# Motivation of Peer Tutors as a Critical Aspect of Teaching Physical Education

**Introduction**

Participating in the role of a peer tutor is a difficult task in as much as it is also specific to its requirements. It is indeed true that when students fulfill the role of peer tutor a lot of benefits are experienced in the process. Peer tutoring provides an opportunity for students to develop social skills, friendship development is also nurtured, and students have the opportunity to engage in age-appropriate activities. The benefits that students with disability get from their peer tutors are also enormous compared to when the tutors are adults. This is specifically true because several studies have shown that students tend to behave differently when with adults than when they are with their peers. The most outstanding benefits that students with disability get from their peer tutors are increased academic learning time in physical education, increased moderately to more vigorous physical activity level, enhanced motor performance, improved social interaction and social skills development, promoting inclusion, motivating self-efficacy performance and also helps in increasing aerobic fitness. It is for these reasons therefore that student peer tutors need to be motivated to help students with a disability.

Peer tutoring contributes to increasing social interaction and social skills. Peer tutors, therefore, needs to be motivated to help increase social interaction and social skills. There are four different types of peer tutoring all of which produce positive results when adopted by students. These peer tutoring methods include unidirectional peer tutoring which also means one on one peer tutoring, reciprocal peer tutoring, cross-age peer tutoring and class wide peer tutoring. Unidirectional peer tutoring, for instance, provides an opportunity for a student with a disability to be able to receive additional support and attention from a student without a disability because usually in this method only one student is trained to serve a student with a disability with all roles defined. Reciprocal peer tutoring provides a sense of responsibility and equal status among participants. This is because in this peer tutoring method students are grouped most preferably in a pair where one student is disabled, and the other one is not. Cross-age peer tutoring, on the other hand, involves an older student tutoring a much younger student. The benefit of this method of peer tutoring is that the older tutor is more experienced, reliable and responsible than same age peers. Class-wide peer tutoring, on the other hand, is a more innovative way of maximizing classroom resources while promoting effective and dynamic student experience. It usually groups students in small groups of four to six (Cervantes, Lieberman, Magnesio, & Wood, 2013). The students are then given the opportunity to be both tutor and tutee for the group and feedbacks provided. The benefit of this peer tutoring method is that it provided more practice time and increased the opportunity to accurately perform desired skills. Motivating peer educators impacts positively on all these effects of peer tutors on physical education.

Motivation of peer tutors can be done through several means. It can be done through training and skills improvement. Research has shown that trained and untrained peers tutors show different results on the performance of students with disability. A research in particular that was conducted using trained and untrained peer tutors showed that trained peers tutors were more successful in delivering desired results. The research was conducted using six students as participants. Of the six students five were boys and one girl all of whom were in the age bracket of 9 to 11 years. All these participants were regarded to be having mild mental retardation (Houston, Dunn, Van der Mars, & McCubbin, 1997). It is in record that two of the five boys had Prader-Willi syndrome and the female had Down syndrome. The six students were based in a self-contained special education class and were on a regular basis integrated into physical education that included art and music. Then six peer students were chosen to be peers educators. The criteria for choosing the six peers educators was based on good behavior in physical education class, high level of skill ability and a desire to be in the study. Their ages were in a similar range as the disabled children which were between 9 to 11 years. Some of the peer tutors were trained and others not trained. The peer educators were then given an opportunity to attend participants' physical education class in addition to the regular physical education class (Houston, Dunn, Van der Mars, & McCubbin, 1997). Motor performance in regards to horizontal jump, catch, overhand throw, forehead strike and sidearm strike were analyzed. After several classes results were analyzed. The results achieved showed that it is important to train tutors especially prior to working with students with disabilities in physical education. The resulted showed that trained peer tutors helped students with disability improve their motor performance in a relatively higher manner than the untrained students. It is for this reason therefore that it is important to consider training of peer tutors as one way of motivating the peer students and helping to improve the performance of disable students. This specifically is important because untrained students in the study simply gave general statements like ‘good'. However the trained students gave specific cues and feedback messages such as ‘stand sideways' and ‘bend your knees'

Motivation is also important for peer tutors because it provides skills improvement especially with regards to behavior empowerment. An analysis conducted based on interaction of the environment and behavior on peer tutors show that behavior can be developed maintained and decreased. It is for this reason that students who fulfill functions of peer tutors needs to be motivated. Behavior can be viewed in respect to private behaviors that occur within the person such as thinking. Thinking in specifics refers to self-reflection, self-talk and problem solving. Thinking also involves feelings with regards to love, anxiety and joy. All these attributes of thinking in one way or the other touches on peer tutors in physical education. Motivation then helps the peer tutors to have positive thinking towards their peer disabled students which is a very important factor in enhancing and improving performance of both the peer tutors and the disabled children. The two main principles of behavior analysis are discrimination and generalization. Discrimination in simple terms refers to behaving differently in different situations. Generalization on the other hand refers to behaving similarly in different situations. Peer tutors are motived not to adopt these two characteristics of discrimination and generalization. An example of discrimination is when a tutor praises one student's technique but corrects another. For instance, when a student passes a ball in a basketball game to a player in the open but ignore passing the ball to another player who is being covered by an opponent. An example of generalization is for instance when a tutor provides feedback to a student he or she has not previously worked with, or when a student performs a particular defensive tactic in a games that he or she has previously only practiced in a lesson (Lee & Ward, Peer-assisted learning in physical education: A review of theory and research, 2005). Behavior empowerment is therefore important to help control the occurrence of negative behavior in peer tutors. The best way of achieving behavior empowerment is through training on relevant skills.

Motivation is also important for peer educators because it helps them to increase performance through inclusion. Inclusion is an important aspect for students with intellectual and physical disabilities. Studies have shown that students with poor social skills in some cases exacerbate stress among students. It is therefore important that peer tutors are motivated to practice inclusion to reduce stress among students (Block, Oberweiser, & Bain, 2001). A study conducted to assess the level of inclusion with regards to peer tutoring on physical, instructional and social interaction behavior among peer students with severe and multiple disabilities and peers without disabilities shows that the principle of inclusion is very beneficial in shaping the behavior of students (Klavina & Block, 2008). A study conducted with three severe and multiple disabilities and nine peer tutors illustrates the importance of inclusion in physical education offered by peer tutors. In the study, one of the students with severe and multiple disabilities had a hereditary degenerative disorder with severe loss of coordination and balance. The student often needed at least two people to offer him assistance to transfer to the gym and participate in other activities. It was challenging for the classmates to do activities together with him even though they loved him. The other student with severe and multiple disabilities suffered from severe intellectual disabilities. The student had moderate motor difficulties, severe speech difficulties, and poor body awareness. The students showed a behavior that was disruptive and non-compliant which was related to task avoidance. The third student with severe and multiple disabilities suffered from cerebral palsy, severe mental retardation, and very limited vocabulary. The student needed physical assistance in all her activities especially to do with the following direction and participating in individual tasks or games (Klavina & Block, 2008). All these students were included in the physical education class on a full-time basis with the other nine students serving as peer tutors and adult teacher direction. The results from this study showed that peer-mediated instructional conditions showed an immediate increase in interaction behavior with peer tutors for the three target students (Block & Malloy, 1998).The interaction with adult support personnel decreased for all the target students. This study is a classic example showing how important the aspect of inclusion is to physical education. Therefore, peer tutors need to be motivated to adopt this culture of inclusion in physical education.

The motivation of peer tutors also helps students to achieve self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an informative outcome in understanding peer tutoring mechanisms (Jean & Lafont, 2010). Peer tutors, therefore, need to be well equipped with peer tutoring instructional strategies to achieve self-efficacy. Self-efficacy usually influences the activities that individuals consider to approach, the effort they deploy on such activities, and the degree of persistence individuals demonstrate when faced with failure or aversive stimuli. Self-efficacy is traced to three sources of information. The three are enactive mastery experience, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasions and psychological states (Block, Oberweiser, & Bain, 2001). Generally; it is true that in most cases students do not take full advantage of peer tutoring instructional strategies when preparing to fulfill the role of a tutor. A study was conducted to examine whether implementing a peer tutoring program before the beginning of reciprocal peer tutoring sessions might help to solve this issue. In the study, forty eight students were assigned in symmetric dyads to a physical practice that is associated with spontaneous reciprocal peer tutoring condition and another twenty-four participants assigned to a physical activity without reciprocal peer tutoring conditions. The peer training was targeted to enhance the explanatory potential of the tutor and how sensitivity the tutor is to the specific needs of the tutee (Jean & Lafont, 2010). Results of the study showed that trained participants achieved superior motor performance and portrayed more accurate self-efficacy than the other participants who were not taken through reciprocal peer tutoring. The study concluded that reciprocal peer tutoring is effective in increasing cognitive knowledge among peer tutors. It is therefore important that peer tutors are motivated to achieve self-efficacy (Lee & Ward, Peer Tutoring Student-centered learning in physical eduaction for the 21st century, 2002).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that peer tutoring carries a lot of benefits for both students with disability and those without disabilities. The benefits are several and include among others increased academic learning time in physical education, increased moderately to more vigorous physical activity level, enhanced motor performance, improved social interaction and social skills development, promoting inclusion and motivating self-efficacy performance. It is for these reasons that peer tutors and peer tutoring needs to be motivated to promote and enhance these positive attributes required in physical education.

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