



Paired reading schemes: a teacher toolkit

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Section One: Why run a paired reading scheme?

A paired reading scheme involves one pupil (the tutor) supporting another pupil (the tutee) with their reading. Traditionally, the most effective schemes are where the tutor is older than the tutee (two years' difference being the optimal gap) – this is often referred to as cross-age tutoring. Paired reading works successfully in primary and secondary schools, but also between the two types of schools.

Schools have been running such schemes for many years and the benefits are widely acknowledged. In September 2011, the University of Durham published the results of the largest ever trial of peer tutoring in reading with primary school aged children. The impact of the scheme was convincing:

“The boost to school pupils’ attainment provided by peer tutoring was equivalent to about three months progress in both maths and reading.”

Tutees took part in two ten week programmes over the course of two years. If you would like to read more about this study, visit www.dur.ac.uk/news/newsitem/?itemno=12786. Below we have summarised the potential benefits of a well-run paired reading scheme for the tutees, tutors and for the school itself.

Benefits for the tutee

- Improved reading attainment – decoding and comprehension of words and text
- Increased confidence and enjoyment of reading
- Improved attitudes to reading for pleasure and increased amount of reading

outside of school

- Interaction with a positive peer role model – learning from their positive behaviour
- Personal 1-to-1 attention, allowing them to work at their own pace
- Increased sense of belonging in the school community

Benefits for the tutor

- Development of interpersonal skills through experiencing a deeper sense of responsibility, dedication and pride in being able to help a peer
- Improved speaking and listening skills through asking meaningful questions and active listening
- Improved attitudes to reading for pleasure and increased amount of reading outside of school
- Increased sense of belonging in the school community

Benefits for the school

- Improvement in attainment of under-performing pupils in English/reading
- Cost effective
- An effective supplement to high-quality teaching
- Improved school community cohesion – pupils in different year groups getting to

“Hopefully this has convinced you of the benefits of running a paired reading scheme in your school. Read on to find out how to set up and run an effective scheme.”

Section Two: Impact and outcomes

One of the first and most important tasks to do when setting up a reading buddy scheme is to establish what you are aiming to achieve and to work out how you will monitor and evaluate pupil progress.

Having evidence that you can feedback to tutors and tutees, which shows that progress has been made, will help sustain motivation and enjoyment. Furthermore, proving that you have made an impact will give the project more credibility moving forwards. This could result in funding for a future scheme, as well as increased staff engagement across the school.

Impact on literacy or English attainment

The primary aim should be to show that paired reading activity has an impact on the tutees' literacy/English attainment.

• In primary schools...

Use ongoing teacher assessment tracking data related to reading. Baseline each child at both the beginning and end of the scheme to see where progress beyond the anticipated levels has been achieved. If the scheme is running for more than six months, try and capture data at a mid-point as well.

• In secondary schools...

You may want to administer a "reading" test, of which there are many available on the market, at the beginning and end of the scheme. If your scheme is running for more than six months, you may want to administer a mid-point test.

A word of caution related to reading assessment tests...

You will invest time and effort trying to create a relaxed and unthreatening atmosphere for your scheme. Assessment and tests have the potential to undo some of that good work. When introducing tests to pupils, explain the reason for them and who gets to see the results (ideally when data is accompanied with names, this is as few people as possible). Reassure tutees that the test results are used purely to inform and that they do not affect their work or results in class.

Impact on attitudes, behaviour and social skills

In addition to targets related to attainment, tutors and tutees will benefit in other ways in terms of their attitudes, behaviour and social skills. Measuring this progress is also important:

Tutees

Survey tutees at the beginning and end of the scheme. Surveys could also be accompanied by an informal focus group session or an informal interview, in order to explore key areas in more detail. For example, you could explore whether, as a result of the scheme, the tutee:

- Is more positive and confident about their reading
- Reads for enjoyment out of school more frequently
- Feels more confident about school and school work
- Feels like she/he is more a part of the school community

Tutors

Survey tutors at the beginning and end of the scheme. Surveys could also be accompanied by an informal focus group session or an informal interview, in order to explore key areas in more detail. For example, you could explore whether, as a result of the scheme, the tutor:

- Has developed new interpersonal skills
- Has improved their ability to communicate with other pupils
- Feels more positive about themselves as a member of the school community
- Feels more positive about reading and reads more for pleasure outside of school

It is also important to make sure that the aims for the paired reading scheme link to the school's overall improvement targets. This may relate to the cohort of pupils participating, literacy or citizenship targets. Evidence that you have made progress in a priority area will help with the sustainability of the club and its profile within the school. Make sure you talk to the tutors' and tutees' teachers to gather anecdotal feedback about any improvements, other than those relating to attainment.

At the end of the scheme, we would suggest writing up a report which describes the scheme and the impact it has made on the children/young people. If the report is quite lengthy, then start it with an executive summary. You may like to use this as the basis for a presentation to your senior management team or at a staff meeting.

Section Three: Practical considerations

There are many practical aspects to consider when setting up a paired reading scheme. These will of course depend on your pupils' and school's circumstances, but we have addressed some of these through our Frequently Asked Questions section below.

How often and when is the best time to run sessions?

At least one session a week before school, at lunchtime or after-school has proven to work well. Before school can be a particularly effective time if there are lots of lunch or after-school clubs which the tutors or tutees take part in. Although we have seen paired reading schemes that work well during class time, this can present challenges, especially for secondary schools, if tutees feel embarrassed about the attention they may receive for "being pulled out of class". Whatever time you hold the sessions, make sure it is a consistent time every week.

How long should each session last?

Up to 45 minutes for secondary schools and up to 30 minutes for primary schools. Research from the University of Durham (2011) showed that sessions as short as twenty minutes were seen to be effective in boosting the tutees' reading attainment. You may want to create distinct sections within the session: club update; talking about reading/choosing a new book; reading together; summary of session.

Where should I hold the sessions?

Hold the sessions in a space where the tutors and tutees both feel comfortable. Ideally this should be somewhere informal and free from distraction, for example the school library or a 'nurture' room. If the only space you have is a classroom, this is fine, but do try and make sure that it is a room away from the hustle and bustle of lunchtime crowds.

How much does it cost to run a paired reading scheme?

As little or as much as you would like! At a minimum you need to make sure that the school can provide a range of exciting reading materials for the sessions. This would include magazines and comics as well as fiction and non-fiction books. Hopefully, your school library will be the place where you find these reading materials, but if your library does not stock them then you will need to invest in them for the scheme.

It is also a good idea to factor the cost of refreshments into the budget. You will be trying to create a friendly sociable atmosphere and drinks and snacks can go a long way in helping with this.

If the budget will allow, then put some funds aside for a celebration event at the end of the scheme. This could be a trip to the cinema, a local theatre or attraction, or even a party at school.

Section Four: Ingredients for success

A positive environment

It is absolutely crucial to create the right atmosphere and a positive environment during sessions. As mentioned earlier, if possible, try not to hold the sessions in a classroom – although we do appreciate that this may not be feasible. To help keep the atmosphere friendly and build a sense of team spirit amongst the group, give pupils the opportunity to get to know each other and talk as a group as well as in their pairs. It is also beneficial to give tutors the opportunity to talk to each other so that they can share their experiences and help each other. Refreshments will also help to keep the atmosphere informal.

Keeping attendance high

When starting any kind of club or scheme outside of class time, there is always the risk that initial enthusiasm will fade away and attendance will drop. Here are some ideas and messages that should help prevent this:

- Choose tutors very carefully (see next section) – on accepting the role, they should commit to attending each session
- Provide constructive and positive feedback to tutees about their progress
- Provide constructive and positive feedback to tutors about the difference they are making and what a good job they are doing
- Regularly celebrate progress and achievements
- Make sure the range of reading materials on offer are engaging and vary in format (magazines, books, comics etc)

Selecting the right tutors and tutees

One of the most important elements in setting up a scheme is to get your selection of tutees and tutors right. Below are some criteria for selecting tutors, tutees and matching them up.

Criteria for selecting tutors

Pupils who have a positive attitude to learning, and preferably have experienced some degree of success at school themselves

- Pupils who have good communication (including listening!) and social skills
- Pupils whom you can rely on to attend every week and take the role seriously
- Pupils who like reading themselves (ideally)
- Pupils who are at least two years older than the tutees
- Pupils interested in their own personal development and growth, including developing their social skills and leadership skills

Criteria for selecting tutees

- Pupils who you know or who have been recommended by other members of staff
- Pupils who are functioning with a reading age below that expected of a child their age. This should not include pupils with Special Educational Needs.
- Pupils who are at least two years younger than the tutors
- Pupils who are willing to engage with the scheme and are motivated to improve their reading
- Pupils who could benefit from having an older role model in their life

Matching up tutors and tutees

Pupils of the same gender

- Pupils of the same background, including ethnicity where appropriate
- Pupils with a common interest
- Pupils that you think will get on well with each other

Section Five: Supporting the tutor

The success of your scheme will partly depend on the ability of your tutors to support their partner. Therefore time and consideration needs to be dedicated to making sure they are equipped for the role and supported along the way. This section will look at some of the activity which you might like to implement to ensure success in this area. Please note that the section below this one addresses the technicalities of reading support.

Getting some of the tutors involved in the planning of the scheme

When planning your scheme, make sure you get some of the tutors involved so that they feel some kind of ownership over the activity, increasing your chances of success.

Initial training sessions

It is important to make sure that you dedicate enough time to train your tutors before they start working with their partners. You should ideally offer a series of short training sessions at lunchtimes or after-school for tutors, covering all or some of the areas detailed in the next section: Guidance and practical advice for tutors. This is an opportunity for tutors to confirm that they definitely want to participate, learn how to be an effective reading tutor, get to know other tutors and ask any questions they may have.

Ongoing support during sessions

Try to always be on hand to support tutors during the sessions. If this is not possible, make sure another member of staff, for example a teaching assistant, is involved with the scheme and will be available to provide this support where needed.

Organise a catch-up session for tutors every month or half term

It is important to talk to the tutors regularly and to check that they continue to be fully confident in their role. Organise a short catch-up session for the tutors every month or half term where:

- They can share their experiences with each other
- They can ask you questions
- You can introduce further mini-training sessions to help them improve in their role
- You can help them evaluate the progress they are making

Offer a reward for participating in the scheme

Tutors should be chosen because they are self-motivated, but an incentive or reward may also help to keep the pupils interested if enthusiasm wanes. You may want to offer recognition linked to your school's reward point system, or system of recognising achievement. You could also explore whether being a reading tutor could be recognised formally and count towards a qualification, for example the Arts Award or the Open Education College Network.

Section Six: Guidance and practical advice for tutors

The following guidance and advice needs to be introduced to tutors through initial training sessions and they should be given the chance to practice them in advance of the first session with their tutee. We would suggest grouping sessions into general advice for being a tutor and specific techniques for supporting tutees with their reading.

This guidance has been written for both primary and secondary schools and covers all possible areas that could be introduced to tutors. The ability of the tutors will of course differ from school to school and within your group. Therefore, you may not want to introduce all of the strategies in advance of the first reading session and also may need to adapt the guidance according to the age/ability of the tutors you are working with.

Underneath each section below, you will find some ideas for activities that you could use during the training sessions to communicate the strategies/advice.

Training to be a tutor (general advice)

Clarifying the role of the tutor

It is important to establish the parameters of the role of the tutor from the outset, so that they have a clear understanding of what their level of involvement is and of what is outside their remit.

Tutors should understand that:

- They are simply there to help their partner to read during the sessions
- They need to get to know their partner and establish a friendly atmosphere during sessions
- They should encourage their partner to read for enjoyment outside of the sessions
- They need to be reading role models for their partners and share their own reading preferences and recommendations
- They should always be on time and focussed during sessions

But tutors should also understand that:

- They are not responsible for their partner's attainment or reading level
- They should talk to the teacher about anything that their partner discloses which they are concerned about, such as bullying or anything which is putting the child in danger.
- They are not the child's teacher and should not discipline the child as if this were the case. Tutors should understand that any behavioural issues should be reported immediately to the coordinating teacher.
- They are representing the school in their role and therefore should not influence their partner with any negative views they have about the school or individual members of staff.

Suggested training activity

Get tutors to brainstorm all of the things they think they are responsible for and not responsible for on post-it notes and then to stick these on respective pieces of flip chart paper. For younger children, you may want the different ideas to already be on the post-it notes, setting children the challenge of putting these on the correct piece of flip-chart paper. Use this activity as a springboard for a discussion about their role.

How to build rapport with the tutee and establish a relationship of trust

It is important for the tutor to take steps and build rapport with their partner from the very beginning. Encourage the tutors to get to know their partners during the first session. This could include:

- Showing an interest in their partner
- Sharing likes and dislikes regarding interests and hobbies
- Finding things which they have in common
- The tutor outlining his/her role in order to put the tutee at ease
- Finding out what the tutee thinks about reading
- Allaying any fears or worries that the tutee has about the sessions
- Talking about what they think they can achieve through the sessions (dependent on age)

Suggested training activity

Split the group into two. Half of the tutors will play the role of tutees and half the role of tutors. Ask the role-play tutees to think about how they might feel at the start of the scheme - any worries and questions they may have. Ask role-play tutors to think of questions they could ask and information about themselves they could share with the tutees. Following this, pair up the role play tutors and tutees and ask them to imagine it is their first meeting and the conversation they would have. If you have time, swap the groups over and mix up the pairs again. You may want to model the conversation as the role play tutor with one of the pupils.

Offering praise

One of the most important things that a tutor can do is be encouraging in their comments to their tutee. Discuss with your tutors which phrases and expressions they think would work well.

Encourage your tutor to be as specific as possible with their encouragement. They need to pay attention to their partner's reading and, rather than offering general feedback such as "well done" or "great work", they should try to pinpoint why they are pleased with their partner. The age of the tutors may well dictate whether tutors can do this. If they can, they could use the following type of expressions:

- "Well done for getting X or Y word right"
- "You managed that word all by yourself, I'm really pleased with you"
- "Brilliant, you have really showed me that you that you understood what was happening in that chapter/story".
- [In response to a question] "That's a really interesting question you've asked..."
- "You read that chapter/page much more fluently that when we read together last week. I can really see you are improving."

Suggested training activity

Talk to tutors about why it is important to be specific when they are praising their tutees' reading. Model this behaviour by reading a story / acting something out / performing in some way, then ask the tutors to discuss in pairs what they liked specifically and provide feedback to you as part of a whole-group discussion.

Offering advice and constructive criticism

Depending on the age of the tutors (this should be fine for secondary school students), they should be able to offer their reading partner advice and constructive criticism. However, tutors need to be able to deliver these messages sensitively, something they may need guidance with. Below are a few strategies that you may want to suggest, again depending on the age of your tutors:

- Make sure you have eye contact with your reading partner when talking to them about how they can improve.
- Talk about their reading, not about them. For example, “You had a few problems with your reading today”, rather than “You weren’t a very good reader today”.
- Try and use a soft voice when you are talking to your tutee about the things they find difficult.
- Make sure the tutee knows that you are on their side, offer reassurance and deliver any advice with a smile. For example, “I really used to have problems with those kinds of words too. I practised them at home and that helped.”
- Older tutors should be able to use the “complement sandwich method” whereby constructive criticism is sandwiched between two complements. For example, “You read that page really well. You did have trouble with some of the long words though. You need to practise them at home and then I’m sure you will get better at reading these words.”

Suggested training activity

You can use the same activity as the one described in the offering praise section. This time, perform something which clearly has things wrong with it and ask pupils to think about how they would communicate back some of these weaknesses using the strategies above.

Monitoring their tutee’s progress

Depending on the age of the tutor, they should be encouraged to look for progress that their reading partner has made and to make a note of anything they notice. This will be quite a difficult task for some tutors to do and is also difficult to practise in advance of real-life sessions.

If you feel your tutors are able to think about their partners’ progress, go through the questions suggested below with tutors. As the scheme progresses and they become more confident, get pupils to think and talk about their tutees’ progress during the monthly/half-termly catch up sessions. Ask tutors to look out for the following kinds of signs of progress (this may or may not be possible depending on their age):

- Is the tutee enjoying the sessions more? Is the tutee talking to you more (about reading)?
- Is the tutee reading more outside of the sessions/school than they were before?
- Is the tutee reading more fluently, with fewer pauses or hesitations?
- Is the tutee better at reading longer words now?
- Does the tutee seem to understand the story/text more than they used to?
- Can the tutee read for longer than they used to be able to?
- Is the tutee more confident? Is the tutee happier when reading than before?

Furthermore, a tool which will help them to think about their tutee's progress is a reading record, which both the tutor and tutee could complete at the end of each session. This is a good way to keep a record of all the great things that pairs have achieved. However, it is important to make sure it does not become a chore for either the tutor or tutee. Therefore ask for entries to be brief, in note format (where appropriate) and give them time to do this at the end of each session.

Helping the tutees with their reading (specific advice)

Encouraging tutees to read for pleasure

An important aspect of any reading tutor role is to encourage their partner to read more outside of school and their sessions. Ideally tutors are avid readers themselves. If they are not, then you may want to spend some time encouraging this. As reading role models, tutors should:

- Talk about why they like reading
- Talk about what they are reading at the moment
- Recommend reading materials that they have enjoyed in the past
- Validate all forms of reading – encouraging their partner to read and talk about magazines, comics and websites, as well as books they have read.
- Show an interest in their tutee's reading choices.
- Ask their teacher or school librarian for suggestions regarding what their tutee might like to read next
- Where possible, read some of their tutee's chosen books in order to generate discussion

Suggested training activity

Discuss with tutors the importance of reading for pleasure. Then ask tutors to reflect on their own reading story and habits. You could do this through getting them to complete the National Literacy Trust reading for pleasure survey (downloadable from www.literacytrust.org.uk) or simply have a discussion as a group.

Following this, get them to think about a book/comic/magazine that they have enjoyed in the past and then to finish the sentence, "I think you would enjoy this book because...." The aim of this exercise is to get them to practise recommending books to each other.

Supporting tutees to choose books

Each tutee needs to be able to choose books successfully and tutors should support their partner with this. Choosing books successfully may come naturally to some of your tutors, but they may not even be aware of how they do it. Others may not have done this very much, or may not have done it successfully. It is therefore important that tutors understand about the importance of book selection, that they are made aware of how they do it and that they are given opportunities to practise doing it.

• **Readability.** Tutors can help their partners to find books at their level by showing them the "Five-finger method". The pupil chooses a page to read in the book with one hand, with the other hand open. Each time an unknown word is encountered, the pupil puts one finger down. If the pupil encounters five unknown words on a page, and all five fingers are down, then that book is probably too difficult for them.

Clues on the book. This refers to clues that pupils can find without opening up the book. Pupils should ask themselves questions like, “Does the title sound interesting?” or “Does the cover look like another book I’ve read and enjoyed?” Other clues could include the blurb on the back of the book or key phrases (such as based on a TV series).

- **Dipping into the book.** Pupils can “dip in” to the book, read a random page and then decide if it is interesting.

- **Cautionary clues.** Pupils are likely to have an idea of what they don’t like, even if they are not yet sure what they do like. Pupils can reflect on their dislikes and then look out for cautionary clues.

- **Reading experience desired.** Pupils who are more familiar with reading for pleasure may seek to incite a certain mood by reading a book. Pupils should ask themselves, “Is this a book I’m in the mood to read?”.

- **Recommendations.** Has the book been recommended by anyone? Does this recommendation help or persuade the pupil to read the book?

A tutor can follow up this activity by asking their partner to reflect upon their choice when they have finished the book. Did they make a good choice? Why/why not? Was the book what they were expecting? Would they choose another book like this in the future?

Suggested training activity

Within the advice above, there are lots of suggested questions which pupils could ask themselves when choosing a book. These could be integrated into the activities below:

- Modelling – as a teacher, choose five books and model the questions you would ask yourself in choosing one of them.
- Pair work – tutors can pair up and then go to the school library in a role-play situation and take turns in choosing a book talking through the decisionmaking process out loud.

Decoding

Tutors need to learn a few simple strategies to help tutees with words they are struggling to read. To do this, introduce the basic principles of synthetic phonics to tutors.

Raise the tutors’ awareness of the different sounds that we have in the English language. Practise breaking down words together into individual sounds and then blend them by building them up again.

Once tutors have tried this with simple words, try doing the same activity with really difficult words that tutors will not know (for example scientific language). This will give tutors the experience of how their future tutees might feel when they stumble on words. You may also want to introduce the following messages:

- Make sure the tutors understand that some sounds are represented by more than one letter, for example “sh”, so that when they are sounding out words, they don’t break this kind of sound down even further.

- Introduce the concept of “tricky words” to tutors so that they understand that some words can’t be broken down into sounds because the letters don’t make the sounds you would expect and need to be learnt by sight. Raise their awareness of simple common “tricky words” such as the, said.

Furthermore...

- Communicate to tutors that they do not need to stop their reading partner every time they make an error sounding out a word, especially if they feel it is going to break their flow.
- Encourage tutors to be aware of tutees getting frustrated or getting tired of reading and when it is the right time for tutees to take a break from reading and for the tutor to take over for a while.
- Encourage the tutor to revisit words at the end of the session which tutees have struggled with, to help them remember them in the future.

Comprehension

As discussed above, part of the tutor’s role is to help them with their actual reading, the decoding of words. However, it is important that the tutor understands that it is as important for them to have an eye for whether their partner has understood the text as well. Younger tutors may find it difficult to help with decoding and comprehension at the same time. In this case, to begin with, they may want to focus on the decoding when their partner is reading and ask 2-3 more generic questions at the end of the session when they have finished reading.

For those pupils who are able to do both, below are some suggestions which you may like to pass on to tutors as a part of their training sessions. At the end of this section there are some ideas for activities to help tutors learn about the kinds of questions they can ask.

Helping with the definition of words

If tutees get stuck reading words, or come across new words, tutors should check that their partner understands what the word means. They should ask tutees what they think it means before they offer an explanation. The tutee may be able to find clues around the word which help with this so it is important that tutors do give them this opportunity. Tutors should make a note of new words learnt.

Discussion before pairs start reading

Reading pairs should have a recap on their last session before they launch into their reading together. Tutors can ask questions such as:

- What do you remember from when we read together last week?
- What do you think is going to happen next in the story?
- Have you managed to read anymore of the story since then? Can you help me to catch up – what has happened in the story since we were last reading together?

Asking meaningful questions along the way

Where possible, it is important for tutors to check that tutees have understood the text and are not just reading the words aloud. The best place to do this might be at the end of a page or chapter. Possible questions could include:

- What just happened in the story? Did you expect that/did that surprise you?
- What do you think of what x or y just did? Why do you think he/she did that?
- What do you think is going to happen next?
- What would you have done in that situation? (depending on age)

Reviewing what they have read together

The end of the session is a good opportunity to review the words which the tutee got stuck on, but also a moment to ask more in-depth questions which would have interrupted the flow during reading.

- Are you enjoying this book? Why/why not?
- What was your favourite part of the story?
- Do you like x or y character? Why/why not?
- What does the setting make you think of? Would you like to go there?
- What do you think is going to happen next?
- Do you think you would like to read something else by the same author?

Suggested training activity

- Read a short story as a group, or set this as homework for the tutors in between training sessions. Then, with a partner, get them to think about all the different questions they could ask fellow tutors during group discussion about the story. Following this, hold a group discussion where these questions are asked. Which were the most interesting questions? Why?
- Get your tutors to pair up and ask one pupil in each pair to read a page of a book. The other pupil in the pair has to think about questions they could ask their partner to check they have understood what they have read.

So that's all there is to it! If you do decide to set up a paired reading scheme, then do let us know how it goes so that we can continue to share the best of practice amongst schools on this subject. Good luck!!