



Executive Summary of Research Related to Teaching by Elementary and Secondary School Students

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A. Research on teaching-related actions by K-12 students appears to support the following assertions:

- Tutoring of children by other children is beneficial for both the tutor and the tutee. Benefits to tutors appear to exceed benefits to tutees, although most studies show benefits to tutees as well. Benefits of being a tutor have been found for low-, average, and high-achieving students, and for students with various types of disabilities. The most frequently examined variables are academic achievement in math and reading. However, studies have also found benefits in the areas of motivation, self-concept, socialization skills, cooperative (as opposed to competitive) behavior in the classroom, attitudes towards tutees with disabilities, reduced absenteeism, and improved classroom behavior, indicating that affective benefits are likely as well. Participants in most studies were elementary and middle school students, but some evidence of benefits to high school students also exists.

Relevant Sources:

(Bar-Eli, Bar-Eli, Tenenbaum, & Forlin, 1998; Blake, Wang, Cartledge, & Gardner, 2000; Elbaum, Vaughn, & Hughes, 1999; Franca, Kerr, Reitz, & Lambert, 1990; Giesecke & Cartledge, 1993; Goodlad & Hirst, 1990; Grant, Murphy, Stafford, & Childers, 1997; Gumpel & Frank, 1999; Hansen, 1992; Jacobson, Thrope, & Fisher, 2001; Kamps, Kravitz, & Lopez, 1998; Kennedy, 1990; Kreuger & Braun, 1999; Labbo & Teale, 1990; Marious, 2000; Mathes & Babyak, 2001; Neuman & Roskos, 1991; Ponzio & Fisher, 1995; Ponzio & Peterson, 1999; Rekrut, 1994; Taylor, Hanson, Justice-Swanson, & Watts, 1997; Topping & Bamford, 1998; Zukowski, 1997)

- Cooperative learning, an instructional method which involves putting students in heterogeneous small groups to carry out tasks collaboratively, is effective in terms of student achievement and socialization. The achievement benefits appear to be true with tasks involving both lower- and higher-level cognition, and for low-, average-, and high-achieving students. A challenge in assessing the effectiveness of collaborative group work of all kinds is that implementation varies greatly, and effectiveness often depends on how and in what context cooperative learning is carried out.

Relevant Sources:

(Cohen, 1994; Davenport & Howe, 1999; Dori & Herscovitz, 1999; Hernandez Garduno, 2001; Matthews, 1992; Palincsar, Yvonne, Winn, & Stevens, 1991; Peklaj & Vodopivec, 1999; Qin, Johnson, & Johnson, 1995; Ramsay & Richards, 1997; Randall, 1999; Robinson, 1990, 1997; Ross & Smyth, 1995; Slavin, 1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1996; Sutherland, Wehby, & Gunter, 2000; Webb, Nemer, & Chizhik, 1998)

- Children who learn most in collaborative contexts (controlling for initial achievement) are those who provide detailed, elaborate, explanations to others. This is true in small group work and paired peer-tutoring contexts.

Relevant Sources:

(Cohen, 1994; Davenport & Howe, 1999; Fuchs et al., 1996; Webb, 1989, 1992)

- High achieving students are more likely to participate in small group work and also provide higher quality explanations in peer tutoring dyads and small groups than average- or low-achieving students.

Relevant Sources:

(Fuchs et al., 1996; Mulryan, 1994; O'Connor & Jenkins, 1996)

- Certain conditions increase the effectiveness of cooperative learning. One of these is the presence of group rewards, probably because this makes students want other students in their group to understand the material, motivating them to teach each other more effectively. The more effective teaching probably helps both the explainer and the child receiving the explanations.

Relevant Sources:

(Cohen, 1994; Slavin, 1996)

- Reciprocal peer tutoring programs, which involve students being paired and in a structured manner taking turns acting as tutor and tutee, are effective in terms of academic achievement in subject areas of math, reading, spelling, and science. They have been researched most at the elementary level, but appear to be effective at both elementary and secondary levels. There are studies of the effects of these programs on a variety of student populations, including high-, average-, and low-achievers, students with disabilities, low-income students, and minority students, generally with positive results. Studies of these programs do not separate effects on tutor from effects on tutee because all students play both roles.

Relevant Sources:

(Arreaga-Mayer, 1998; Butler, 1999; DuPaul, Ervin, & Hook, 1998; Ezell, Hunsicker, & Quinque, 1997; Fantuzzo, King, & Heller, 1992; Fantuzzo, Polite, & Grayson, 1990; Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Simmons, 1997; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Thompson, 2001; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Yen, 2001; L. S. Fuchs et al., 1997; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Kazdan, 1999; Greenwood, Arreaga-Mayer, & Utley, 2001; Greenwood, Terry, Arreaga-Mayer, & Finney, 1992; Greenwood, Terry, Utley, Montagna, & Walker, 1993; Harper, Maheady, & Mallette, 1999; Maheady, Harper, & Mallette, 2001; Maheady, Mallette, & Harper, 1991; Marston, Deno, Kim, Kiment, & Rogers, 1995; Mastropieri et al., 2001; Mathes & Babyak, 2001; Mathes & Fuchs, 1994; Mathes, Torgesen, & Allor, 2001; Mortweet, Utley, & Walker, 1999; Utay & Utay, 1997; Utley, Mortweet, & Greenwood, 1997)

- Reciprocal teaching is an approach to improving reading comprehension which involves instruction and practice of the following four instructional support strategies: generating questions, summarizing, attempting to clarify confusing words or text

meaning, and predicting what might happen next. The strategies are taught and modeled by the teacher, with the students gradually taking over the role of facilitator and providing instructional support to each other. Reciprocal teaching has been studied at the elementary, middle and high school levels, and with high-, average-, and low-achieving students, and its effectiveness is well-documented.

Relevant Sources:

(King & Johnson, 1999; Lederer, 2000; Marston et al., 1995; Palincsar et al., 1991; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994; Rosenshine & Meister, 1996)

- When students are placed in groups or dyads together without structure or training they generally do not effectively help each other, and without guidance their collaborative skills do not improve with time. Problems include, for example, omission of low-achieving students from discussions, a tendency for children to use lecture to explain things to each other, and confused explanations.

Relevant Sources:

(Fuchs, Fuchs, Bentz, Phillips, & Hamlett, 1994; Fuchs, Fuchs, Kazdan, & Allen, 1999; Kohler & Greenwood, 1990; McMahan & Goatley, 1995; Webb, Troper, & Fall, 1995)

- The quality of student interaction in collaborative work can be improved via training. More specifically, when children in reciprocal peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and reciprocal teaching contexts are trained in skills such as giving explanations, asking higher-order questions, and helping behaviors, the interactions among students are enhanced and learning increases.

Relevant Sources:

(Barron & Foot, 1991; Bentz & Fuchs, 1996; Fuchs et al., 1994; L. S. Fuchs et al., 1997; Lynn. S. Fuchs et al., 1999; Gillies & Ashman, 2000; King, 1994; King & Rosenshine, 1993; King, Staffieri, & Adelgais, 1998; Nath & Ross, 2001; Palincsar & Herrenkohl, 1999; Staub & Hunt, 1993)

B. Research on teaching actions of K-12 students does not appear to support the following common assumptions:

- *Cooperative learning and peer teaching are detrimental to the cognitive development of high ability students.*

Many studies of reciprocal peer tutoring and cooperative learning have examined the case of high ability students, and benefits of these approaches for this group are well-documented. This appears logical, since, as stated above: 1) it is generally the explainers who learn most in these situations, and, 2) high ability students are more likely than medium and low ability kids to be explainers. Relatedly, one interesting study (Linchevski & Kutscher, 1998) examined whether heterogeneous grouping of students in math would avoid the increased gap between high- and low-ability students that occurs over time with ability grouping (tracking) in that subject. The researchers were also interested in determining whether the gap that occurs is due to the low-ability students doing worse with tracking than they would with heterogeneous grouping or to the high-ability children doing better with tracking than they would with heterogeneous grouping. The study found that the increased gap is avoided with heterogeneous

grouping. Importantly, they also found that the gap appears to occur because low-ability students do worse with ability grouping than they would with mixed-ability grouping rather than because homogeneous grouping is good for high-ability children. The researchers conclude that low and average-ability children do much better with mixed-ability grouping than with tracking while the loss for high-ability children in heterogeneous grouping is negligible.

Relevant Sources:

(Cohen, 1994; Davenport & Howe, 1999; Dori & Herscovitz, 1999; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Thompson, 2001; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Yen, 2001; L. S. Fuchs et al., 1997; Fuchs et al., 1996; Lynn S. Fuchs et al., 1999; Hansen, 1992; Linchevski & Kutscher, 1998; Mathes & Babyak, 2001; Slavin, 1991, 1996; Webb, 1989, 1992)

- *Cooperative learning and peer teaching are detrimental to the development of students who are gifted.*

Criticism of cooperative learning and peer teaching practices is found most often in the area of gifted education. Reasons provided for the above assertion include the argument that gifted students tend to prefer to work alone or with other students of their ability, and that involvement in cooperative learning keeps them from doing higher level work that they should be doing. There is some evidence that gifted students prefer working in homogeneous groups and in competitive rather than cooperative contexts. However, this area is not well-researched, and there is at this time no good evidence to support the assertion that peer tutoring and cooperative learning have a negative impact on the achievement or motivation of these children. Obviously, these methods should be carefully implemented with gifted students, as they should with all types of students.

Relevant Sources:

(Colangelo & Davis, 1997; Hernandez Garduno, 2001; Matthews, 1992; Ramsay & Richards, 1997; Randall, 1999; Robinson, 1990, 1997; Ross & Smyth, 1995; Slavin, 1990a, 1990b)

C. The following issues related to the teaching actions of K-12 students would be interesting to examine in the future:

- *What exactly is it about teaching others that leads to achievement and affective benefits in children?*

It appears that providing explanations to others predicts learning, but why is that true, and are there other beneficial aspects of providing help to others? Several possible reasons for the benefits of teaching are cited in the literature, including the following: mental organization required to explain concepts and facts to others leads to increased learning; more frequent review of material leads to increased learning; generating questions for others leads students to think more about a topic; tutoring provides students with a meaningful use for the material which increases interest in the topic; tutoring leads to an increased understanding about the process of teaching, which leads students to empathize more with the teacher and hence to be more cooperative with and have a better attitude toward the teacher. Studies have examined some of these questions (c.f. Kennedy, 1990), but much remains to be learned.

Relevant Sources:

(Chan, Burtis, Scardamalia, & Bereiter, 1992; Chinn, O'Donnell, & Jinks, 2000; Goodlad & Hirst, 1990; Kennedy, 1990; Rosenshine & Meister, 1996; Slavin, 1996)

- *There are important types of teaching that differ from cooperative learning and peer tutoring that appear to be missing from the literature.*
One of these is individual students teaching groups of younger students on a topic that the student has mastered (currently practiced on an annual basis as a special event at the elementary school attended by my children); another is individual students or groups of students giving teaching-like presentations to other students. Information on the extent to which such formats are used, why they are used, and benefits of these practices (if any) for the student "teachers" and their "students" would be helpful.
- *As mentioned in Part B, above, more research is needed to determine whether peer tutoring and cooperative learning are beneficial or detrimental to gifted students. If benefits exist, what are they and under what specific conditions do they occur?*
- *Some components of "leadership skills" appear to be very similar to effective teaching skills. It would be interesting to examine the extent to which these two areas overlap. Further, the apparent assumption that leadership skills' development is appropriate for gifted children only should also be examined.*
There is a body of literature arguing for the development of "leadership skills" in K-12 students. Leadership skills are defined in various ways, including communication, problem-solving, collaboration, and stimulation of others' thinking, and they are most often discussed in relation to gifted students. (One article, for example, (Ross & Smyth, 1995), responds to the assertion that heterogeneous cooperative learning is harmful for gifted students by arguing that cooperative learning may give gifted students the opportunity to develop and be trained in leadership.)

Relevant Sources:

(Chan, 2000; Karnes & Stephens, 1999; Merriman, 1999; Myers & Slavin, 1990; Ross & Smyth, 1995)

- *Does being an effective peer teacher as an elementary or secondary school student predict effective teaching skills as an adult?*
- *If one's goal were to improve the quality of teachers in the profession, would it be more effective to develop teaching skills of all K-12 students or to try to identify and work with precocious child teachers in their classrooms? Does training children to teach peers or giving them opportunities to teach peers increase the likelihood that students will choose teaching as a profession?*

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