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ABSTRACT

This document discusses the relative merits of cross-age helping programs, where one older more experienced student helps younger less experienced children to learn. Two types of approaches to organizing cross-age helping programs are reviewed: (1) one emphasizes a programmed or structured approach which consists of a series of detailed steps for the tutor to follow with his tutee; (2) the other emphasizes an open, more flexible relationship between older and younger. Ingredients necessary for a successful cross-age helping program are discussed, as well as an anecdotal evaluation of this type of program in a pilot study. A second paper included with this document suggests types of designs which have worked well in cross-age helping programs. (Author/PC)

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CROSS-AGE HELPING PROGRAMS

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Definition and rationale

A cross-age helping program is one in which older, more experienced children or youth help younger, less experienced children learn. Cross-age helping can include any subject area or skill: even just how to make friends and share ideas. Older students can help younger ones, in whatever the younger ones need help in.

Research and observation show that children 3 or 4 years older play a very significant role in influencing the attitudes of younger children. Older children are also a unique resource for younger children. They are nearer their age and speak their language (note from Dr. Feldman's non verbal interactions paper the 6th graders and 3rd graders can interpret the feelings of 3rd graders better than adults can). Older students are more feasible and attractive models for younger children than are adults. If younger children are not succeeding in school because they are alienated from adults, older children, perceived of as "friends", and on their side instead of hostile authority figures, can often reach them when adults cannot.

A cross-age helping program well run, gives children and youth experience in helping others, caring about others, opening their hearts to others, developing compassion, at the same time as becoming more appreciated by others. It gives students a picture of themselves as people with resources to share and with skills to do it.

It's a way for the isolated and shy to make contact with others, to become connected with their peer world in a meaningful way. It's a way for the already powerful to learn how to use their influence wisely.

It provides the youngers with an opportunity for individualized attention and instruction. For the olders it's an acceptable vehicle for learning.

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human relations techniques. Cross-Age helping substitutes for the idea of competition alternative attitudes and techniques of cooperation. (In this respect I regard it as one of society's important survival skills).

It provides many of the conditions research has shown are needed for effective learning to take place.

It gives students a chance to make close friendships. It gives students a way to feel useful and influential.

It provides an opportunity for students to fill gaps in their own education. It's a way to put a 1st grade book in the hands of a 6th grader and make him feel "cool" about carrying it. A good way to learn something is to teach it.

It's a chance to reduce the communication gap between teachers and students and increase their empathy for each other.

It provides an apprenticeship in the people helping professions. Students are a ready source of paraprofessional help.

Cross-Age helping gives older helpers a chance to work through with awareness, but at a safe emotional distance, some of their own problems with siblings, peers and adults.

It places a student in a position of trust and responsibility, thereby invoking change in behavior rather than having evidence of change be a prerequisite to be given responsibility.

It provides a basis for more meaningful interaction between participating staff members; creating a more positive, more interested, more goal oriented problem solving attitude toward each other.

Students get a perspective on their own learning and ability, a more realistic picture of where they fit into the community of people, younger and older than themselves. Conducted well, a cross-age helping program teaches trust, responsibility, caring and compassion.

Two types or approaches to organizing Cross-Age Helping Programs

There are two general schools of thought in cross-age tutoring. One emphasizes a programmed or structured approach which consists of a series of detailed steps for the tutor to follow with his tutee. The two outstanding programs using this approach are Elbert Ebersole's program at the Soto Street School in Los Angeles and Grant Von Harrison's method of remedial reading at Brigham Young University at Provo, Utah.

The Soto Street School program includes a 5 day tutor learning program before teaching. The tutors are taught step by step procedures they are expected to use with their tutees. They make flash cards for review. They drill tutees on words they miss. They listen to them read. They talk about what they've read to see if they really understand it. They follow a closely prescribed system of teaching children word recognition and reinforcing learning. At the Soto Street School before the tutoring program was started, only 2% of the first graders had scored as high as the 4th or 5th stanine on the annual Stanford reading test. After tutoring first became a part of the curriculum, 25% placed in stanine 4 or above. When the program was expanded to include more children two years later, the percentage jumped to 41%.

The more academic success these youngsters have, the better their behavior, states Mr. Ebersole, who was also the principal at the time he designed this program.

The other approach also includes the possibility of some programmed remedial work if the teachers of the youngsters deem it advisable. But the emphasis is on open, not-so-structured relationship between older and younger. The goal is to help the older understand why the younger is having trouble learning and to discover constructive, creative ways to support the younger's

efforts. The objective is to develop friendship and mutual regard as much as to increase precise academic skill.

Ingredients necessary for a successful Cross-Age Helping Program

Just putting older and younger students together does not insure that they will be helpful to each other or that the teachers of the older group or younger group will necessarily be pleased with the results. There are ingredients necessary to include in a cross-age helping program to make it a positive learning experience. The program should be voluntary for both the staff team organizing the program and the older students who help younger ones.

There should be:

1. A staff team including:
 - a) Supportive administration
 - b) A volunteer sending teacher from whose class the older student volunteer helpers come.
 - c) At least one volunteer receiving teacher who is being helped by the older students.
 - d) Someone to conduct seminar training sessions for older student helpers in how to relate constructively to younger children. This can be an additional person, a counselor, assistant principal, principal, crisis teacher, social worker, or the seminar can be conducted by the sending teacher, the receiving teacher or the two of them together.
2. Team building and support time for the staff to discuss and plan mutual goals; design decision; concerns; support for team; scheduling, etc.

3. Three types of training for older helpers:

- 1) How to relate well to youngers (Human Relations seminar sessions)
- 2) Precise methods of teaching the content material the teacher of the youngers and the older helper want the youngers to learn (often taught by receiving teacher, sometimes by expert like remedial reading teacher).
- 3) How to be creative and invent ways of helping youngers reach the learning goals. (Seminar sessions)

There should be some orientation and seminar sessions for older students before they begin working with youngers, which include:

How to relate positively to youngers

What youngers are like

How to turn mistakes into success experiences

How to relate to teachers of the youngers they will help

There should also be seminar and support sessions after the older helpers begin work with youngers. These include:

On-the-job problems and successes shared and analysed

New ideas exchanged

New information about children and teaching techniques

Supplementary learning materials, games, etc.

Skill practice opportunities to try out alternative ways of handling situations. (Most children know what it is like to be criticized, punished and belittled. But few have received much help while they were smaller in techniques of building self esteem. Skill practice exercises in alternatives of handling a situation give an opportunity to try out helping in positive ways in order to avoid cutting children down

or punishing them. Untrained older helpers are apt to act like the worst teachers they have ever had because they equate this behavior with the teaching role.)

4. Feedback from a staff member who has observed the helping sessions and can point out successes and provide opportunities to discuss alternative methods of dealing with situations which seem baffling.
5. Conferences between the receiving teacher and the older helpers in which the teacher can brief the helping student in how to present the content material which the younger needs to learn, give any specific content training skills to the helper, and discuss goals for the younger child. After the helper starts work there should be continued student-teacher conferences to give and get feedback from each other about how things are going and to share ideas on next step strategies. The most significant person for the student helper volunteers in evaluating their own success is most often the teacher of the youngsters they are helping. This teacher is looked upon by the students as the one who "employs" them.
6. Time for teachers to discuss and practice skills/relating to older students and of using students' help. There should be time given in their team-building planning sessions to consider:

How to air and cope with resistances to involvement or ambivalences in the program

How to promote students' self esteem -- to do for older student helpers what you hope they will do for the youngsters they help

How to team build, lessen threat, increase mutual trust,

How to creatively pair older and younger students in the helping relationship.

A Recommended Schedule for Cross-Age Helping

Optimally the schedule for a helping program should include:

Seminar time once a week for older students

Receiving teacher conferences once a week with older students
to check how things are going

Total staff meeting once a month to check on progress and make
needed changes

Two, three or four days for older students helping younger
(supervised at regular intervals by someone on the staff who
will report back episodes worthy of note to the student
helpers)

Evaluation

Evaluation of this type of program has been largely anecdotal in nature. In a pilot study of an inner city Detroit complex involving a high school, junior high school and an elementary school, where a more formal evaluation questionnaire was given after the program, teachers and students reported changes for the better in younger's academic performance, turning in assignments, settling down to work, greater confidence, better attitude toward receiving help, greater self-respect and better attitude toward others.

Twenty-four high school students, members of a high school psychology class involved, were asked what changes they saw in themselves which could be attributed to their experience with cross-age helping.

19 reported understanding others better

10 reported being more considerate of others

19 reported being more patient

6 reported getting along better with others

15 reported feeling more useful

18 reported greater self confidence

Raymond Bottom, when principal of Custer Elementary School in Monroe, Michigan, started a pilot cross-age helping program of 5th graders helping 2nd graders. He analyzed the composite scores of the students involved from the Iowa test of basic skills. The results showed the older helpers had grown 9 times faster than their previous rate of growth over a comparable period. He isn't sure if this is because they learned that much more or because they were more cooperative in taking the test. Since the goal for the program was both greater learning and better cooperation, it doesn't really matter. The younger students made gains greater than in a comparable previous time period. Teachers rated youngsters and olders in the program on a five point scale on 15 behaviors, attitudes and achievement dimensions before and after a 4 months program in helping. These included items like

Low class participation. to high class participation

Attentive to inattentive

Persistent to gives up quickly

, etc.

On all dimensions both youngsters and olders had gained.

The best evaluation comes from the Ontario-Montclair School District in Ontario, California, which conducted evaluative research on their ESEA Title III program on Cross-Age Teaching, an elective 8th grade class in Serrano Junior High School. This involved 120 eight graders and elementary pupils each year for three years. Poole-Young Associates research team from Long Beach, California analyzed the data and provided the evaluation package. They tested the students, both youngsters and olders, on academic learning (math and English) self concept, social acceptability, discipline and attendance.

The students, for a 50 minute period, met 5 days a week for the period of three weeks. Every day they had a human relations type training in how to relate to youngers. Then they worked with their paired youngers on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. On Friday they had a feedback (seminar session) and on Monday they planned their work with their youngers and had training in special content areas. The course lasted one semester.

The Results:

Academic Learning

A positive improvement for the experimental students over the control students was made in five of the six areas measured. (Reading, Language, and Math for the Jr. High Students and Vocabulary, Math and Spelling for the Elementary Students.) Specifically results were as follows:

Jr. High - Olders

Exceeded the mean growth of the older control groups

in reading scores by 3 months;

in math scores by 3 months;

in language scores by 2 months

Elementary - Youngers receiving help

Exceeded the mean growth of the control groups

in reading scores by 2 months;

in language scores by 1 month.

In Self Concept

The younger tutored children exceeded their controls by 1.4, the Olders by 5.69, according to teacher ratings on the McDaniel Inferred Scale.

The Youngers exceeded their comparison groups by 5.22 and the Olders exceeded by 5.39 on the pupil-rated Reported Self Concept Scale.

This data reflects a strong change in self concept on the participating students and the teachers of these pupils identified the same strong change.

On Social Acceptability

The growth gained by each group is as follows:

Younger Leadership	+2.90
Learning	+3.99
Older Leadership	+5.0
Learning	+3.55

The control groups declined on this measurement.

In Discipline

The olders exceeded the control group by 6% positive gains.

The youngers exceeded the control group by 23% positive gains.

In Attendance

The youngers in the project significantly reduced their absences as compared with the control groups.

The older students had an 8.33% of non-attendance as compared to 6.58% for the control students.

David Sherertz, one of our discussants, was a teacher and dissemination consultant for this project.

How to avoid traps in programming

Everyone involved gains in a well run cross-age project. But there are traps to watch out for in programming. Some ways to avoid these traps are:

- 1) Don't exploit older student helpers by giving them "dirty work" like washing paint brushes or "baby sitting" an incorrigible child you want to be rid of.

- 2) Don't give them a younger you consider impossible to succeed with, like a brain-injured child, unless you explain to them the difficulty and they are willing to take on the job knowing it's not their fault if there seems to be no progress made.
- 3) Be sure student helpers understand the goal for an assignment given and why it is important so they can explain it correctly to the youngers if need be or proceed correctly.
- 4) Be sure to inform parents of both olders who are helping and youngers who are being helped.
- 5) Give older students a "one to one" assignment before letting them accept the responsibility of handling a small group.
- 6) Provide an example in relating to the olders with respect and esteem-building techniques; make sure they understand what is expected of them; consider their needs; voice appreciation; treat helping as a status activity; give helpers training and support -- treat them as you hope they will treat their youngers.
- 7) Plan techniques to prevent disappointments or failures. When pairing olders with youngers it's good to arrange a time to review how things are going before making it permanent so the olders won't have a feeling of failure if it doesn't work out. Pair slower older helpers with slower youngers. Protect the olders' image as being wiser. The closer in age and ability the olders and youngers are, the more "help" the olders have to be in the subject matter being taught. A space/^{of} at least two actual years in ability and age help preserve the olders' image as a resource person. That is, 6th grade to 3rd grade, 4th grade to 1st grade, etc. More space is perfectly o.k.

- 8) If possible, include some older students held in high esteem by their classmates to insure that the program is regarded as the "in" thing to do.
- 9) When possible have at least 2 older students helping at the same time in a room. It gives them a chance to become friends with someone their own age, coming and going to class, and it keeps remarks and suggestions the teacher may make to them from being heard as "personal" criticism.

In summary

When help is really needed and teachers don't feel threatened or displaced by older helping students; when the program for both staff and students is voluntary; when helping is linked with caring on the parts of the teachers for both older helpers and youngsters being helped; when olders are not helping all alone in a vacuum but are supported and trained; when learning to help is considered an important part of the program and helping is regarded as a status activity, much benefit accrues to everyone, olders and youngsters and staff.

Who can measure/spread effect? ^{the most significant} A 5th grade older was asked if now that he'd been helping a 2nd grader this had any effect on his attitude toward younger brothers and sisters at home. "Yes," he said emphatically, "I have a little sister. When she cried I used to say "shut up". Now I say, "What is it?"

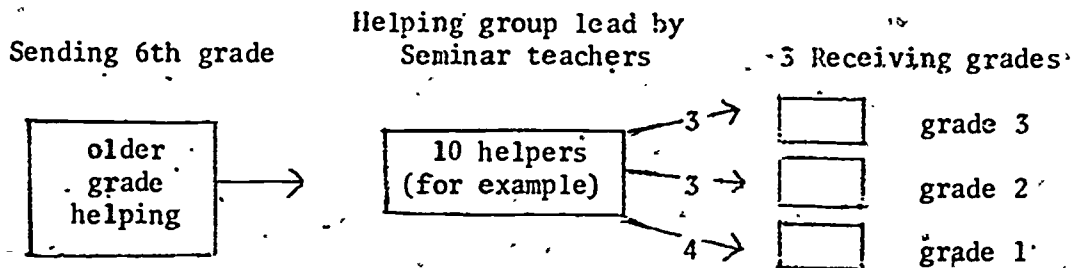
There should be a research design set up to discover the gains made by cross-age helpers in empathy, understanding and concern for others.

Suggested Types of Designs which have Worked Well

in Cross-Age Helping Programs

In the Elementary School

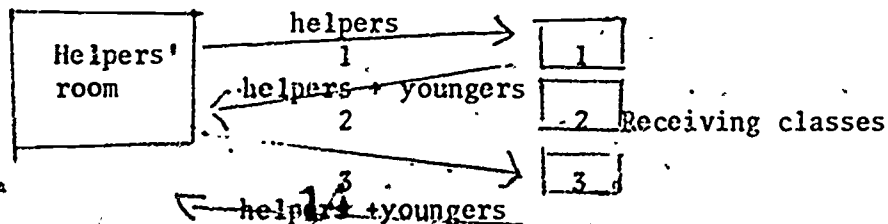
One design is an older sending grade, 4th, 5th or 6th, from which a small number go to help younger receiving grades. This design looks like this:



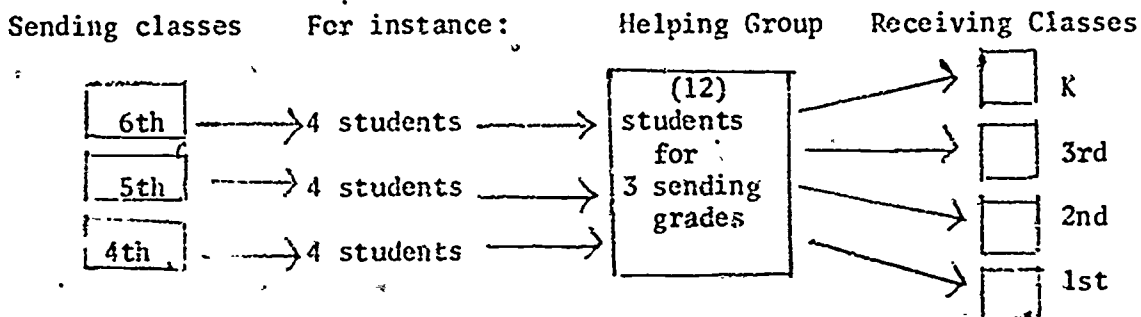
This group helps in lower grades 3 or 4 times a week at one time period, say 9:30 - 10:30. One day a week at this same time they have an older helpers' seminar led by a counselor, a helping or crisis teacher; the vice principal, the principal, a social worker, or the counselor and social worker together, etc. The leader supervises the helping sessions, looking in on each pair for about 10 minutes each week. At the seminar session each week the leader can then share successes observed and open discussion for alternative methods of dealing with situations that have seemed baffling.

This group of helping students may work with youngsters a whole semester or a shorter length of time (every 8 or 10 weeks, say), giving an opportunity for other helping groups to have a chance and the original group of helpers to have a vacation from helping.

Another way to supervise in this type of design is to have the helpers bring their youngsters to the room of the supervising teacher to work during the work period together, like this:

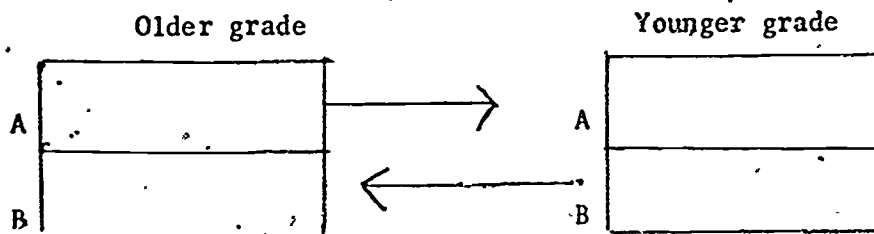


A modification of this design is where volunteers from several sending classes form a helping group:



This has worked well with social workers, counselors or remedial reading teachers or crisis teachers leading and coordinating the helping student group, either alone or as team teachers.

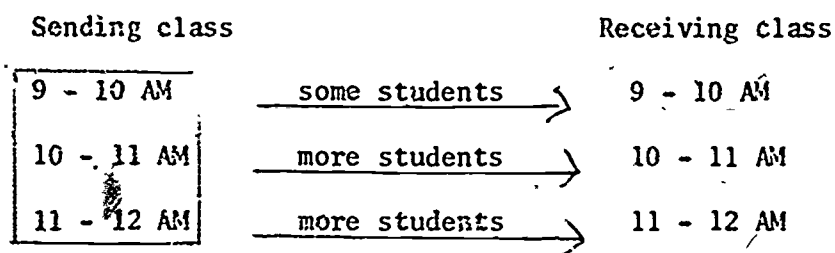
Another Elementary School design which works very well is having an older class and a younger class permanently paired with each other as "buddy" classes for the semester or the year. There they can use a design that includes everyone who wants to be in the helping experience. The "A" half of the older grade comes down to the younger grade to join the younger "A" half. The "B" half of the younger grade goes to join the older "B's" during the period, say 9:30 - 10:30, 3 or 4 times a week. The teachers involved supervise helping pairs in their own rooms.



Students who don't want to be included (and there are hardly ever any) can go to another same age grade room or the library during the period assigned to helping.

A second type of design in 2 permanently paired classes of older and younger can be used when the students from the older sending class are working on an individual contract basis. They may go to help the receiving younger at different times of day according to the receiving teachers' needs and the helpers' contracts.

The design looks like this:



A further variation is to have some students help Mondays and Wednesdays, some Tuesdays and Thursdays. The seminar for helpers might be on Friday for an hour co-led by both sending and receiving teachers, with a substitute that hour for the receiving teacher's class.

Permanent pairing makes it possible for the receiving teacher to plan with the sending teacher to have helpers to cover extra events like field trips or help with playground activities.

In Secondary School

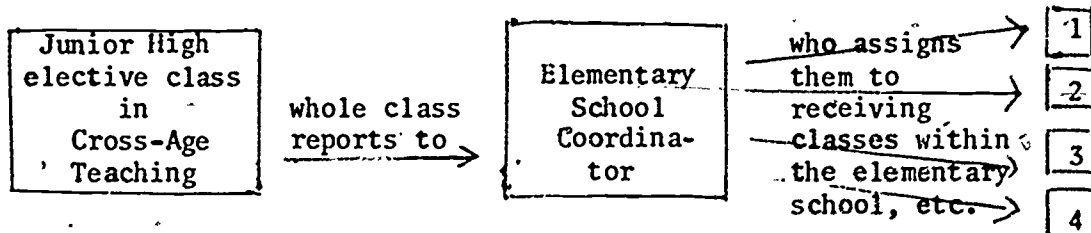
In a Junior High or High School setting often this is an elective course in "Cross Age Teaching" which meets 5 days a week. For the first 3 weeks it meets every day for training in how to get along well with younger children and the receiving teachers the older students will be helping.

Then, 3 days a week (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) they work with younger they are paired with. One day a week (Friday) they have a seminar or feedback session. One day a week (Monday) they have training in special content work they think would be useful to know, like remedial reading techniques, subtraction facts, or inventing learning games for younger, etc.

The times they are working with their youngsters can be supervised by the teacher of their class.

The Ontario-Montclair California design included two Junior High School teachers' half day assignments with 15 students each for two periods. They could have seminar and feedback sessions together with team teaching or separately, as they saw fit. It also included two Elementary School clinicians who were employed half a day. These teachers are credentialed and can substitute in any receiving teacher's classroom, leaving that teacher free to look in on a helping pair or to be a resource person during the Friday or Monday older student training and support sessions.

A Junior High School variation used successfully in Chula Vista, California is an elective cross-age helping class whose leader runs the per-service training for 3 weeks, and seminar supportive sessions once a week thereafter, with a helping teacher from the elementary school to whom the helpers report and from whom they receive their assignments.



A High School psychology class elected to have student members help youngsters 3 days a week (with their teacher observing each group about 10 minutes per week): They had a seminar session for all helpers once a week, and a class period based on the psychology textbook once a week.

These designs can be adapted in different ways or may give you ideas about how you can design effectively for your group.

Compiled by
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