

What Works Clearinghouse



Peer Tutoring and Response Groups

Practice description *Peer Tutoring and Response Groups* aims to improve the language and achievement of English language learners by pairing or grouping students to work on a task. The students may be grouped by age or ability (English-only, bilingual, or limited English proficient) or the groups may be mixed. Peer tutoring typically consists of two students assuming the roles of tutor and tutee, or “coach and player” roles. Peer response groups

give four or five students shared responsibility for a task, such as editing a passage or reading and answering comprehension questions. When working in a small group to edit a writing assignment, one student edits punctuation, another edits spelling, and another provides overall feedback on writing focus and clarity. Both peer tutoring pairs and peer response groups emphasize peer interaction and discussion to complete a task.¹

Research Three studies of *Peer Tutoring and Response Groups* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. These studies included 118 English language learners from first to sixth grades in Florida, Texas, and Washington state.² The WWC

considers the extent of evidence for *Peer Tutoring and Response Groups* to be small for English language development. No studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations addressed reading achievement or mathematics achievement.

Effectiveness *Peer Tutoring and Response Groups* was found to have positive effects on English language development.

	Reading achievement	Mathematics achievement	English language development
Rating of effectiveness	na	na	Positive effects
Improvement index ³	na	na	Average: +17 percentile points Range: +1 to +48 percentile points

na = not applicable

1. The descriptive information for this program was obtained from the research literature (Jun-Aust, 1985; Prater & Bermudez, 1993; and Serrano, 1987). Verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this practice, which is publicly available, is beyond the scope of this review.
2. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.

Additional practice information

Developer and contact

Peer Tutoring and Response Groups does not have a developer responsible for providing information or materials.

Scope of use

Information is not available on the number or demographics of students, schools, or districts using this intervention.

Teaching

Peer Tutoring and Response Groups can be used by teachers during classroom instruction or as part of after-school programs. The process for implementing the groups depends on the specific instructional task and academic objective. Peer tutoring with assigned partners (tutor and tutee) is often used for tasks that require two students to work together to read or complete an assignment, such as reading a passage aloud and

Research

Four studies reviewed by the WWC investigated the effects of *Peer Tutoring and Response Groups*. Three studies (Jun-Aust, 1985; Prater & Bermudez, 1993; and Serrano, 1987) were randomized controlled trials that met WWC evidence standards. The remaining study was a single-subject design that is not included in this review because the WWC does not yet have standards for reviewing single-subject studies.

Met evidence standards

Jun-Aust (1985) studied 30 Korean English language learners in grades 1 through 6 from two elementary schools in Tacoma, Washington. The study compared a classroom “peer-pairing” intervention with a no-treatment comparison condition.

Prater and Bermudez (1993) studied 46 English language learners in fourth grade from two elementary schools in the Houston, Texas, metropolitan area. The study compared the use of small, heterogeneous peer response groups to provide feedback on

answering comprehension questions or using guided discussion questions to help practice conversation. Teachers may group students of varying abilities, such as pairing a bilingual student with one who is just beginning to learn English or an English-only student with a bilingual peer. Tutoring partners or small groups may focus on a range of academic tasks in reading, language, writing, and math, or they may be used solely for social support. Before implementing peer tutoring groups, students are trained to interact as tutor and tutee or to work in small groups. Specific instruction on tutoring procedures or how to assume individual roles in a group is required before implementing the routine use of this practice.

Cost

Information is not available about the costs of training and implementation of *Peer Tutoring and Response Groups*.

group members’ writing with a comparison group that did not use peer response groups for writing instruction.

Serrano (1987) studied 42 students with limited English language proficiency in grades 3–5. Students were native Spanish-speaking and were classified as migrants. The study took place at one elementary school in the School District of Indian River County, Florida. Two intervention groups were examined: bilingual tutoring (limited English proficient students were tutored by a bilingual student tutor) and English-only tutoring (limited English proficient students were tutored by an English-only tutor). The study’s comparison group consisted of students who did not receive peer tutoring.

Extent of evidence

The WWC categorizes the extent of evidence in each domain as small or moderate to large (see the [What Works Clearinghouse Extent of Evidence Categorization Scheme](#)). The extent of evidence takes into account the number of studies and the

3. These numbers show the average and range of student-level improvement indices for all findings across the studies.

Research (continued)

total sample size across the studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations.⁴

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Peer Tutoring and Response Groups* to be small for English language

development. No studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations addressed reading achievement or mathematics achievement.

Effectiveness Findings

The WWC review of interventions for *Peer Tutoring and Response Groups* addresses student outcomes in three domains: reading achievement, mathematics achievement, and English language development. None of the three studies that were reviewed for this intervention and that met WWC evidence standards addressed outcomes in the mathematics achievement domain or the reading achievement domain.

English language development. Jun-Aust (1985) examined subpopulations of students based on popularity (low integrative motivation versus high integrative motivation, or the level of desire to be liked by others) within peer-pairing and non-peer-pairing groups. WWC combined subpopulation data to examine the overall effects of peer pairing compared with non-peer pairing and found no statistically significant effect on listening comprehension. The study author reported that peer pairing and popularity (integrative motivation) had statistically significant effects on language behavior. When the WWC combined subgroup data within the peer-pairing and non-peer-pairing groups to examine their overall effects, the analysis found peer pairing to have a statistically significant effect on student language behavior; there was no statistically significant effect when talking to the teacher and when being addressed by the teacher. However, the overall size of the impact of the intervention was large enough to be considered substantively important by WWC standards (that is, at least 0.25).

Prater and Bermudez (1993) reported statistically significant differences favoring the peer response group on the number

of words written and number of ideas presented in student compositions but no statistically significant differences in overall composition quality and number of sentences written. The WWC confirmed the statistical significance of these findings. The overall size of the impact of the intervention was large enough to be considered substantively important by WWC standards (that is, at least 0.25).

Serrano (1987) examined effects of the tutoring by a bilingual tutor and the tutoring by an English-only speaking peer on the IDEA Oral Language Proficiency Test (IPT I) and found no statistically significant effects for either strategy. The average effect size across the two versions of implementation was neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important (that is, at least 0.25).

Two of the studies reviewed met WWC evidence standards (Jun-Aust, 1985; Prater & Bermudez, 1993) because statistically significant findings were reported.

Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in a given outcome domain as: positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings,⁵ the size of the difference between participants in the intervention and the comparison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the [WWC Intervention Rating Scheme](#)).

4. The Extent of Evidence categorization was developed to tell readers how much evidence was used to determine the intervention rating, focusing on the number and size of studies. Additional factors associated with a related concept, external validity, such as the students' demographics and the types of settings in which studies took place, are not taken into account for the categorization.
5. The level of statistical significance was reported by the study authors or, where necessary, calculated by the WWC to correct for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation, see the [WWC Tutorial on Mismatch](#). See [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#) for the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance. In the case of *Peer Tutoring and Response Groups*, corrections for clustering or multiple comparisons were needed.

The WWC found *Peer Tutoring and Response Groups* to have positive effects on English language development

Improvement index

The WWC computes an improvement index for each individual finding. In addition, within each outcome domain, the WWC computes an average improvement index for each study and an average improvement index across studies (see [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#)). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is based entirely on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analyses. The improvement index can take on values between -50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting results favorable to the intervention group.

References

Met WWC evidence standards

- Jun-Aust, H. (1985, March). *Individual differences in second language learning of Korean immigrant students*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Second/Foreign Language Acquisition by Children, Oklahoma City, OK.
- Prater, D. L., & Bermudez, A. B. (1993). Using peer response groups with limited English proficient writers. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 17(1&2), 99–116.
- Serrano, C. J. (1987). The effectiveness of cross-level peer involvement in the acquisition of English as a second lan-

The average improvement index for the English language development domain is +17 percentile points across the three studies, with a range of +1 to +48 percentile points across findings.

Summary

The WWC reviewed four studies on *Peer Tutoring and Response Groups*. Three of these studies met WWC evidence standards; the remaining study was not included in this review because the WWC does not yet have standards for reviewing single-subject designs. Based on these three studies, the WWC found positive effects for English language development. The evidence presented in this report may change as new research emerges.

guage by Spanish-speaking migrant children. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 48(07), 1682A. (UMI No. 8723140)

Disposition pending

Greenwood, C. R., Arreaga-Mayer, C., Utley, C. A., Gavin, K. M., & Terry, B. J. (2001). ClassWide peer tutoring learning management system: Applications within elementary-level English language learners. *Remedial & Special Education*, 22, 34–47.⁶

For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the [WWC Peer Tutoring and Response Groups Technical Appendices](#).

6. One single-subject study was identified but is not included in this review because the WWC does not yet have standards for reviewing single-subject studies.