Research Considerations for Developing a Peer Tutoring Program

Project Description

Legacy High School (LHS) in Bismarck Public Schools, North Dakota, supports personalized learning, in which instruction is individualized to each student. LHS implements a flexible-time schedule that allows students to choose their learning activities. For example, students can choose to visit a learning center where they can receive additional academic support or engage in enrichment activities. The learning centers are available to encourage students' agency in determining when and in what subjects they need support. However, results from a recent REL Central study (Legacy High School Student Flexible-Time Usage) and feedback from teachers suggested that the Humanities Learning Center was underused and not meeting its goal of helping students build literacy and social science skills. REL Central will support LHS to formulate high-quality evaluation questions to understand why the Humanities Learning Center is not meeting its goals, to leverage available data or to collect additional data to answer these questions, and to determine the best ways to proceed in acting to improve the use of the center.

Development of the Handout

This handout was developed in response to the evaluation LHS conducted to reconceptualize the Humanities Learning Center. After analyzing the student survey and focus group data, LHS staff determined that peer tutoring was one of the recommendations they wanted pursue to improve the center. If LHS staff decide to implement a peer tutoring program, they may use the information provided in the handout to design a more effective program and make the center a more valuable place for students. The handout was developed through a review of recent and publicly available literature on peer tutoring. The search for literature was not comprehensive, and other relevant references may exist. REL Central also did not review the quality of the research referenced in this handout.

Reported Benefits of Peer Tutoring

Peer tutoring, or the use of peers to provide academic support to students, has identified benefits: improved learning of academic skills (Alegre et al., 2019; Leung, 2019), the opportunity to respond immediately to instruction and receive immediate feedback (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013), and the enhancement of peer relationships (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013). Perhaps just as meaningful, both tutors and tutees benefit from participation in peer tutoring (Alegre et al., 2019). Peer tutoring can match students of similar academic achievement or pair students with mixed academic achievement, and both have been shown to be effective (Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007). Research has also suggested that peer tutoring is effective for elementary students

but may be slightly more effective for secondary students (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2019; Jun et al., 2010). Studies have shown that both same-age tutoring and cross-age tutoring have a positive effect on student outcomes, with same-age-tutoring having a greater effect, likely because students have an existing relationship (Alegre et al., 2019)

Reported Implementation Considerations

Several research studies explored how different methods for implementing peer tutoring were associated with outcomes for students. Below is a description of implementation methods that were found to be associated with better student outcomes, for consideration in designing peer tutoring programs.

Consideration 1: Provide training for tutors

Training is an essential component of a peer-tutoring program. Programs that have more extensive training requirements for tutors are associated with better outcomes for students (Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007; Worley & Naresh, 2014).

Strategies and activities to include in the training:

- Strategies for delivering instruction, providing feedback, monitoring performance, and managing challenges.
- Learning styles, organizational strategies, and communication strategies.
- Modeling, scenarios, and role-playing activities.

Consideration 2: Set tutoring routines that help both tutors and tutees

Set routines for the tutoring session provide support for both tutors and tutees by creating a familiar setting (Alegre et al., 2019; Leung, 2019; Worley & Naresh, 2014).

Strategies for set routines:

- Start each tutoring session by setting goals to achieve during the session. End each session by reflecting on progress toward meeting the goals.
- Create and follow a structured routine for the session, with clear steps and schedule.
- Incorporate collaborative problem-solving activities during the session.
- Be mindful of the schedule of sessions. Each session should be 30 minutes or less and 3 times a week or less. Tutoring sessions should last no longer than 8 weeks.

Consideration 3: Use a reward system

Tutoring programs that use a reward system for attending and achieving specified goals have a greater effect on student outcomes. Furthermore, rewards may be more effective for middle and high school students (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013; Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007).

Strategies for a reward system:

- Develop systems to track attendance and goal attainment.
- Reward individual attendance and goal achievement.
- Consider group rewards (e.g., classes or grade levels) for using tutoring services.
- Consider rewards for tutors based on adherence to tutoring routines, use of effective strategies, and tutee achievement.

Consideration 4: Monitor tutor performance

Tutoring programs that monitor tutor instruction, use of feedback and reinforcement, and error correction are associated with better student outcomes (Stenhoff & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2007).

Strategies for monitoring:

- Conduct regular meetings with all tutors to provide general feedback and problem-solve.
- Conduct immediate feedback sessions with individual tutors as needed.
- Create opportunities for tutors and tutees to provide regular program feedback.

References

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