

Snapshot #5

Peer Tutoring: Lake Washington High School Benjamin Rush Elementary School

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RESEARCH FINDINGS

A review of effective schooling practices reveals that many support the use of peer tutoring. As indicated in *Effective Schooling Practices: A Research Synthesis* (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1984) supportive research findings include:

At the CLASSROOM level:

1.2 THERE ARE HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING.

- No students are expected to fall below the level of learning needed to be successful at the next level of education.

1.3 STUDENTS ARE CAREFULLY ORIENTED TO LESSONS.

- The relationship of a current lesson to previous study is described. Students are reminded of key concepts or skills previously covered.

1.4 INSTRUCTION IS CLEAR AND FOCUSED.

1.5 LEARNING PROGRESS IS MONITORED CLOSELY.

- Teachers frequently monitor student learning, both formally and informally.
- Teachers require that students be accountable for their academic work.

1.6 WHEN STUDENTS DON'T UNDERSTAND, THEY ARE RETAUGHT

1.7 CLASS TIME IS USED FOR LEARNING.

- Students are encouraged to pace themselves. If they don't finish during class, they work on lessons before or after school, during lunch or at other times so they keep up with

what's going on in class.

1.11 PERSONAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ARE POSITIVE.

At the SCHOOL level:

2.5 SCHOOL TIME IS USED FOR LEARNING.

- Extra learning time is provided for students who need or want it; students can get extra help outside of regular school hours.

2.6 LEARNING PROGRESS IS MONITORED CLOSELY.

- Summaries of student performances are shared with all staff who then assist in developing action alternatives. Periodic reports are also made to the community.

This list of proven instructional and administrative practices suggests some of the actions teachers and schools can take to enhance student learning and other outcomes. Peer tutoring, with its focus on monitoring, support, and corrective feedback, represents specific means of implementing these practices. This report details a secondary peer tutoring program and a peer tutoring program operating at the primary level.

SITUATION

Lake Washington High School (Kirkland) and Benjamin Rush Elementary School (Redmond) are in the Lake Washington School District, located across Lake Washington from Seattle. Over 20,000 students attend Lake Washington's 31 schools. The area is predominantly suburban and relatively affluent (\$27,500 median annual family income in 1984), although 15 percent of the population lives in households with less than \$15,000 annual income. Over 90 percent of Lake Washington's students are Caucasian. The largest minority group is the 5.4 percent of the district's students who are of Asian extraction.

Lake Washington High School has 1,582 students in grades 10-12. Benjamin Rush is a K-6 school with 586 students.

In 1982, the Lake Washington School District made available \$2 million for remediation programs, and schools within the district were invited to plan and develop their own remediation approaches. At Lake Washington High School and at Benjamin Rush Elementary School, an educational consultant to the district worked with school staffs to set up peer tutoring programs to help those students who were performing below grade level.

CONTEXT: LAKE WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

Observations of a peer tutoring program in operation in the Beaverton (Oregon) School District led Lake Washington High School staff to decide to develop and implement a similar program. However, whereas the Beaverton program included the use of instructional aides, the Lake Washington program was set up to be entirely reliant on students to conduct the tutoring.

Now in its sixth year of operation, the peer tutoring program is a well-established part of the

life of the school. Depending upon the semester, the class meets for either five or six 55-minute periods per day, with 125 to 150 students participating. A part-time program manager and three part-time teachers staff the peer tutoring program. Major program features are as follows:

- **ELECTIVE CREDIT.** Peer tutoring is an elective class for which both tutors and tutees receive credit toward graduation.
- **STAFFING BY SUBJECT MATTER TEACHERS.** Based on the failure of some peer tutoring programs operated by special education teachers in special education resource rooms, Lake Washington program developers were careful not to put students off by using such a structure. Instead, the program has its own room and is staffed by social studies and English teachers, as well as special education teachers.
- **STUDENT SELECTION BASED ON INTEREST AND WILLINGNESS.** Potential tutors may be recommended by teachers or counselors; and potential tutees may be encouraged by counselors, teachers, or parents. Ultimately, however, self-selection is the major avenue by which students become involved. Program teachers have found that dedication and perseverance are the most important qualities in both tutors and tutees, and that these attitudes are not likely to be present if a student is in the class against his or her will.
- **FOCUS ON TARGET CLASSES.** when signing up for peer tutoring, each tutee identifies a "target class"--one course in which he/she anticipates needing help--and this becomes the focus for the tutoring during the semester. Tutors identify target classes, too, and may receive help from the teacher and/or other students. The "target class" choice of the tutors serves primarily as a model for their tutees. They share with tutees their notebook organization, time management calendars, notes, assignment records, etc.
- **TUTOR-TUTEE PAIRS.** tutors and tutees are arranged in pairs or trios based on target class needs and ability to work together. These partnerships are maintained throughout the semester.
- **TRAINING.** At the beginning of each semester tutors and tutees receive training in study skills, learning strategies, organizational skills, mnemonic devices, time management and other methods for learning how to learn effectively. Students also learn communication skills and ways to give each other encouragement and positive feedback. A cooperative learning approach is used for the training, with "veteran" and new members of the peer tutoring class working together.
- **MINI-LESSONS.** The first five to ten minutes of each peer tutoring class are devoted to reviewing learning strategies, tutoring methods, and other processes introduced in the initial training.
- **TESTING PROGRAM.** Students are periodically tested on learning strategies, study skills, and other content presented in the initial training and ongoing minilessons.