

# Primary schoolchildren can be great tutors

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Results from a project run in 129 primary schools in Scotland, the largest ever trial of peer tutoring, show that children as young as seven to eight years old can benefit from a tutoring session as short as twenty minutes per week.

The findings and the ease of implementation of the scheme indicate that peer tutoring could be an effective way to supplement the work of teachers and classroom assistants, and could be rolled out as a nationwide programme. The boost to school pupils' attainment provided by peer tutoring was equivalent to about three months progress in both maths and reading. This is larger than the impact of national strategies and comes at a fraction of the cost.

Peer tutoring is a specific form of peer learning. It involves one student tutoring another where pairs are typically of differing academic standing and sometimes differing ages (cross-age tutoring). Cross-age tutoring was found to be particularly effective in [age groups](#) with two years' difference.

The results of the two year trial, led by Durham University, working in partnership with the University of Dundee and Fife Council are published in the journal, School Effectiveness and School Improvement.

Professor Peter Tymms, School of Education, Durham University, said: "Expensive policy initiatives have often had little effect on learning. The tutoring scheme requires some organisation and a little bit of training but it's an inexpensive scheme to implement in that it involves no fancy

equipment.

"The trial shows that a tutoring scheme could be implemented across educational areas nationwide. Older pupils boosted their knowledge and skills by becoming tutors and the younger tutees benefitted greatly from one-to-one learning with older children."

During the Fife trial, various lengths of sessions were tried from intensive (three twenty-minute sessions per week) to light (twenty minutes a week) over the course of 15 weeks. Children aged seven to twelve years old were assessed before the project started with PIPS (Performance Indicators in Primary Schools) and again at the end of the two year project; these assessments included measures of pupils' reading and mathematics attainment, science attainment, vocabulary, non-verbal ability and attitudes. The results of PIPS show that cross-age peer tutoring had a consistent positive impact on attainment in reading and mathematics.

In the reading tasks, the pupils selected suitable books and then read with each other (this is called Paired Reading). The tutor gives corrections where required. In mathematics, a method known as Duolog Maths was used which involved eight stages of discussion, including Questioning, Summarising and Generalising. Each individual has a defined role with protocols for interaction within the sessions.

Nora Conlin, Education Officer from Fife Education Service, said: "We wanted to engage schools in reform to improve students' attainment and attitudes across a whole education area using a sustainable model. Pupil tutoring is an extremely effective way of boosting learning in schools."

Tutoring is a kind of teaching that carefully takes into account that tutors are not professionals, and structures the interaction so that both tutor and tutee benefit.

Before and during the tutoring trial, teachers received training to help deliver the sessions and commitment to implementation of the programme was given by all of the partners.

Cross-age tutoring is more difficult to organise than same-age tutoring as it involves bringing children together from different classes but it was the most effective method with benefits to all: the tutee gets the one-to-one input of a child with higher skills, while the tutor reinforces previous learning and develops new skills. In practice, this form of tutoring can be implemented with children from classes next door to each other, or just along the corridor, the researchers say.

Professor Keith Topping, School of Education, University of Dundee, said: "We received excellent feedback from teachers about the project. 92 per cent of teachers reported that the project worked well. Children enjoyed taking on the mantle of being a tutor and responded positively to the responsibility.

"[Tutoring](#) can be implemented across many schools with little fuss and disruption. It can be easily embedded into teachers' practice, bringing benefits at every level to authorities, schools, teachers and pupils."

Ken Greer, Executive Director of Education and Children's Services in Fife said: "I am delighted that this excellent piece of research on improving pedagogy by peer learning is being published. We often hear of strategies for improving learning based on conjecture. This is definitely not the case here."

Provided by Durham University

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