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The Effects of Cross-age Literacy Tuition in a Low-Decile Secondary School

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study was to determine whether cross-age tutoring by Year 12 and 13 students could improve the reading skills of Year 9 and 10 low-achieving readers. The participants were 44 Year 9 and 10 students, mainly Pasifika and Maori, and 22 Year 12 and 13 tutors. The Year 9 and 10 students were all low-achievers in reading comprehension but varied considerably in word recognition and decoding skills. In terms of the “simple view” of reading, some were “garden variety” poor readers with low scores in listening comprehension, reading comprehension, and word reading while others had “specific comprehension deficits” with low scores in listening comprehension and reading comprehension, but average or high levels of word reading. The design of the study involved placing the Year 9 and 10 students into matched pairs based on their reading comprehension and word reading skills and then randomly assigning each pair to an experimental group, given reading instruction, or a control group, given math worksheets. Each of the two groups divided into three levels of word reading ability, low, middle and high. The low and middle groups were “garden variety” low-achieving readers but the high group had specific comprehension deficits. Year 12 and 13 tutors taught the lessons mostly outside of class time, in the school hall, for two school terms. The tuition involved a mix of decoding skills instruction, reading of text, and comprehension activities, depending on the skills of each ability group. Results indicated that the reading tuition had a significant effect on word reading as measured by the Burt Word Reading Test but not on pseudo-word reading, WRAT word reading, or reading comprehension.

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