

# Peer Tutoring and Advanced Learners: Effective Strategy or Unfair Use of Student Time?

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## What is Peer Tutoring?

Peer tutoring (PT) is characterised [sic] by specific role-taking as tutor or tutee, with high focus on curriculum content and usually also on clear procedures for interaction, in which participants receive generic and/or specific training (Topping, 2007, p. 632).

Reciprocal peer tutoring

Cross-age tutoring

Same-age tutoring

## Different from...

Cooperative learning

Collaborative learning

Turn and talk

Small group learning

At the most fundamental level, it is the instructional task and the asymmetrical tutor and tutee roles that distinguish peer tutoring from other forms of peer learning. (Roscoe & Chi, 2008, p. 535)

# Peer Tutoring as Differentiation Strategy

Approach to managing “fast finishers”

Strategy for differentiating for advanced learners – have them help others

## Pros and Cons

Pros	Cons

Let's apply a critical thinking strategy to the practice...

What's the purpose?

## Reflecting on purpose...

Purposes *for whom?*

Who are the beneficiaries of the practice?

What are the intended learning outcomes for all the learners involved?

What does it reflect that  
**we believe** about  
teaching and learning?

## Beliefs and Assumptions about Teaching and Learning

Belief that students will learn better by explaining to others

Assumption that students will be able to help others learn, despite limited or no training

## What's the **evidence?** – from the classroom

## Reflecting on evidence...

What evidence do we collect on the effectiveness of the practice?

What evidence do we collect to assess the degree to which students are reaching the intended learning outcomes?

## Evidence – from the literature

Most peer tutoring research focuses on benefits for the tutee.

Some key benefits for tutors include increases in helping behaviors and understanding of peers (e.g., Park & Oliver, 2009).

Other research showing academic benefits for tutors focuses on tutors who are themselves low-achieving.

## Further evidence

Spontaneous (untrained) tutoring behaviours can tend to be primitive (e.g., Person & Graesser, 1999), often characterised by questioning limited both in frequency and level of cognitive demand, coupled with infrequent correction of errors and the giving of positive feedback when not appropriate. (Topping, 2005, p. 633)

Knowledge-building versus knowledge-telling (Roscoe & Chi, 2008)

# TRAINING FOR THE TUTOR

Key observation about peer tutoring approaches reported in research



# What are the implications?

## Peer Tutoring as Differentiation for the Gifted

Should require training

Should involve discussion with parents and students

Should incorporate student choice

Should have measurable outcomes for academic and/or social and emotional learning

## Peer Tutoring as Differentiation

If it is a time-saving or behavior management measure, it may not be a well-reasoned decision.