4-1-1977

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CROSS-AGE TUTORING AND THE SACROSANCT READING PERIOD

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Cross-age tutoring in the elementary school has long been recognized as a valid means of learning for both the tutor and the tutee; (Frager & Stern, 1970). Many studies even show that the tutors make greater gains than the tutees, (Cloward, 1967). Like many validated educational innovations, however, cross-age tutoring is not practiced to any great extent in the schools, particularly the elementary schools. One of the main reasons for this is that tutoring is difficult to fit into the regular school program. Reading, writing, social studies, math, science, health, etc., all seem to fill the day of the elementary school student. The problem of time becomes more severe as the student progresses through elementary school. It is further compounded in the intermediate grades when many schools begin forms of team teaching and/or departmentalization. The question seems to be then: How can one introduce a program such as cross-age tutoring without sacrificing components of the already existing program? The answer is simple. It can't be done! Something has to go! The purpose of this study then was to see the effect on student achievement when a cross-age tutoring program was substituted for a traditional program—in this case; the traditional reading program.

Setting Up The Program

Twenty-four fifth grade students all reading two or three years below grade level were selected for this experiment. This group of twenty-four was then randomly divided into two groups. One group had the normal forty-five minute reading periods, five days a week with the classroom teacher. This group used two different basal programs. The second group received only two days of regular classroom reading instruction per week. The other three days they tutored. This situation was carried out for only ten weeks, but getting classroom teachers and administrators to agree to such a practice required a great amount of persuasion.

The group from which the tutees were drawn consisted of twenty-four first graders all of whom were reading below grade level. As was done with the fifth graders, this group of twenty-four was randomly divided into two groups. One group received added instruction from the classroom teacher while their classmates received tutorial help from the fifth graders.

Both the fifth grade tutors and the first grade tutees, as well as their counterparts in the classroom, received pre and post tests. The fifth graders took the word and paragraph meaning subtests from the *Stanford Achievement Test* (Forms W & X). First graders took a criterion referenced test based on the Dolch List of 220 Basic Words.

The tutoring sessions took place in the small room of the school reading specialist and in the hall immediately adjoining that room. Normally, the classes of the reading specialist numbered about seven or eight. Giving the reading specialist a class of twenty-four represented an innovation in itself.

The first four days of the program consisted of training sessions for the fifth grade tutors. Day one of the training dealt with human relations and stressed simplified behavior modification techniques. During the second and third day of the training prospective tutors were introduced to the proper teaching techniques to use with their young charges. Basically, a flashcard procedure was used. Tutees were presented with sentences constructed from the Dolch list of 95 nouns and the Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary of 220 words. When they were unable to read a word, the tutors would teach it to them using the appropriate flashcard. Tutors were also introduced to various word games such as Concentration, Fish, and Word Bingo all of which used the Dolch words. Part of the tutoring sessions was devoted to playing these games. In addition, tutors practiced oral expressive reading of high interest books for first graders. Before reading to their students tutors were instructed to read a book into a tape recorder, listen to their own reading, and judge if it was presented in an interesting manner.

The remaining period of tutor training dealt with scheduling and record keeping. Tutors were instructed to devote fifteen minutes of each tutoring session to teaching, fifteen minutes to oral expressive reading and/or word games, and fifteen minutes to record keeping and planning. Each tutor was given a folder in which was stored all the tutee's work. In addition the tutor kept careful record of his or her student's progress and made appropriate comments on the record sheet about the work of the tutee.

Implications

The implications of this study are many. If nothing else it can be concluded that a cross-age tutoring program probably makes more efficient use of the time of the reading specialists. In many elementary schools the reading specialists are consigned to a small room where they see no more than fifty students a week. Thus, the over-all effect of their specialized training on the entire school is rather negligible. The implementation of a cross-age tutoring program definitely increases the scope of their efforts. One of the great advantages of this cross-age tutoring program is the observable increase in the self-concept of the young tutors. These particular tutors had been accustomed to failure, and to seeing their more able classmates grab the academic limelight. By placing them in a position of responsibility and by making them the academic paragons, this program almost guaranteed an increase in the self-esteem of these tutors.

The advantages of a tutoring program for the tutee were also manifold. Not only did the program provide the youngsters with truly individualized instruction, but it also provided these first graders with a truly interested "older brother or sister."

Of course, one of the most interesting implications of this particular is that it offers some proof that a cross-age tutoring situation can be *as*

academically beneficial if not more beneficial than "normal" classroom reading instruction. Thus, the fear of classroom teachers and administrators of depriving students of valuable class time appears to be ungrounded. Cross-age tutoring can be a truly educational experience, for both tutor and tutee. Teachers and administrators should make every effort to build it into the schedule even if it means sacrificing something as sacrosanct as the reading period. Just as obviously, however, no one would advocate complete abandonment of classroom instruction in favor of cross-age tutoring. Both tutors and tutees need the instructional base provided by the classroom teacher. Only then can they benefit from a tutoring program.

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