies of peer tutoring have found lower average effects, suggesting that monitoring the implementation and impact of peer tutoring is valuable. Overall, the evidence is rated as extensive.

What are the costs?

The direct costs of running peer tutoring in schools are very low, as few additional materials are required. Professional development and additional support for staff is recommended, particularly in the early stages of setting up a programme. Overall, the costs of this type of intervention are very low.

What should I consider?

Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:

1. Are the activities sufficiently challenging for the tutee to benefit from the tutor's support?
2. What support will the tutor receive to ensure that the quality of peer interaction is high?
3. Training for staff and tutors is essential for success. How will you ensure sufficient time to train both staff and tutors, and to identify and implement improvements as the programme progresses?
4. How will you ensure peer tutoring is being used to review or consolidate learning, rather than to introduce new material?
5. Four to ten week intensive blocks appear to provide maximum impact for both tutors and tutees. Can you arrange for your peer tutoring to follow this structure?

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