

ADULT LITERACY VOLUNTEER TUTOR TRAINING

Journal of Literacy Research (<http://jlr.sagepub.com/content/38/2/111>)

About the Volunteer Tutor Training Study

This study by Dr. Alisa Belzer, Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, analyzed the relation between volunteer tutor training and reading instruction in four adult literacy programs. The four programs represent well-functioning programs in large and small locales using a diversity of tutor training programs. The data focus on tutors' choices of reading materials and strategies for assisting in the development of comprehension and word identification skills.

Data collection strategies included the researcher as a participant-observer for the tutor training, collecting instructional materials used in both the tutor training and tutoring sessions, interviews with key staff, audio tape recordings of tutoring sessions which were transcribed, and participant interviews of both students and tutors. Analysis of data included program training topics, tutor assistance strategies, materials used and distinctions among the four programs.

Findings from Research

Little about the training volunteers participated in seems to predict what materials and activities tutors and students will use or how tutors will help students when they get stuck on words. Given the significant commitment of time and resources devoted to training by programs and volunteers, it would seem a reasonable hope and expectation that more specifics from the tutor training would "rub off."

Many factors other than their volunteer training influenced the decisions and choices the tutors made as they worked with their students. Other factors included students' instructional needs, tutors' own experiences as learners, their professional training, their own creativity, "trial and error" approaches, or their parents as resources.

Data indicate a relatively low level transfer from training to practice.

Specific Implications of the Adult Literacy Volunteer Tutor Training Study

Implication: Use a Just in Time (JIT) Tutor Training Model

What the research says: The lack of fidelity between training and implementation of sound reading instructional strategies result in a lack of effectiveness in the training models studied. Tutors rely on a variety of instincts, resources and strategies, regardless of the training received.

Therefore, you should...

...consider limiting initial time spent on tutor training and utilize a Just In Time Model.

Strategies

- **Provide short initial training.** Only information that is relevant to tutoring any student during initial training eliminates time spent on conveying information that is not well-utilized. A three-hour orientation is recommended.
- **Use more intensive and targeted support post-match.** This is consistent with adult learning theories which suggest that adults learn by experience, benefit from contextualized learning and develop skill through interaction with more expert practitioners.
- **Use a JIT training framework.** This includes a new tutor-student match and instruction that begins on-the-job training; follow-up meeting after 12 hours of instruction and in-service tutor support meetings.
- **“Listen in” via recording of an instructional session after approximately 12 hours of instruction or direct observation.** An observational checklist relates student goals and other needs to an overview of activities carried out during the session. This provides the source for specific tutor feedback on reading and writing instructional strategies and student-tutor interactions.

Additional implications are found in Alisa Belzer, “Just in Time Volunteer Tutor Training: Reports from the Field,” in Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education, Volume 2, Number 1, Spring 2013.