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Cross-Age Tutoring--Using the 4 T's

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CROSS-AGE TUTORING—
USING THE 4 T's

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Cross-age tutoring or peer tutoring can be an effective instructionl strategy for remedial reading teachers who are overloaded with students. While the concept is not new, the purpose of this paper is to describe an organizational change in remedial reading classes using a cross-age or peer tutoring paradigm developed by the author. The paradigm is entitled the "4 T's Tutoring" (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Framework For Cross-Age Tutoring

| Testing | Training | Tutoring | Translating |
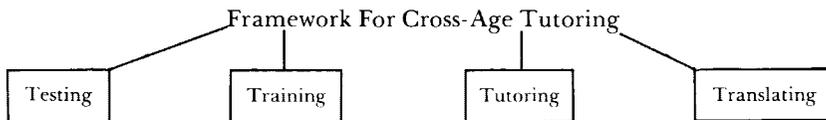
According to Spache (1976), "Of all the organizational changes that are supposed to be helpful, only those advocating using pupil teams or tutors seem currently to be achieving an impact upon pupil growth in reading" (p. 291). Also, cross-age tutoring can help the reading teacher individualize instruction, increase tutor and tutee motivation, improve the self-concepts of tutors, and tutees, as well as helping the teacher give direct instruction to more students. While many cross-age tutoring projects are well-planned, many times students who are put into a teaching role are given very little preparation prior to tutoring. While this technique may be satisfactory for a few students, more than likely it results in minimal improvement in reading.

Testing (T$_1$)

Figure 2

TESTING

Identify Tutors & Tutees

IRI

Group Diagnostic Test
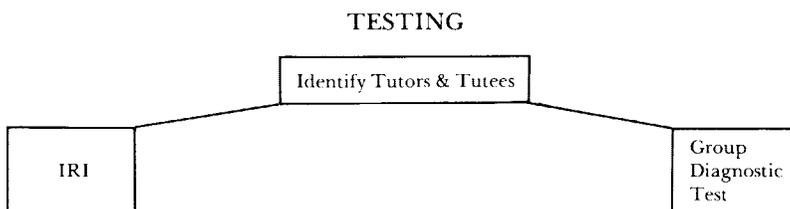
In this paper, a more structured tutoring program is recommended. In order for older disabled readers to tutor younger readers, testing of both groups is necessary in order to know their strengths and weaknesses. Depending upon the severity of the disabilities, the minimum diagnosis should include a thorough analysis of an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) and a group diagnostic test such as the Silent Reading Diagnostic Test (1970) or the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (1976). Through the use of the IRI, both an estimated instructional level and patterns of oral reading errors can be determined. The group diagnostic test should help determine strengths and weaknesses of word identification skills, and, depending upon the test used, comprehension skills.

While it is impossible to make a perfect match between tutor and tutee, an approximate match can be made based on instructional levels determined from the IRI. The tutor should be a slightly better reader than the tutee in order that they be a more fluent reader when oral reading is done. Since we, as teachers, like to perform better than our students at reading, and since the tutor is the "model" for the tutee, it is necessary for the tutor to have an instructional level at least as high as the tutee. If several tutors and tutees have approximately the same instructional levels, the match can be based on similarities of strengths and weaknesses based on the group diagnostic test used.

Training (T_2)

Figure 3
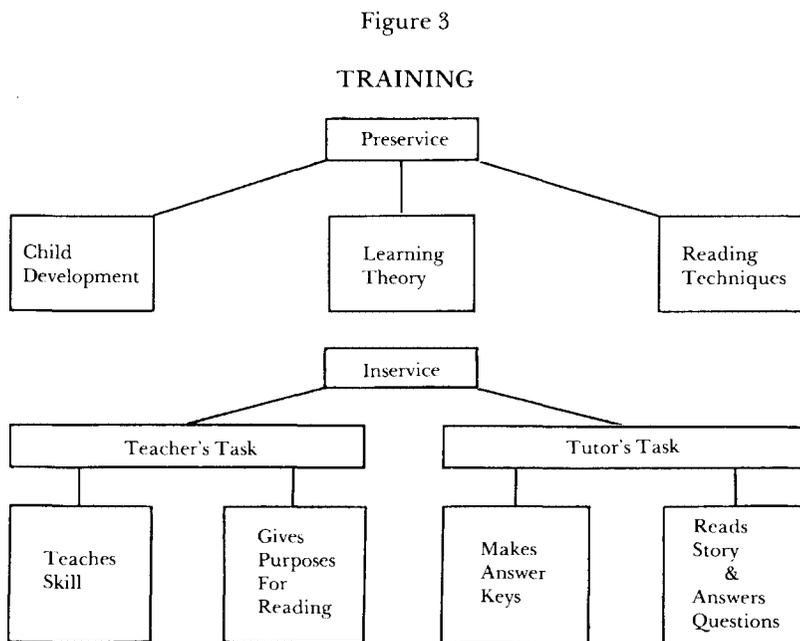
TRAINING

Just as a professional educator has two types of training — preservice and inservice — it is also necessary for the tutors to have both. Once the tutors are selected, some discussion of child development is necessary in order for the tutor to better understand the tutee. These discussions, while extremely important, should be on a level that the tutor will understand. For example, if the tutors are sixth graders and they plan to tutor third and fourth graders, a discussion could develop from the following questions:

1. How have you changed since you were in the third and fourth grades?
2. What did you do then that you think is silly now?
3. When you were in the fourth grade, how did you feel about sixth graders?
4. What types of things do you see third and fourth graders doing that you think are silly? Why do you suppose they do those things? Do you think that the third graders think those things are silly?
5. Have you ever noticed that you act in some ways different from fourth graders? 10th graders?

If the tutors have a better understanding of why younger students behave the way they do, it will help the tutors tolerate some of those "childish" behaviors.

Behavior is not the only part of development that should be discussed. Students' reading interests are important for helping select books for the tutee to read and enjoy.

Discussions about effective learning are also necessary. That is, discussions about when and how you do most of your learning. What happens when the teacher gives you too much work? Do you feel better when you are asked to do something that you are fairly certain that you can do but is neither too easy or too difficult? Do you feel better when the teacher says nice things about your work or do you like it better when she is uncomplimentary about it?

It is also necessary during this preservice training to teach the tutors the steps for a directed reading activity. While most lessons are prepared for the tutors and they simply have to follow them, it is important that the tutor knows why new words need to be presented in context, why purposes are set just prior to reading part of the story, and why a discussion should take place immediately following the story.

It is important for the tutor to be exposed to these areas prior to tutoring. It not only should make the tutors more understanding of the tutee, but, hopefully, it will help them have a better understanding of why teachers of reading do what they do in class.

The inservice part of the training is getting the tutor ready just prior to each tutoring session. The reading teacher is really teaching the tutor skills that he or she will be teaching the tutee. In other words, if a tutor or several tutors are going to teach the tutee a word recognition skill, such as the "final e rule," the teacher presents the tutors with a short

skills lesson on the "final e rule." After presenting this lesson, each tutor is given a worksheet to complete based on the "final e rule" which will become the tutor's answer key when he or she presents the lesson to the tutee. While the reading teacher is teaching the skills lesson, other tutors can be preparing for the reading part of the lesson. Possible suggestions for managing the reading part for each tutor are to have the purposes of reading the selection for each tutor on a sheet of paper, let the tutor read the selection, and have comprehension questions designed in a manner that makes the response brief for the student. The format can vary from short answer responses (recall) to circling correct responses (recognition). These response papers as well as the skill sheets need to be checked by the teacher prior to the tutoring in order to be certain that the tutor's "answer key" is correct.

It can be seen that the size of the tutoring group needs to be small in order for each tutor to receive the necessary attention. The group size could increase if para-professionals were available to help the teachers. One must also remember that each tutor-tutee dyad does not need to have a new skill taught each lesson. Meaningful practice of using the skill in context is very necessary.

Tutoring (T_3)

Figure 4
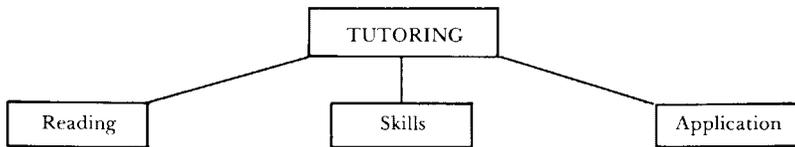
Immediately following the training session, the tutors should work with the tutee. The tutoring session should last about thirty minutes and should have at least 3 parts to it; reading, skills, and applications.

The reading portion of the lesson should consist of the tutor setting purposes for the tutee to read. (Generally they will be the same purposes the teacher sets for the tutor.) Following the setting of purposes, the reading can be done several ways, but probably the technique that is most enjoyable and beneficial to both tutor and tutee is to take turns reading, such as switching after each paragraph. The tutor and tutee can then discuss the story, or the tutor could give the tutee a worksheet like the one he or she received during the training session. Any misconceptions or incorrect responses could be clarified by the tutor at that time.
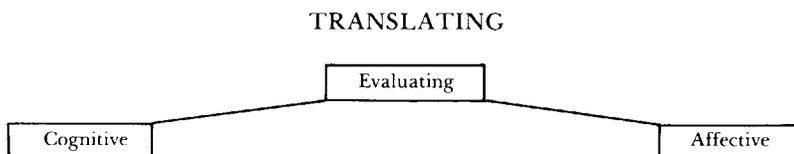
The skills part of the session should focus on the skill that the tutor was taught prior to the tutoring session. Based on past experience of the author, one can be fairly certain that the tutor will say basically the same things the reading teacher told him during the training session.

Following the teaching of the skill, the tutee completes the same worksheet the tutor had done earlier.

The last part of the tutoring session is used to apply the skill taught through some enjoyable way such as games, cross-word puzzles, etc. Practicing a meaningful skill in a pleasant manner should help the child retain and transfer the skill at other times.

Translating (T_4)

Figure 5

TRANSLATING

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                    ┌─────────────┐
                    │ Evaluating  │
    ┌───────────┐   └─────────────┘   ┌───────────┐
    │ Cognitive │                     │ Affective │
    └───────────┘                     └───────────┘
```

The fourth "T" is Translating and is designed for the tutor to make a short evaluation of the lesson that was taught. The reason for this part of the session is to give the tutor an opportunity to reinforce the skills taught by writing what he learned. In order for the tutor to reflect on both the affective and cognitive domains, questions that reflect both areas should be answered during the translating portion.

Suggested questions are:

1. What skill did you teach today?
2. Describe at least one successful task accomplished by your student.
3. Do you think your student enjoyed the tasks you asked him or her to do? Please explain.
4. How did you feel about helping your student with his or her work today?
5. Did you find any part of the lesson difficult to teach? Please explain.

When the 4 T's technique is used, listening, reading, speaking, and writing, all become integral processes by which the tutor can develop reading skills.

The focus of this technique is predominately on the tutor. The reason is that it is extremely difficult to teach the older student the reading skills that are expected to be learned in the primary grades. Intermediate and upper grade students are usually "turned off" by having to work on lower level skills; however, when the tutor is learning a skill in order to teach it to a tutee, the tutor is usually more receptive to learning the skills. Another problem that occurs when one attempts to teach lower level reading skills to older students is the inability to give the student enough meaningful repetition in order to learn the skill. In one ses-

sion where a reading skill is taught using the 4 T's, the tutor makes the answer key (1), teaches the skill to the tutee (2), evaluates the tutee's work (3), and describes the skill in the translating portion of the session (4). Not only has the tutor received four reinforcements following instruction, but also the processes of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and spelling have all been used to develop the necessary skills to improve reading. Using three senses (seeing, hearing, and feeling) should help the tutor retain the skill.

Other benefits accruing to the tutor are that the learning to read process should be more meaningful, his or her reading skills should be better developed, and the improvement of these skills should be noticeable. Furthermore, cross grade tutoring gives the tutor adult responsibility, and the self-worth of the tutor should be evident because helping someone else to learn gives most of us a good feeling.

The tutor is not the only one that benefits from a program like this. The tutee's reading skills should improve. The tutees will probably like working with an older student, and hopefully, the tutees will be able to see growth in reading, as well as an improvement in their self-concept.

The teacher is also a beneficiary in a program like this. It will help the teacher individualize instruction more effectively, and the process will help teachers make a difference with more children than he or she could by being forced to teach so many children using a more traditional organizational approach.

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