

# Why High School Kids Should Start Teaching Younger Students

When I was 17, I was suddenly given the opportunity to give music lessons to children at a K-8 school. Still in high school myself, the experience was a bit intimidating. But I persisted and was soon teaching like a pro.

The main benefit of this entrepreneurial endeavor was the cash it provided me. But a lesser, and perhaps more valuable, benefit was what I learned myself. Having to teach others – who sometimes were not all that far behind me knowledge-wise – forced me to pay attention, work hard, and brush up on musical concepts that weren't my forte (pardon the pun).

I was reminded of this invaluable experience while reading a recent *Education Week* [article](#) about Brianna Aubrey, a Vermont high school senior. The same age I was when I began teaching music, Aubrey has also entered the classroom to put her language expertise to good use.

Her foray into teaching began with a school project in which Aubrey made Spanish picture books and took them to read to second-graders. The excitement with which she was received encouraged her to start a pilot program teaching Spanish to grade schoolers.

According to school officials, those children have learned rapidly, but in all likelihood, so has Brianna Aubrey. Conventional wisdom acknowledges that those who teach often learn the best, and this fact is now backed up by science. As Annie Murphy Paul [explained](#) several years ago in *TIME*:

*“Students enlisted to tutor others, these researchers have found, work harder to understand the material, recall it more*

*accurately and apply it more effectively. In what scientists have dubbed 'the protégé effect,' student teachers score higher on tests than pupils who are learning only for their own sake. But how can children, still learning themselves, teach others? One answer: They can tutor younger kids."*

Unfortunately, the fact that Brianna Aubrey's teaching endeavors are highlighted in a high-profile education publication seems to indicate that this course of action, while beneficial for both younger and older students, is quite rare in American schooling. This is because American schools seek to place only the most qualified, well-credentialed individuals in front of students.

And such careful selection is a good thing. But one has to wonder: might this course of action be denying older students important opportunities to learn and solidify knowledge – a depth of knowledge gleaned only through the responsibility of teaching others?

The late author and University of Chicago professor Richard Weaver [once wrote](#):

*"[A] burden of responsibility is, after all, the best means of getting anyone to think straight. If he is made to feel that he is accountable for results, he looks steadily at the situation and endeavors to discover what is really true in it. This is a discipline. But when he has long been absolved of the duty of thinking, he may be seized with a sense of helplessness and panic when the necessity of it is thrust upon him."*

We talk a lot these days about how young people are infantilized and live in a type of Neverland until they are well into their late twenties and early thirties. Would we see students act like knowledgeable, well-rounded adults far sooner if we gave them more responsibility at younger ages?

[Image Credit: U.S. Air Force [photo](#)/Staff Sgt. Leigh Bellinger]