PEER TUTORING AS AN EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY TO PROMOTE A COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT WITH LEARNING AS A SOCIAL PROCESS TO ENHANCE READING ACHIEVEMENT: STUDENTS AS TEACHERS, TEACHERS AS FACILITATORS.

By

Sarah A. Starr

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF EDUCATION SPECIALIST IN EDUCATION AT NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

December 8, 2009

APPROVED BY: Derek L. Anderson, Ed.D.

DATE: December 9, 2009
Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................. 3

Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of Problem ........................................................................................................ 4
Research Question(s) ........................................................................................................... 8
Definition of Terms ......................................................................................................... 8

Chapter II: Review of Literature ......................................................................................... 9

Increasing Active Student Responding ............................................................................. 9
Peer Tutoring for Reading Remediation .......................................................................... 10
Making Classrooms More Responsive to Diversity ......................................................... 12
Effects of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies ..................................................................... 14

Chapter III: Results and Analysis Relative to the Problem ............................................... 18

Chapter IV: Recommendations and Conclusion .................................................................. 23

Recommendation ............................................................................................................. 21
Areas for Further Research .............................................................................................. 27
Summary and Conclusion ................................................................................................. 32

References ....................................................................................................................... 34
ABSTRACT

The primary focus of this literature review is to determine if peer tutoring is an effective instructional strategy to promote a collaborative learning partnership among peers with students as teachers and teachers as facilitators. Students serve as trained tutors to create meaningful learning opportunities and increased engagement time in academics with peer partnerships. Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of peer tutoring in relation to academic achievement and social impact at the elementary level. Collaborative learning plays a major role in constructive cognitive development because learning occurs with interaction of the surrounding environment. Implementation of a peer-assisted learning model provides an intervention tool for elementary teachers to promote interactive partnerships that create a more natural learning environment in which all students take an active role in learning, rather than the more traditional classroom setup where students can easily become passive learners: students as teachers, teachers as facilitators.
Chapter 1 Introduction

Statement of the problem

The federal government has mandated with No Child Left Behind that all children will be proficient in reading and math by 2014, thus creating a need for research-based practices to provide interventions in the classroom for all learners. Providing all students with an opportunity to grow academically and achieve should be every educator’s goal, yet the question remains as to what the most effective strategies are to achieve this goal. The past three years I have held a range of teaching assignments including Title I reading teacher, first grade teacher, fourth grade teacher and now a third grade teacher. Each assignment required the need to provide students with individualized instruction based on the diversity of student learning needs. In response to the diversity of need, educators and educational leaders continue to search for ways to help individualize instruction and to provide an environment where students have a more active role in their learning.

Peer assisted learning is a research-based strategy that promotes active engagement for all learners in the classroom. Peer assisted learning or peer tutoring is not a revolutionary idea presented just recently in fact in the late 18th and 19th centuries two British educators developed similar approaches to peer tutoring even prior to the introduction of public schooling. In 1789, Andrew Bell became the superintendent for a school of orphans in Madras, India and developed a system in which he trained students to teach each other. Joseph Lancaster opened the Borough Road School in London, England in 1801 and this school also involved the peer tutoring approach of learning. Each instance resulted with a significant impact upon educational practice. But by the second half of the 19th century, “enthusiasm for peer tutoring waned, perhaps because of
the start of public schooling and the increasing professionalization of teachers” (Fuchs, 1997, p.179). Peer tutoring was rediscovered in the late 1960’s when American educators became concerned about the achievement gap among poor and minority children and again with the publication of A Nation at Risk (1983). No Child Left Behind (2002) only strengthened the demand for stronger accountability and proven educational methods to work to close the achievement gap to make sure all students, even those disadvantaged, have the opportunity to achieve academic proficiency. NCLB also supports educational programs and methods that have been determined effective through rigorous scientific research, thus creating a large market for research and a demand for research-based programs.

Government officials and researchers seem to continually want to identify one specific reason that our educational system is failing our student population. Researchers, educators, and educational leaders have responded to this criticism with various approaches to enhance student achievement. Several studies look at the importance of an environment with student-to-student interaction in a peer learning model. Johnson (1981) pointed out the neglected variable in education: the student-student interaction. Johnson claimed that many classrooms focus on the teacher-student relationships and interactions with learning and social development dependent upon these interactions, rather than the student to student interactions. Johnson concluded that education should have educational goals that “consist of transferring knowledge and skills; socializing children and adolescents into perspectives, values, and attitudes that they need to function in our society; and, facilitating the cognitive, social, and physical development of each individual student” (Johnson, 1981, p. 5).
Savery and Duffy (2001) focused research on student-to-student interaction and collaboration, concluding that knowledge evolves through social negotiation among peers, with the social environment as a critical factor in the development of individual understanding and knowledge. They argued, “at the individual level, other individuals are a primary mechanism for testing our understanding” (p. 4). Peer teaching or peer learning encourages collaboration among students in an environment in which they can test their own understanding and examine the understanding of others when communicating with their peers.

Bruffee (1984) defined the collaborative learning environment as one that “provides a particular kind of social context for conversation, a particular kind of community that of status equals, or peers” (p. 87). He also pointed out that many classrooms focus on the teacher as the discussion leader with little time for students to correspond, and argued, “if we accept the premise that knowledge is an artifact created by a community of knowledgeable peers and that learning is a social process not an individual one, then learning is not assimilating information and improving our mental insight” (p. 96). When students work in partnership they are required to communicate knowledge as an instructor, and engage in interaction to make sense of new information presented. Studies have concluded the effectiveness of peer tutoring as an instructional model to promote academic achievement in a more natural learning environment where students are active in learning.

In order for sustainable school improvement to occur reform initiatives need to be organized and implemented involving educators, educational leaders, government officials, and the local communities. Educational reform isn’t a new topic in the
educational realm. Educational reform continues to evolve with the current Obama administration with an imperative focus on school improvement and reform that will provide today’s youth with a competitive edge in the global economy. Providing all students with an opportunity to grow academically and socially should be every educator’s goal, yet the question remains as to what the most effective strategies are to achieve this goal. With high expectations, time constraints, and the diversity of student need in the classroom educators are striving to provide effective intervention that will promote academic achievement and social growth.

In response to the changes in education and the student population in schools, educators and educational leaders have recognized the proposed achievement gap and have taken action to make improvements. One of the most recent reform initiatives is the development of the 21st Century Skills partnership in education with the goal in mind to better prepare students to succeed and compete in the global economy. The 21st Century Partnership includes employers, educators, parents, community members, and students in a comprehensive effort to create a common vision and understanding in education to better prepare students for their future in a competitive global economy. With the varying needs of students and the demand for all learners to succeed, researchers and educators are seeking out strategies that are inclusive and require participation from all learners. This type of instruction requires careful planning, development, and implementation of specific strategies that emphasize both the academic and social needs of all students.
Research Question:

To what extent is peer-tutoring an effective instructional model to promote a collaborative environment with learning as a social process: students as teachers, teachers as facilitators?

To what extent is peer-tutoring an effective instructional model to promote a collaborative learning environment in an area of increasing curricular and assessment mandates?

Definition of terms:

Peer tutoring:

A peer tutor is anyone who is of a similar status as the person being tutored. In a K-12 school this is usually a student from the same grade or higher.

(PalS- Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies: Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies or PALS, is a scientifically based practice to supplement instruction to promote accelerated achievement in Reading and Math with the use of pairing students to work with partners.)
Chapter II- Review of Literature

Several studies concluded that peer assisted learning has a significant impact on student achievement in the elementary grades and some impact at the high school and college levels. Much of the research in regard to peer assisted learning entailed similar attributes: student roles, student training to act as a coach or tutor, and a game format. The goals of peer assisted learning also shares much commonality across various research: to provide students with effective interventions to promote academic achievement. Research demonstrates the peer assisted learning model as an effective tool to promote a collaborative learning environment in an area of increasing curricular and assessment mandates.

Increasing Active Student Responding and Improving Academic Performance Through Classwide Peer Tutoring

Mayer (1998) presented the effects of performance based on the implementation of the Classwide Peer Tutoring (CWPT) instructional model. The CWPT involves the entire class with peer tutoring using a game format. This format included all content areas and required thirty minutes of class time. With this format students are paired randomly or by ability with tutoring pairs changing on a weekly basis. The roles during CWPT are exchanged during the daily tutoring session to allow for students to be the tutor/teacher and tutee/student, a format similar to the PALS program. The population of students included those with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, autism, mild mental retardation, and hearing or language impairment.

One specific study referenced the study conducted by Greenwood, Delquadri, and Hall (1984) that employed an experimental-control group design to compare the outcome
effect of the CWPT intervention model with sixty four inner-city students with learning disabilities. The third grade students received reading instruction using a CWPT model at school, parent tutoring at home, and the regular school program. After a three month implementation using this model results indicated that oral reading error rates for students “were significantly reduced compared to each group’s pre assessment levels and in relationship to both the LD control group and the non-LD normative group” (Mayer, 1998, p. 91). Observation data also indicated that the students receiving tutoring using the CWPT model spent more time engaged in oral and silent reading behaviors. Although this study was conducted with subjects with learning disabilities, empirical evidence is presented in this article in support of the CWPT model as an effective procedure for increasing curricular learning for students with or without disabilities.

Surveys were also conducted with teachers, parents, and students indicating a high degree of satisfaction with the tutoring procedure and effects on reading performance (p. 92). Yet the study did not indicate the method used to collect survey data. Studies were also done with the CWPT model in relation to basic math facts and other content areas. The CWPT intervention model strives to provide educators an approach to individualize instruction, opportunity for active engagement, and immediate error correction with positive feedback. Further research also indicated that the CWPT model served as a tool in development of the Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies program.

_Trovato and Bucher (1980)_ investigated an operant-based corrective reading program to study the effectiveness of peer tutoring with students demonstrating reading deficiency. Ninety students were selected from seven elementary schools from grades 2-6
through a variety of referral sources: those identified as deficient in reading skills, those identified by grade records and teacher interviews, and those students whose parents expressed interest in participation with the home-based program. Although ninety students were selected, sixty-nine participants remained for the entirety of the study. The sixty-nine students were randomly assigned to three groups: control group (C), peer tutoring (PT), and peer tutoring plus home-based reinforcement (HB).

Students were selected based on pre-test scores, teacher interviews, and parent interviews. Two pre-test scores were student initial test scores from the Spache Diagnostic Reading test (oral reading and comprehension subscales) and the third pre-test score came from SRA starter stories. The twenty-three students in the peer tutoring group received peer tutoring for about thirty minutes a day. The twenty-three in the peer tutoring plus home-based reinforcement received the same time of peer tutoring at school, but also received reinforcement work at home which could be rewarded with points for accurate oral reading and comprehension. The control group consisted of twenty-three students that were enrolled in in-school remedial reading programs with in-class instruction and no attempt was made to control the instruction received in this group. The materials used were the basic reading from the SRA Reading Kit and the Fry reading formula.

For this study peer tutors were chosen from senior grades (6-8) within the school. The peer tutors were trained using a tutor manual which described the process step-by-step. After training the peer tutors were assigned a student to work with in a tutoring room for the designated time. The tutor used the SRA materials box to choose appropriate daily reading materials. The student read from the book and the tutor was
responsible for recording errors and providing support. Upon completion of each tutoring session students received chips for each comprehension question answered correctly. The students included in the home-based reinforcement group followed the same peer tutoring procedure, but also had a point transfer card to be used at home to track points earned at home.

The overall results of change in reading ability was assessed using the pre-test data and the post-test data using the oral reading and comprehension subscales of the Spache Diagnostic Reading Scale and the test of reading ability of the SRA Starter Stories. The results from this study indicated progress made during the peer tutoring study across the three groups. The first results are based on the instruction level subscale of the Spache Diagnostic Reading Scales measured oral reading fluency. The average gain from pretest to posttest for the home-based group was 1.27 years (.5 to 3.2). The average gain for the peer tutoring group was .77 years (range .0 to 1.7). The average gain for the control was .19 years (-2.7 to .7). The next set of results is based on the SRA Starter Stories assessment. The average gain from pretest to posttest for the home-based group was 1.35 years (range .0 to 2.7). The average gain for the peer tutoring group was .95 years (range .0 to 1.8). While the average gain for the control group was .23 years.

The results of this study indicate from the pretest and posttest data that the students involved with the home-based reinforcement group outperformed the peer tutoring children who were not given the home-based support. Both the home-based group and the peer tutoring group outperformed the control group students based on data. The authors concluded that peer tutoring was effective in increasing oral reading and comprehension performance with students identified as having reading deficiencies.
Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies: Making Classrooms More Responsive to Diversity

Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, and Simmons (1997) studied the effectiveness of a classwide peer tutoring program for three learner types: “low achievers with and without disabilities and average achievers” (Fuchs, 1997, p. 174). Twenty-two elementary and middle schools took part in the study, yielding forty teacher volunteers teaching grades 2nd through 6th grade. Schools were then divided into three groups: high-level, middle-level, and low-level groups based on standardized test scores. Based on the three groups the schools were then randomly assigned as a PALS school or a No-PALS school. The classrooms were chosen based on teachers who had at least one or more students with learning disabilities taking part in reading instruction. PALS and No-PALS teachers were told they were part of a study to examine how teachers accommodate diverse learners in the classrooms, but no indication was made to the classrooms with No-PALS implementation. Data collection included one hundred twenty students from forty volunteer classrooms. Each teacher identified three students in their reading class: an LD student defined in accordance with state regulations, a non-disabled but low performing student, and a student estimated to be an average-achieving reader based on teacher recommendation.

Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies was implemented and conducted during regularly scheduled reading instruction for thirty-five minutes per day, three times per week, for fifteen weeks. Reading PALS students were partnered based on reading ability and ranking. During peer assisted learning students had the opportunity to be the tutor/coach and the tutee/reader. Three reading strategies are part of the PALS model: partner reading with retell, paragraph shrink/summary, and prediction relay. Students
read from text at the instructional level of the weaker reader in the partnership. The No-PALS classroom teachers conducted reading instruction in their typical manner.

Results and achievement data were determined based on pretests and posttest data from the Comprehensive Reading Assessment Battery (CRAB) subtest which used two reading selections and assessed the average number of words read correctly in three minutes, average number of questions correct, and number of correct maze replacement in two minutes. The results of the CRAB assessment indicated significant progress with the three types of learners in the PALS classrooms in comparison to the No-PALS classrooms. The learning disabled students demonstrated growth from the pretest to the posttest on words correct with an average of 51.08, while the No PALS classroom demonstrated an average growth of 28.68 words correct per three minutes. The low performing group demonstrated a growth of 56.25 words correct per three minutes, while the No-PALS classroom demonstrated a growth of 40.35 words correct. The average achieving group demonstrated a growth of 59.50 words correct in three minutes, while the No PALS classroom demonstrated a 37.38 growth. The study then concludes that the PALS classrooms “made significantly greater progress than their counterparts in No-PALS classrooms across the three reading measures” (Fuchs, 1997, p. 194) Results aggregated across LD, LP, and AA students with effect sizes .22, .55, and .56 on words correct, questions correct, and maze choices correct based on CRAB scores. The study demonstrated the peer-tutoring model as an effective instructional strategy to promote academic achievement in reading through a cooperative learning model.

*Effects of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies on High School Students with Serious Reading Problems*
Fuchs, Fuchs, and Kazdan (1999) examined the effects of PALS when implemented at the secondary-level students with eighteen remedial and special education classes in ten schools, within one metropolitan southeastern school district. The study consisted of two treatments: nine teacher who implemented PALS, and nine teachers with no peer-mediated reading activities as the control group. Students who were chosen for the study were students that experienced chronic reading difficulties with reading levels grades 2nd through 6th at the beginning of the study.

Teachers in the control classroom provided reading instruction using their conventional reading programs without the use of peer-mediated learning. The classroom that implemented PALS supplemented their reading instruction with the use of peer assisted learning five times every two weeks, over the course of sixteen weeks. The high school PALS program consisted of the same reading activities as the later elementary grades: partner reading with retell, paragraph shrinking, and prediction relay. Teachers began the study by training students using the PALS instructional lessons to teach the roles during PALS. The teachers determined pairings based on ability having a higher and lower performing student in each pair. High school PALS was set up similar to the elementary-level PALS except students changed partners frequently, rather than every four weeks.

This study also used the Comprehensive Reading Assessment Battery (CRAB) to administer pre and posttests. The researchers stated that the results indicated that both treatment groups grew comparable amounts (ES = .04). The growth of PALS students exceeded that of the No-PALS classrooms in relation to number of questions answered correctly (ES = .34) Yet the study concluded that differences are not significant enough for
either measure of assessment. Although the students in the PALS group improved their reading comprehension scores more than the students in the No-PALS group it showed only a moderate effect. This could be due to the small sample size and various other factors that may impact the results of a study implemented in this manner. The findings from this study remain mixed. “Some evidence suggests that PALS shows promise for promoting literacy among these seriously delayed high school students; other results reveal limitations” (Fuchs, 1999, p. 317).

The results of the study do not indicate a significant impact at the high school level with this study and authors report that results were mixed, yet the authors try to remain positive about the effectiveness of the program and include various reasons why the program may not be as effective at the high school level compared to the elementary level. The authors also suggest providing a reward system with this age of students to promote student motivation, yet this factor alone could impact results in the study. Peer assisted learning at the high school level using the PALS program indicates the need for further research.

Observations, findings, and conclusions from the various studies researching the impact of peer tutoring have demonstrated the potential effectiveness of the approach to strengthening student achievement. The PALS program was developed by Doug Fuchs, PhD and Lynn Fuchs, PhD, both professors of special education and Vanderbilt Kennedy Center investigators. Many of the studies that are referenced with the PALS programs are those studies conducted by the developers of the program. When studies are conducted by those developing a program bias can lead to a non-neutral stance, thus impacting results and conclusions. With the growth of a new program more research may surface, as well
as data collection in the classroom as educators implement peer-assisted learning on a regular basis.
Chapter III: Results and Analysis Relative to Problem

When researching the concept of peer assisted learning several studies concluded that peer assisted learning has a significant impact on student achievement in the elementary grades. Much of the research in regard to peer assisted learning entailed similar attributes: student roles, student training to act as a coach or tutor, and a game format. The goals of peer assisted learning also share much commonality across various research: to provide students with effective interventions to promote a collaborative learning environment in an area of increasing curricular and assessment measures.

Dynarski (2008) discussed research available to educators and claims that today’s education research does not really provide reliable and rigorous evidence about the programs, practices, and policies that help students achieve without some bias presented in the study. At first it was quite difficult to find research that didn’t involve those personally involved with the study or those that had a motive behind the research findings such as promoting a program. Observations, findings, and conclusions from the various studies researching the impact of peer tutoring have demonstrated the effectiveness of the approach to strengthening student achievement, yet several of the studies I have located were conducted by the same researchers in association with specific programs. The PALS program was developed by Doug Fuchs, PhD and Lynn Fuchs, PhD, both professors of special education and Vanderbilt Kennedy Center investigators. Many of the studies that are referenced with the PALS programs are those studies conducted by the developers of the program. When studies are conducted by those developing a program bias can lead to a non neutral stance, thus impacting results and conclusions. I found little research
conducted demonstrating the validity of studies in regard to peer learning strategies (PALS) program, but as the program grows more research may surface.

I believe at this time there is still a need for further studies and research involving the PALS model, but as an educator I have had the opportunity to implement the PALS program over the past three years in my classroom and this has provided valuable feedback. I have administered student surveys and tracked data at each grade level and this has demonstrated the effectiveness of the peer assisted learning in the classroom as an effective instructional model to promote a collaborative learning environment in an area of increasing academic achievement. When incorporating reading PALS at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year, I provided students with guided lessons to train students for their roles when working with partners, as well as discussed what makes an effective partner. At the beginning of the year the students were enthusiastic about reading PALS and often asked, “Are we doing PALS today?” I assessed groups through observation during peer instruction, through points, and by collecting math practice assignments to determine if students master the concepts. Although practice assignments and peer instruction often were positive, I still questioned the students’ true feelings about the program and whether or not the program was effective for all learner types.

Higher performing students may become bored from this type of instruction when providing support for a lower performing student. I conducted a survey with my fourth grade students asking questions in regard to the PALS program. I asked students to be as honest as possible and explain reasoning with each question. The first question on the survey asked, did you like reading PALS this year? Why or why not? I included this question to simply get an understanding of whether or not students liked the peer assisted
learning. I collected surveys from nineteen students. Forty two percent of students answered yes, fifty three percent answered no, and five percent answered kind of. I was more interested in determining the percentages based on the roles the students had during PALS. Of the students which answered yes: fifty percent were first readers (low performing), thirty eight percent were reader two (higher performing). One student did not indicate his role as first or second reader. Of the students which answered no: fifty percent were first readers and fifty percent were second readers. I assumed that a higher majority of higher performing students would respond negatively to the survey, yet the data does not demonstrate that.

The second question on the survey asked: do you think that reading PALS helped with your comprehension in reading? Sixty-eight percent answered yes, and thirty-two answered no. Although a high number of students answered yes, very few provided adequate reasoning why they felt it helped with comprehension and some demonstrated lack of understanding of the question. One fourth grade response (higher performing), “no because all the stories and articles were easy for me to understand. And I already was a good reader” (4th grade student, 2009). This comment indicates that this student was bored with the reading that was provided during PALS because it was at the lower reading level to provide success for the lower-performing student.

The last question included on the student survey: Do you think you became a better reader because of PALS? Sixty-three percent answered yes, thirty-two percent answered no, and five percent answered not that much. I broke this down to determine the percentage based on first reader and second reader. Of the students that answered yes,
fifty-six percent were the first readers (lower-performing) and twenty-five percent were the second reader (higher performing/coach). Again one student did not indicate his role.

Quantitative data for reading includes DIBELS scores from the fall, winter, and spring, as well as STAR reading growth reports indicating reading fluency measurement and reading comprehension. The scores indicated are those scores from the STAR reported are grade equivalents from the fall and spring assessment. The oral reading fluency is from the DIBELS test from the fall and spring assessment reported as words read correctly in one minute. Student 1- a low achieving student demonstrated gains in both oral reading fluency and comprehension (grade equivalent 2.5-4.7 and oral reading fluency 47 words per minute-100 words per minute). Student 2- average achieving student demonstrated growth, but not as large growth as student 1 (grade equivalent 4.8-5.0 and oral reading fluency 92 wpm-129 wpm). Student 3- a high achieving student demonstrated gains (grade equivalent 9.8-11.2 and oral reading fluency 127wpm-172 wpm).

This data indicated a growth in both reading comprehension and oral reading fluency over the course of the year. Student 1 received Title I support five days a week, was included in a reading read of three students in class that met five days a week, and worked with peer assisted learning for the entire school year. Reader 2 received Title I support for four days a week for the second half of the year, worked in a reading group of five in the classroom that met four days a week, and worked with peer assisted learning for the entire school year. Student 3 did not receive any Title I support, worked with an in-class reading group of five, and worked with peer assisted learning for the entire school year. The data is interesting because it demonstrates that student 1 made a 2.2
grade level improvement and more than doubled reading fluency over the course of the year. Student 2 demonstrated a gain, but not as significant. Student 1 received more intensive intervention with Title I support and this may factor in to the student growth, making it hard to determine the impact of peer assisted learning with this data collection. Math data collection also needs planning and multiple forms of measurement need to be determined prior to starting another cycle of research. As I reflected on the data collection process I began to see that revisions need to be made to the survey and there may be other ways to collect data that would provide more information from students, as well as teachers, yet this is a starting point for data collection at the local level.
Chapter IV: Conclusion

Recommendation:

The Escanaba School District currently offers student interventions provided by a Title I teacher and Title I assistants with interventions occurring with a pullout model. The Escanaba School District has made significant changes in the way the Title I program functions and serves students in the schools over the past six years with the push for data-driven decisions. The Title I reading teacher along with assistants provide intensive and strategic interventions when students demonstrate the need for academic intervention. Although these students work four to five days a week with a Title I teacher or assistant, they still need support in the classroom requiring teachers to find ways to meet the needs of the diversity among learners in the classroom. Several different research-based interventions are provided for in-class use, yet all teachers are not aware of these programs or trained to implement them as an intervention tool in the classroom. In order to prepare teachers to provide effective interventions in the classroom a district-wide training could be offered to implement these types of programs in the classroom.

The collaborative effort between the Title I staff and the classroom teacher in providing appropriate interventions is central to the initiative and the outcomes of student learning in the Escanaba School District. The Title I staff and classroom teachers must work collaboratively to test new ideas and programs to provide the most effective interventions with the students. With participation from all staff it is important to monitor and evaluate the effects of the interventions in place, in order to make appropriate changes when necessary. Title I does not provide support for students who receive special education services. Special education students in the Escanaba district have an IEP in
place which indicates the content areas that are to be taught by the regular education teacher. Yet these students are encouraged to take part in peer-assisted learning in the classroom.

The Michigan State Board of Educators endorses the standards adopted by the National Staff Development Council (2001) for a high-quality, comprehensive, outcome-based staff development. The standards focus on the importance of integration of staff development with current school improvement goals and the importance of a strong leadership and support system in place when changes and implementation occur, as well as the importance of reliance on the implementation of research-based strategies. No Child Left Behind defines quality staff development as those opportunities that include integrating professional development within a broader school improvement plan with a focus on a positive and lasting impact on classroom teaching and student outcomes (NASDSE, 2006, p.1). National Association of State Directors of Special Education argues that a successful professional development program “addresses three components of skill development: beliefs/attitudes, knowledge, and skill” (NASDSE, 2006, p. 2). NASDSE suggests that all three components should be considered during the process of developing a professional development plan.

When discussing beliefs and attitudes NASDSE sites research that has been conducted on beliefs and attitudes. This research has identified two factors that predict successful implementation of a new skill 1) understanding the need for the practice meaning understanding and identifying the problem and 2) belief that one possesses the skills to implement the practice in successful manner. The research claims that if the
knowledge component is strong, then educators will understand the background and rational for implementation and how it effects student learning and outcome.

The knowledge component is also a key factor in effectiveness of implementation at each grade level. The following professional development plan must ensure that all educators at the elementary level have a comprehensive understanding of the PALS program and process to translate knowledge to practice and implementation in the classroom.

The skills component of the professional development plan represents the practice part of knowledge including judging instruction quality based on class performance and student learning using assessment data, making reliable and accurate decisions to improve instructional quality, and most importantly modeling and teaching the students the appropriate skills for effective peer-assisted learning. This component also focuses on the importance of communication and collaboration among staff after implementation of a program. With this plan it will be necessary that teachers communicate with one another within the same grade level and across grade levels to discuss questions, concerns, and successes.

**Professional Development Proposal for Fall 2010**

Effectiveness in implementation of the Peer-Assisted Learning intervention relies greatly on the quality of the professional development in-service and a follow-up professional development model to translate research into practice at each grade level in the elementary schools. The two days of professional development will provide elementary teachers in the Escanaba School District with an in-depth look at the Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies program in order to implement this intervention in the
classroom to provide an effective instructional model to promote a collaborative learning environment in an area of increasing curricular and academic achievement.

Day 1: Introduction to using data in decision making.

Goals and objectives: To provide opportunity for educators to share effective interventions already being implemented in classroom and providing educators with the background as to why data-driven decisions are crucial when planning and implementing interventions in the classroom. Day 1 will also introduce the reading and math PALS program.

I. Looking at the current data and assessment tools used in classrooms at the elementary level
   a. DIBELS reports
   b. STAR reports
   c. District math assessments
   d. Staff and student surveys
   e. Student work including writing, reading, and math district assessments

II. Using the current assessment tools for data-driven decisions
   a. How can data be used to guide teaching and learning?
      i. Small group discussion
      ii. Report back to the groups
   b. What types of data have you used in the past to guide teaching and learning?
      i. Small group discussion
      ii. Report back to groups
c. Discuss the importance of data-driven decisions: How can current data be used to guide teaching and learning?

i. Look at current DIBELS data to focus on the assessment tool and what it reports. As a whole group look at a student from each grade level K-5 to determine students need based on reported data.

ii. As a small group look at student data to develop an intervention plan for a student from each grade level K-5.

d. Current interventions being used in the classroom

i. Each teacher will record and report current interventions being implemented in the classroom.

ii. Discuss what are the effective components of these interventions?

iii. Are the interventions research based? If not, what outcomes do you see with these interventions, and do they demonstrate effective outcomes with the students?

e. Introduction of PALS: Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies by Literacy Director Cathy Claes from the DSISD

i. Overview of the PALS program and resources available in the district at the current time

ii. Discuss goals of the PALS program

Day 2:

Goals and objectives: Introduce the PALS programs grade K-5 and discuss the goals of the PALS reading program. The PALS reading program is a supplement to the current reading curriculum. PALS accommodates student learning needs by “decentering” the
teaching and learning process. PALS encourages students working with peers to take an active role in their learning.

**Reading PALS- Beginning Readers Kindergarten and 1st Grade Teachers**

f. Introduction of K-PALS and First-Grade PALS
   i. Goals and objectives of program
   ii. Summarize research findings in research, as well as teacher share for educators who have already implemented the program

g. Simulation of a PALS classroom during the training period with students: the teacher models all strategies.
   i. Teacher-directed lessons
   ii. Peer-mediated practice

h. Skill Practice using K-PALS and First Grade PALS lessons
   i. One teacher acts as the coach and the other teacher acts as the reader and then switch roles to practice each job.
      1. Phonological Awareness: Sound Play
      2. Decoding: Sounds and Words
      3. Fluency building: Partner Reading
   i. Putting it All Together

j. Feedback and Implementation Questions/Concerns

**Reading PALS- Teachers Grades 2-6**

k. Introduction to Reading PALS Grades 2-6
   i. Goals and objectives of program
ii. Summarize research findings in research, as well as teacher share for educators who have already implemented the program

iii. One teacher acts as the coach and the other teacher acts as the reader and then switch roles to practice each job.

1. Fluency building: Partner Reading
2. Retell
3. Paragraph Shrinking

l. Putting it All Together

m. Feedback and Implementation Questions/Concerns

Areas for further research

Proposed Research Design

The What Works Clearinghouse was established in 2002 to provide a central and trusted source of scientific evidence for what works in education. The WWC provides user friendly guides for educators that address research-based program recommendations, to assess the rigor of research evidence presented in relation to interventions and to provide a resource for schools to access education evaluation researchers. Since I began my research The WWC (2007) published a more recent study indicating the PALS model was found to have potential positive effects on reading achievement.

Other research studies were conducted in the 1980’s and reform has occurred over time since these studies were completed as well. Many of the studies have adequate data collection and conclusions that also suggest that peer tutoring is a successful strategy to promote academic achievement, with some discussion about classroom community. Yet
these research studies were conducted over twenty years ago. I feel that these research studies provide some background and history of peer tutoring, yet the educational system has attempted reform ever since and our schools continue to change.

The PALS program is a program that the Escanaba School District will implement at the elementary level to act as a supplement to the current curriculum. Action research is an effective tool at this level because educators will be implementing the PALS model to provide interventions in the classroom.

Participants:

The participants for this study will include students at the elementary level in third and fourth grade. The study will take place in third and fourth grade classrooms across two school districts. The classrooms will be working with a peer tutoring approach in content areas must also be inclusive with special education students. Special education students often spend time out of the room for instruction and it is important to offer all students opportunity to work with peers to feel part of the classroom community. Peer tutoring will be implemented as a supplement to the current reading and math instruction for 25-30 minutes, three days per week. Participants for the study will be chosen from the third and fourth grade classroom based on teacher and researcher selection. Students’ background should vary from both socio-economic status, as well as those identified from all achievement levels.

Data Collection

Data collection will be obtained through observation, assessments, interviews, and documents in the natural setting of the classroom where students are working on a day-to-day basis. Data collection will start beginning in the fall and continue throughout the
school year. Providing that this is a qualitative study data collection may continue over the course of another year if necessary at the conclusion of the first year of analysis.

Quantitative data will be recorded using a common assessment tool across the district. The DIBELS benchmark data and the STAR growth report, and bi-weekly progress monitoring data for reading. Math assessments will include inventory tests administered in the fall and the spring. Math data is also collected during each PALS session with the student practice sheet to determine if daily concepts are mastered. Our district has more assessments for reading and this created more data collection available, but math data collection is not sufficient and more measurements need to be established.

One main source of data collection will be classroom observation conducted during classroom activities that involve partner work, as well as other independent work time that allows students to correspond with their classmates. One study set up that would be beneficial would be to monitor the peer instruction time, and then a free time that directly follows to determine if the collaborative skills are carrying over into other subject areas in which students are not specifically partnered to work together, but given the opportunity if they choose. Free time in the classroom and at recess will also be a setting in which observations and field notes will be taken. Collaboration is a skill students develop through play with peers and some critical observations may be made during these times as well.

Student surveys will be conducted at the beginning of the school year, mid year, and at the end of the school year. The survey will include questions in regard to student perception of school in general, student belief in regard to academic achievement,
response to attitude about partner work, student response to role in the classroom community, and student response to how they feel they learn most effectively.

Teacher and parent surveys will also be administered at the beginning of the year, mid year and, at the end of the school year. Teacher surveys will focus on teacher perspective of student social skills with relation to the peer instructed learning over the course of the year.

Student feedback is a large portion of the data collection for this study. As the year progresses student feedback will provide a great deal of data in regard to student relationship and communication when working with peers. When students work in partnerships or in small groups it may also be beneficial to have students provide feedback in regard to each their experience working together. When completing projects as a group part of the assessment could be the feedback students provide in regard to their own peers and their participation in the group project. This type of documentation will provide feedback about the positives of partnership and the areas of improvement.

Other documents may include student behavior reports, student records involving any issues out of the classroom at recess and lunch time, or contact made with parents or other staff members. Events take place outside of the classroom, but often impact the classroom environment as well so these types of documents may lend to understanding of the big picture.

*Ethical Considerations*

Ethical considerations are crucial when conducting research and it is important to abide by all ethical research principles. Obtaining informed consent from students and parents will be administered prior to implementation of the study. The consent will
inform parents and students of the study and information that will be gathered in conclusion to the study. The second ethical principal involves “working to insure that no subtle or overt harm is done to the subjects who allow personal information to be included in the research” (James, 2008, p. 28). This will include information provided on the pre implementation survey which will require students to provide background information and attitude about partner work and school in general. The third ethical principal involves making sure to keep students and personal experiences in a confidential manner, making sure to replace student names with a surname or numbers to protect student privacy. The fourth principle is to add the body of knowledge about the subject under study, which is important to determine what outside factors are impacting student achievement. It is important to get to know students to help prevent assumptions to understand thoroughly the outside factors that may impact a student’s education.

*Anticipated Analysis Strategies*

After reading many research studies and developing a plan for a research proposal I have come to understand the complexity of the process of data collection, but even more so the process of data analysis. Making sense out of the data requires careful analysis to result in a deep understanding of the data collection. When working with students for a full school year, students learn quickly a teacher’s passion, interests, and beliefs. These beliefs can be carried over into a student’s beliefs in a sense. One important point to remember through data analysis is the fact that students may feel intimidated by an adult figure who is administering a survey or interview. It is important to allow students to respond in a non-threatening or persuasive manner, yet exactly how to attempt this
process is not definite at this time. It may involve an outside person to observe and conduct the survey and interviews, as well as take part in the data analysis process.

Data collection is an intense process that involves organization and reflection. Becoming part of the study and continually analyzing the process and data collection is essential to a successful study. When conducting surveys and interviews using a qualitative approach it allows for flexibility to make changes as needed to questions or interview protocol. Collecting open-ended data based on survey and interview questions provides for a broad overview of information that can be organized into themes, and then used for developing inference when attempting to understand the study.

Summary and Conclusion

The government has mandated with No Child Left Behind that all children will be proficient in reading and math by 2014, thus creating a need for research-based practices to provide interventions in the classroom for all learners. Providing all students with an opportunity to grow academically and achieve should be every educator’s goal. With funding decreases and demands on educational expectations increasing, educational leaders and educators must seek out research-based strategies to provide all learners with an environment that encourages collaboration with learning as a social process to enhance academic achievement. Reform is happening all around public schools and competition is impacting the demand for reform. Although history continues to point out what is happening in education that is causing failure, it is time for educators to take part in the push for change in education. The student population is ever evolving and students continue to come to school with a diversity of needs and educators are expected to hold them all to the highest standards without leaving any child behind. One of the latest
movements for reform in public education is the 21st Century Partnership that has emerged as a leading advocacy organization focusing on infusing 21st century skills into education to prepare students for the competitive global economy. The partnership provides resources for educators to help facilitate change with the goal to prepare students to have a competitive edge. Most importantly, this partnership encourages involvement from various stakeholders including educators, employees, parents, and community members in the development of a learning environment that will help students achieve academic and social proficiency with 21st century skills.

The PALS program was designed with the intent to help provide teachers with a research-based program to accommodate diverse learners within the classroom. The PALS program was originally designed for grades 2-6, yet recent research has led to the development of K PALS for kindergartners, first grade PALS, and high school PALS. This program is intended to be a supplement to the current curriculum, not a replacement. This program offers educators an opportunity to provide a learning environment that promotes learning as a social process to enhance active participation and collaboration from all learners.
REFERENCES


Retrieved from [http://www.cenmi.org/Documents/FocusonResults/FocusonResultsDetails/tabid/79/artic](http://www.cenmi.org/Documents/FocusonResults/FocusonResultsDetails/tabid/79/artic)


