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The Verdict Is In Trained Tutors = Increased Student Learning

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In the past, many volunteer programs were content simply to match students with tutors after a screening and orientation period. Program staff members recognized that struggling students benefit greatly from the one-on-one attention of a caring adult, even when the benefits were not so easy to measure. Three years ago, the Corporation for National Service and the U.S. Department of Education joined forces to support the goal that every child read well and independently by the end of third grade. This initiative sharpened the focus of volunteer tutoring toward specific literacy goals. However, there was minimal guiding research around the volunteer tutoring practices that help students learn.

But that was then ... and now we know more. New research on tutor programs is out, and ...

... the verdict is in—
**well-trained tutors
increase student
learning!**¹

Ongoing tutor training and support is now a standard expectation for volunteer programs in national and community service. But programs vary widely in what, when, and how they train tutors. To help kick off a new school year, this issue of *The Tutor* examines key aspects in planning and implementing a tutor training plan. These are:

- Guidelines for training delivery
- Suggested content and timing for tutor training
- Tips for finding trainers
- Peer approaches to training
- Training evaluation
- Resources for tutor training

1. The Abt Associates' study of 68 AmeriCorps tutoring programs across the country identified tutor training as one of four effective practices that correlated with higher student learning gains. In fact, when tutors received preservice and ongoing training, students showed significantly higher gains in reading skills (Moss, Swartz, Obeidahhah, & Green, 2001).
www.americorps.org/research

In a meta-analysis of 29 separate studies, researchers from the University of Texas and the University of Miami found that tutors who receive intensive training are more effective in improving reading skills (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, & Moody, 2000).

LEARNS provides training and technical assistance to Corporation-funded programs focused on education. LEARNS is a partnership of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the Bank Street College of Education. For literacy, tutoring, and mentoring projects, LEARNS provides training and technical assistance. Call or e-mail to find out how we can help you:

- locate resources
- connect with peers
- brainstorm solutions
- design and deliver training

Whether you're a tutor or a tutor program coordinator, our hope is to enhance your learning about this very important area of tutor programming.

How do Adults Learn Best?

Training volunteer tutors allows you to model the many concepts tutors need to know to be successful, such as addressing multiple learning styles and providing a wide range of activities to keep the audience engaged. The Corporation for National Service's *Principles of Adult*

Learning provides a useful framework for designing training.

These principles suggest that training coordinators:

- Incorporate input from trainees to establish the objectives for training
- Provide opportunities for self-assessment so that trainees can identify gaps between what they know and what they need to know
- Draw on the knowledge, skills, and cultural background of trainees
- Clearly state objectives at the beginning of a session and provide opportunity to revise those objectives

- Incorporate input on sequencing activities and check in frequently to see that needs are being met
- Plan training activities that emphasize learning by doing
- Take different learning styles—visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.—into account

- Establish a learning environment that encourages participation
- Select a physical environment that is conducive to learning
- Include evaluation and feedback on trainees' progress in acquiring needed competencies
- Include opportunities for evaluation and feedback on trainers' skill and overall training design

What Training (and When) Helps Tutors Be Effective?

Needs assessment. When designing a training plan, it's important to start at the beginning. Conducting a needs assessment is crucial to determining what training topics will be most useful to tutors, as well as the areas in which they feel they need the most support. A needs assessment can also provide information on what kinds of training volunteer tutors have received in the past and their perceived challenges, strengths, and weaknesses. Involving project site(s) and school teachers in your needs assessment can further strengthen the training plan. Project STAR (www.projectstar.org) and the National Service Resource Center (www.etr.org/nsrc) have sample assessment surveys available on their Web sites.

Training content. Our interaction with education projects across the country during the last four years has exposed us to a rich array of local and regional models for tutor training. Below, we've organized common training topics into four general areas or tracks.

- **Program Operation**—training related to your project, its goals, and your connection with national service

Go by Train: A Bit of Etymology

The word *train*, derived from the Old French *trainer*, came into use during the 15th century and literally means *to draw or drag*. While the notion of dragging tutors into service sounds neither pleasant nor appropriate, the word's origin points the way to more current applications.

The word *train* implies movement, a transporting from one place to another. Despite program differences and training needs, the end goal of training is the same: to take your program volunteers and participants from where they are today and deliver them to a place where they become more effective tutors.

- **School or Site Culture**—training to help tutors and mentors interact with, and contribute to, the educational goals of a school or out-of-school time site
- **Learning Support**—training in educational content areas, such as literacy, computers, and math
- **Learner Relationships**—training that helps volunteers build a positive relationship with learners, incorporating both research and strategies

Where Are Tutor Trainers?

Tutor trainers come from a variety of sources, ideally from the expertise in your own community. Ask team members to share the work of looking for trainers; review the possibilities and make selections as a group. Both program partners and tutors can assume some aspects of training, perhaps involving a local expert; some areas of training, however, are better left to the experts. You can also draw on school partners for training, and may even want to build training into your memorandum of understanding. When scheduling trainers, keep in mind that variety can only enhance your program. Conduct a broad search, focusing on four main resource pools:

- Staff from partner schools and school districts (e.g., reading specialists, Title I staff, teachers, social workers, etc.)
- Your own and other national service program coordinators
- Staff from your sponsoring organization
- Professionals from community organizations (youth-serving, juvenile justice, health and human services, etc.)

Before your search, here are two key questions to ask yourself and your partners:

- What do we want our tutors or mentors to know and be able to do? (Think KSA: Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes)
- Who are the adult educators who have a reputation for expert and engaging work in these areas?

Developing your own training capacity

The LEARNS partnership provides project staff members with state and regional training in strategies and materials for many of the topics on the training calendar. In addition, LEARNS provides training resources, including many ready-to-use session activities, the LEARNS Literacy Assessment Profile (LLAP), and PDF versions of back issues of *The Tutor* on our Web site:

www.nwrel.org/learns. You can contact the LEARNS partners by phone, at 800-361-7890 or 800-930-5664, or via e-mail at: learns@nwrel.org or learns@bnkst.edu. Additional resources are available free to national service programs through the National Service Resource Center at www.etr.org/nsrc.

Training resources outside your project

School district staff members are critical to training tutors to enter the school culture and to support curriculum and student achievement goals. If your project is located within a larger sponsoring organization (a college or university, a

national volunteer or community-based organization), staff at these sites have important expertise to share. In addition, organizations and professionals who serve your learner populations can support your training efforts. The table below provides a partial list of training sources:

Who knows about...

Learner relationships?

- School counselors
- Teachers, including special education teachers
- Staff from youth and social service agencies
- Juvenile justice staff
- Child and mental health specialists
- Mentoring project staff
- Higher education faculty

Project operation?

- Project directors and coordinators
- Board members
- Staff from other national service projects
- Volunteer association or organization staff
- Corporation for National Service or State Commission staff
- Training and technical assistance providers

School or site culture?

- School administrators
- School clerical and support staff
- Classroom teachers
- School specialists (reading, psychologists, librarians, counselors)
- Parent organization members
- Parents of tutees

Learning support?

- School or district teachers and specialists
- Title I reading specialists
- Higher education faculty
- Retired teachers
- Graduate students in education
- School or city librarians
- State and local councils (e.g., literacy)
- Professional organizations (for specific subjects, i.e., math, computers, history)

Training Models From the Field

The LEARNS staff invited three experienced program directors to share their training models, topics, challenges, and best strategies with us. Three programs—AmeriCorps, the National Senior Service Corps, and Federal Work Study—mobilize a range of senior, college student, and community volunteers. Here are three varied approaches to training that are shaped by the programs' goals, students served, and the characteristics and backgrounds of the tutors.

Regional Youth Service Corps AmeriCorps (RYSC) (www.tcfm.org/rysc)

Based in rural Washington state, RYSC AmeriCorps is working to improve its tutor training program. RYSC has 38 full-time members who work side-by-side with students at local elementary schools to help struggling readers. RYSC is also piloting an innovative Math Corps program based on the Washington Reading Corps model.

In the past, the training of AmeriCorps and VISTA tutors was handled by the school sites, while the local Education Service District (ESD) provided training in the state's education standards. While these training programs were useful, it was decided that tutors needed to acquire skills and knowledge before beginning their service rather than sporadically throughout the year.

Beginning in 2002, RYSC will

coordinate its own tutor training, including three weeks of preservice training featuring a strong leadership development component and a variety of strategies for reaching students with different needs. Following the preservice training, members will gather twice a month to add new skills to their tutoring repertoire.

“What has been missing is the collaboration between sites We plan to address the issue by being the coordinators between the sites. Each site will contribute a component to basic training The schools will receive a huge benefit from their collaborative efforts.”

**—Melanie Ogryzek,
RYSC-AmeriCorps**

transition into the school environment, and it really helps allay any fears they may have.”

Tutors receive six days of preservice training during which they gain an understanding of literacy stages and how to support literacy development. They also learn the stages of child development, how to plan an instructional approach and work with teachers, and the dynamics of working as a team. Once tutors begin their service, they receive further training that focuses on any specific needs that arise.

“Our basic goal is that children feel so comfortable in that setting that they are thrilled to learn ... to come in every day and work with that tutor.”

—Rob Tietze, Experience Corps

Experience Corps (www.temple.edu/cil)

A National Senior Service Corps (NSSC) program based in Philadelphia, Experience Corps enlists 140 volunteers to provide literacy tutoring to K–3 students in 13 local schools. Because the average age of tutors is 68, training must be tailored to meet the needs of senior volunteers, many of whom have not stepped into a classroom for many years and whose memories of what school was like vary dramatically from today's reality. According to Rob Tietze of Experience Corps, addressing the similarities and differences between the past and present allows the tutors to make “a very easy

A TUTOR TRAINING CALENDAR

This edition of *The Tutor* includes a sample training calendar (center insert) with suggested topics for each track, divided among the months of the project year. The questions listed under each topic suggest information or skills that the training session might address. Ideally, programs will have time for intensive preservice training at the beginning of the year, and those programs that don't may not begin to work directly with students until late September; therefore, the suggested topics for August and September address key preservice issues. Recognizing that priorities regarding the content and sequence of training are affected by conditions at each site, we suggest you use this calendar only as a starting place for planning your own training schedule. Additionally, a blank training calendar template can be downloaded from the LEARNS Web site at: www.nwrel.org/learns/

A TUTOR TRAINING CALENDAR

Program Operation	School or Site Culture	Learning Support	Learner Relationships
<p>Program introduction What are the mission and goals of the program? What are volunteers' roles and responsibilities? What does the calendar year look like?</p>	<p>School policies, operating procedures What are the school's or site's volunteer policies and protocol for entering the school and working with students? Who can help?</p>	<p>Basic subject strategies, I Where can tutors go to learn what they need to know about the subjects they are tutoring?</p>	<p>Child/youth development What are appropriate expectations for the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development of targeted students?</p>
<p>Reporting systems What reporting systems will track program outcomes and what is the responsibility of the tutor?</p>	<p>School or site orientation When can we establish a time for tutors to meet teachers and staff, find their space, and establish systems of communication?</p>	<p>Planning a tutoring session What mix of activities will be varied and motivating, while helping to meet learning goals?</p>	<p>Beginning a relationship What behavior management skills and other strategies help tutors form a positive relationship with their tutees?</p>
<p>Forming teams How can tutor teams collaborate to support each other and sustain high-quality service?</p>	<p>Connecting with school curriculum How can tutoring support established instructional goals for each child?</p>	<p>Subject strategies, II What advanced strategies will continue to build academic tutoring skills?</p>	<p>Cultural sensitivity What information will help tutors relate sensitively across cultures?</p>
<p>Community outreach How and where can volunteers find support and resources in the larger community?</p>	<p>Connecting with teachers How can we improve communication systems to help tutors support classroom teachers?</p>	<p>Identifying strengths How can we identify and build on the unique assets of each child?</p>	<p>Meeting challenges What additional information will help tutors meet particular student needs or challenges?</p>
<p>Celebration How will we share successes and celebrate achievements?</p>	<p>Family activity planning How can we reach out to engage families in the program?</p>	<p>Multiple ways to learn What information helps tutors address different pathways to learning?</p>	<p>Vacation strategies How can tutors support students through the school vacation with activities that maintain progress and contact?</p>

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

JANUARY	<p>Mid-year reflections and reporting</p> <p>What activities and reports (see September) will assess learner progress at mid-year?</p>	<p>Family follow-up</p> <p>What special efforts will continually involve families to support their child's learning?</p>	<p>Enrichment resources</p> <p>What additional projects and activities can support tutors in planning sessions?</p>	<p>Student check-in and goal setting</p> <p>How can we engage learners in assessing their own progress?</p>
FEBRUARY	<p>Team development</p> <p>What challenges exist within tutor teams, and how can teams be empowered to address them?</p>	<p>Trouble shooting</p> <p>What challenges have arisen with scheduling, relationships, space, etc., and how can we resolve them?</p>	<p>Applying achievements</p> <p>How can tutors help students extend new skills into their daily assignments?</p>	<p>Supportive relationships</p> <p>How can we build on what we have learned so far about preventing and addressing ongoing behavior challenges?</p>
MARCH	<p>Big-picture discussion</p> <p>What social, economic, and political conditions affect our tutors and the work we are doing?</p>	<p>Teacher/tutor dialogue</p> <p>What are the current strengths of teacher-tutor interactions, and how can they be enhanced?</p>	<p>Extending resources</p> <p>How can tutors serve as resource guides to books, Web sites, and research that support student work?</p>	<p>Sharing stories</p> <p>What stories do tutors and students have, and how will they be celebrated and preserved?</p>
APRIL	<p>Local networking</p> <p>In what ways can we collaborate with other local tutoring programs to share lessons learned and resources?</p>	<p>Final family event</p> <p>What culminating activity will celebrate student gains and provide family members with resources for continued support?</p>	<p>Culminating projects and assessments</p> <p>How can we collect information and conclude student work to complete the year successfully?</p>	<p>Service learning field experience</p> <p>What community activity can tutors undertake to enrich their learning?</p>
MAY	<p>Year-end evaluation/celebration</p> <p>What final reports demonstrate progress, and how will we celebrate their completion?</p>	<p>Family event reflection</p> <p>What feedback can families provide about student growth and achievement?</p>	<p>Continued learning</p> <p>What enrichment and take-home activities will support learning during the summer?</p>	<p>Saying goodbye</p> <p>What strategies will create positive farewells and closure for both tutors and students?</p>
JUNE/JULY	<p>Final reflection/evaluations</p> <p>How well did we meet program goals and objectives and what improvements can we plan?</p>	<p>Evaluating school relationship</p> <p>How well did we interact with the school this year and how can we improve?</p>	<p>Evaluating achievements</p> <p>How well did tutors and students evaluate learning growth?</p>	<p>Evaluating student/tutor growth</p> <p>How do students and tutors describe their personal growth and the quality of their relationship to learners?</p>

*A note about word choice: While most tutoring programs base volunteer activities at school sites, an increasing number are also engaged in out-of-school time and community-based organizations. Though the topics presented here often focus on school settings, they also apply to any site where tutoring occurs.

Cleveland State University (www.csuohio.edu/career/amreads.html)

One challenge of operating a tutor program at a commuter school such as Cleveland State University in Ohio is building a sense of community among tutors. Not only do most of the 50–60 tutors in the program live off campus, they also tutor off campus. They often lack opportunities to gather and build *esprit de corps*.

“We use our trainings to develop a relationship with our CSU students. Because we are a commuter school, they don’t have the attachment that you might when you live on campus, and so it’s really important to me that when they come away from this experience that it’s more than being paid \$8 an hour to go and work with a child.”

—Kathy Beal,
Cleveland State University

As a result, the four yearly programwide tutor training sessions become vital for providing tutors with a sense of what it takes to work with others. To meet training needs, program coordinator Kathy Beal sets up sessions that are hands-on and efficient, and that provide as many

practical and relevant tools as possible in the brief time available.

A key component of the tutor training is a tutor toolbox and manual. Both are filled with hands-on activities and are designed to give tutors a resource that will take them beyond what they can learn during four one-day training sessions. Between sessions, Beal visits each of the 15 school sites and attempts to spend an hour on the job with each tutor at least once each quarter.

Evaluating Tutor Training Why evaluate training?

Evaluation is a tool for making decisions, assessing quality, and ensuring future success in reaching program goals. Most organizations, including the Corporation

for National Service, value careful evaluation as part of the process of continuous program improvement. Incorporating program, trainer, and participant (self-) evaluation into training provides valuable feedback that can help programs identify what’s working, what isn’t, and where to go next.

Training evaluation can provide:

- Useful insight for improving the quality and effectiveness of future sessions
- Opportunities for peer-to-peer feedback and professional development
- Validation of or challenge to trainers’ instincts regarding efficacy of methods and materials
- Confirmation of the importance of participants’ opinions
- Information for programs on future training needs
- Data to report on program and volunteer development

Approaches to training evaluation

Within programs, evaluation of tutor training can take place immediately after training, in weekly meetings, during follow-up phone conversations, and in a variety of other forms, including:

- Written evaluations
- Reflection activities
- Informal questions, feedback, and discussion
- Pre- and post-session “tests” of participant skills or knowledge
- Self-assessment checklists

Satisfaction v. impact

Evaluation of tutor training should function on multiple levels, and a distinction should be made between *satisfaction* and *impact*. Good evaluation tells you how participants rate the quality

of the training, but also whether or not they are learning and using the material presented.

Evaluating participant satisfaction through a written feedback form or a structured reflection activity will tell the trainer and/or program staff whether or not participants liked what they did and how they did it, and whether they found it relevant to their work as volunteer tutors. This can also include feedback on materials, facilities, specific activities, etc. Generally, feedback on participant satisfaction is immediate and easy to gather.

Evaluating the impact of training is more difficult. One way to evaluate impact is to measure whether and to what degree participants learned the new skills and strategies presented in the workshop. This can be accomplished through role-plays or games that require use of the skills presented, or by observing tutoring sessions. It is important to emphasize that such activities are not meant to “test” tutors, but rather to determine whether the training has been successful in conveying the intended knowledge and skills; adequate practice in a supportive environment is key to ensuring that tutor training has its desired impact. (Indeed, practice is an important part of a good training session.)

Programs also need to evaluate the long-term impact of training, which includes learning how, and to what degree, tutors actually use new skills and strategies in practice, and how those practices support overall program goals. While more difficult to capture, this information can be gathered through follow-up surveys, action plans, or ongoing reflection activities such as journals or discussion meetings. These tools can provide programs with valuable information about training transfer and the subsequent use of materials and strategies presented.

Evaluation design

Deciding how evaluation will fit into a training plan or session should be part of the initial planning process. By considering all learning styles and integrating evaluation methods and tools into training design, programs can ensure that the feedback they receive provides the most complete picture possible.

The following steps can guide training evaluation design:

- Agree on *what* your program hopes to learn from the evaluation and *why*.
- Review program objectives and desired training outcomes.
- Distinguish *outcome-focused evaluation* (were objectives met and outcomes achieved?) and *quality assessment* (were participants pleased with training design and delivery?).
- Consider the kinds of feedback you will need in order to determine whether training approaches or content need immediate revision.
- Consider methods that might be used to evaluate the long-term impact and value of the training.
- Create a plan for reviewing and aggregating evaluation results, identifying situations requiring discussion or action, and sharing this information with trainers and other staff to improve future sessions.

(Adapted from *Starting Strong: A Guide To Pre-Service Training*)

Tutor Resources

There is a wide range of free resources available to national service tutor programs. Following is a brief sampling of resources developed by the Corporation for National Service, the Department of Education, and/or LEARNS.

The following documents can be ordered through the National Service Resource Center (NSRC), online at: www.etr.org/NSRC/pubs_distribution.html, or by phone at: 800-860-2684, ext. 260.

Tutor training:

On the Road to Reading: A Guide for Community Partners. Addresses the knowledge and skills necessary to support reading tutoring programs. Topics include how most children learn to read, how tutors can help young readers, and how community partnerships support the progress of literacy.

Reading Helpers: A Handbook for Training Tutors. Outlines 36 hours of training for tutors working with pre-K through third-grade readers. Includes lesson plans, transparency templates, handouts, and a resource list. Intended for use with *On the Road to Reading: A Guide for Community Partners*.

LEARNS Videos: Lisa and Crystal: *Learning To Read*; Rosa and Melany: *Reading in English*; and Yolene and Blayn: *Reading Comprehension*. Depicts actual tutoring sessions, allowing viewers to observe, analyze, and discuss the strategies and activities used. Discussion guides are included with all videos.

Assessment:

LEARNS Literacy Assessment Profile (LLAP). Serves as a comprehensive, easy-to-use tool for capturing the reading and writing progress of children who work with tutors in national service programs and provides a system for programs to report achievement data to funders.

Program support:

Growing a Volunteer Tutor Program: Engaging Communities To Support Schools. Offers advice for the critical start-up year of a volunteer tutor program. Addresses tutor recruitment, training, and support, among other issues.

Making an Impact on Out-of-School Time. Helps programs become more effectively involved in enhancing the quality of out-of-school time programs for young people aged five to 14. Included are ideas and suggestions, resource lists, tip sheets, and other materials that can be used in training members and volunteers.

Web resources:

LEARNS: www.nwrel.org/learns. Offers downloadable resources, including games, training activities, and practical tips and strategies for literacy, mentor, and tutor programs. Also available are back issues of *The Tutor*, on topics such as *Reading Aloud To Build Comprehension*, *Working With Preschool Children*, and *Motivating Reluctant Adolescent Readers*.

Bank Street College of Education:
www.bnkst.edu/americanreads. Includes resources, services, and research around literacy and other issues related to education, children, and families.

U.S. Department of Education:
www.ed.gov/pubs. Provides access to a wealth of information for teachers, administrators, policymakers, researchers, parents, students, and others with an interest in education. Offerings include reports and studies on research and practice, newsletters and journals from the department, and an online publication ordering system.

National Service Resource Center:
www.etr.org/nsrc. Provides services, resources, and links for programs funded by the Corporation for National Service. All the products listed above are available through NSRC.

America Counts Tutoring Road Map:
www.ed.gov/americancounts/roadmap. Includes suggestions and materials for building and sustaining high-quality mathematics tutoring and mentoring programs.

National Mentoring Center:
www.nwrel.org/mentoring. Offers a wide range of resources, including *Strengthening Mentor Programs*, a downloadable training curriculum, and free technical assistance packets.

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We're Here to Help

For literacy, tutoring, and mentoring projects, LEARNS provides training and technical assistance. Call or e-mail us to find out how we can help you:

- locate resources
- connect with peers
- brainstorm solutions
- design and deliver training

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