

Tutoring Toolkit for AmeriCorps Program Applicants

This toolkit is intended to help orient you to the kind of thinking you will have to do to complete the tutoring portion of your AmeriCorps application. The toolkit is intended to provide you with helpful background information. However, relying on this information cannot guarantee an award, and the toolkit should not be referred to in your application.

Introduction

National service is moving in a new direction and so is national service tutoring. This toolkit will help you design an AmeriCorps tutoring program that reflects the new directions and expectations for tutoring programs outlined in the Corporation's 2003 AmeriCorps Guidelines. While this toolkit provides potential grant applicants with resources to design high-quality programs, it is designed to assist applicants address new requirements set forth in the 2003 guidelines, including the ability to incorporate scientifically-based approaches to reading instruction, proven strategies for curricula development, tutor training, outcomes and performance measurement, and standards for tutors.

Like all high-quality national service programs, tutoring and literacy programs are locally driven, and their objectives, services, and beneficiaries vary from program to program and from site to site. Some programs emphasize one-on-one tutoring, others, homework help or reading aloud with children, and still others focus on parent education and their role in learning. All are threads of the important web supporting children in their growth and development.

This toolkit focuses on the tutoring part of that web: the planned, consistent, one-to-one or small group reading support activities that are targeted to individual student needs and include ongoing assessment of student progress, with the ultimate aim of skill development and improvement.

The toolkit is divided into six sections:

- I. Outcomes and Performance Measurement
- II. General Elements of Tutoring Program Design
- III. Standards for Tutors
- IV. Curricula and Tutoring Strategies
- V. Tutor Training
- VI. Tips and Additional Resources

Sections I, III, IV, and V correspond to the expectations for tutoring programs articulated in the AmeriCorps Guidelines. *General Elements of Tutoring Program Design* and

Additional Tips and Resources reflect what we know from existing research and experience about effective volunteer tutoring program design. Whenever appropriate, links to Web sites and specific online resources that can provide further information and assistance have been provided.

The toolkit and accompanying documents were developed by LEARNS in conjunction with the Corporation for National and Community Service. LEARNS is a partnership between the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) and the Bank Street College of Education.

Please check this document periodically for updated content.

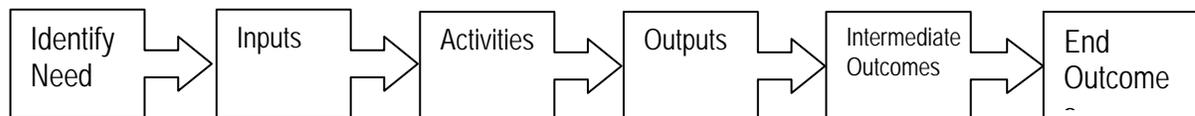
I. Outcomes and Performance Measurement

Performance measurement is the process of regularly measuring the outputs and outcomes produced by your program. It allows you to track the amount of work your program does, your progress towards program goals, your program's strengths and areas of improvement, and the impact of your work on beneficiaries.

To design a successful tutoring program, take a careful look down the road to identify goals for the learners who will participate in your program. These are the learning outcomes that tutors can realistically be expected to help students achieve. Avoid developing your program's outcomes in a vacuum. Just as AmeriCorps programs are designed to meet local community needs, engaging stakeholders in helping you hone needs and convert them into program goals is an all-important first step. Convene an advisory committee, hold community focus groups, and by all means, include your education partners in selecting the student achievement goals around which your program will center. Ideally, education partners helping you will include those working most closely with the children/youth targeted for the program.

The Logic Model

The Corporation for National and Community Service proposes that programs consider using a logic model to represent their goals, service activities, and performance measures. This is a recommended approach during the planning stage to identify the results (or outcomes) your program intends to achieve. The *Performance Measurement Toolkit* (www.projectstar.org/star/AmeriCorps/pmtoolkit.pdf) will help you develop a logic model for your program and assist you in identifying the performance measures that will logically inform your program design.



II. General Elements of Tutoring Program Design

Research and experience in the field of volunteer tutoring have taught us that the presence of certain key elements increase tutoring and program effectiveness. Keep the following in mind during the initial stages of program design:

Planned, Structured Sessions and Activities

Children benefit from well planned, structured tutoring sessions in which tutors employ a variety of materials and strategies to accommodate children's varying interests, abilities, learning styles, and cultural backgrounds. A balanced, integrated approach to tutoring activities benefits children by creating a supportive, literate environment, providing access to a variety of reading and writing materials, and instilling a passion for reading.

The 2003 AmeriCorps Guidelines require programs to employ tutoring strategies that are scientifically based and include the five components of reading instruction identified by the National Reading Panel. The *Curricula and Tutoring Strategies* section of this toolkit explores these concepts more fully.

Frequent and Regular Sessions

The frequency and consistency of tutoring sessions can be as important as session content in creating an atmosphere that is comfortable for tutees and conducive to learning.

According to the *AmeriCorps Tutoring Outcomes Study* (online at: www.americorps.org/research/pdf/tutoring_0201.pdf), students who met with their tutors at least three times per week "increased their reading skills scores between pretest and post-test by 2.1 points more than their peers in programs that met less frequently." Most children benefit from regular sessions that occur at the same time, day, and place from week to week. Since they are practicing skills, meeting several times a week is important.

Coordination with Classroom Teacher or Designated School or District Staff with Reading Expertise

Communication with classroom teachers and school or district staff with reading expertise is important for both school- and community-based programs. Schools and districts have valuable knowledge and resources to support your program. When program activities are coordinated with classroom instruction, children receive more consistent messages about reading and can practice the skills most relevant to their schoolwork. In addition, communication with partner schools can give programs access to important information about students and curriculum.

If your program is partnering with a school that receives Reading First funding, review the Reading First Grant Guidance, online at:

www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/readingfirst/ReadingFirstGuidanceFINAL.pdf. This document will give you a sense of the schools' curriculum priorities.

Member and Volunteer Training, Supervision, and Feedback

It is crucial that members and volunteers receive effective training and supervision before and during service and that the training prepares them for the actual activities they will

undertake. For more information and resources on training design and implementation, see the *Tutor Training* section of this toolkit.

Volunteers and members also benefit from regular opportunities to reflect on tutoring sessions, share strategies, and ask questions. Incorporating service learning into program design allows for structured and meaningful reflection on the impact of service on tutees, the school or site, and the broader community, and expands members' and volunteers' personal and professional development opportunities.

While training is key, some of the most valuable learning experiences for members and volunteers arise during tutoring sessions. To make the most of these moments, provide ongoing supervision, access to reading or instructional experts, and timely feedback.

Assessment and Reinforcement of Tutee Progress

Appropriate assessment of children's learning and literacy development is important for all participants in a national service literacy program. Assessment results are useful to everyone; tutors use this data to adjust session activities, students to better understand their progress, and teachers to gain a fuller picture of students' work with tutors. In addition to improved literacy skills, assessment can address other benefits children may experience, such as improved school attendance, behavior, self-esteem, and interest in reading.

For one example of a literacy assessment tool, see the LEARNS Literacy Assessment Profile (LLAP), online at: www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/llap/index.html. Developed by LEARNS in close collaboration with the Corporation, this tool enables tutors to inform the content of their tutoring sessions through assessment of tutees' strengths and weaknesses. The tool also provides a way for program directors to aggregate individual student data to show overall program progress.

Regular Performance Measurement

In a sense, performance measurement serves the same purpose for programs that assessment does for students, allowing a program to gauge its progress and adjust practices to meet outcomes and better serve children and the community. The 2003 AmeriCorps Guidelines require applicants to identify goals and show links between program objectives, activities, training, and performance measurement tools and to track progress on a regular basis. See the Corporation's *Performance Measurement Toolkit* (www.projectstar.org/star/AmeriCorps/pmtoolkit.pdf) for assistance with this task.

Access to Training and Technical Assistance Resources

Local trainers for tutor programs may come from a variety of sources. For ideas, see *Identifying Local Resources for Your Literacy Program*, online at: www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/startup/IDLLocalResources.pdf. Programs can also tap into local resources by establishing advisory or planning committees made up of key community stakeholders, including representatives from business and community organizations, parents, local teachers, community members with reading expertise (i.e., university professors, retired teachers, etc.), and Title I coordinators. No matter who the

trainer is, training content should focus on the activities tutors are expected to perform and include practice in supporting the five key reading components articulated in No Child Left Behind.

National training and technical assistance providers are funded by the Corporation to support national service programs by training trainers or project directors, developing training materials, or working with programs on developing training plans. LEARNS (www.nwrel.org/learns) is the training and technical assistance provider for tutoring, mentoring, and out-of-school time. A complete guide to training and technical assistance resources is available at the National Service Resource Center Web site at: www.etr.org/nsrc/resguide/rgtoc.html.

Positive, Caring Relationships Among Children, Staff Members, and Volunteers

Positive, caring relationships underlie student and program success. Successful tutor programs foster positive relationships, which increase tutoring effectiveness and help motivate students to achieve. Relationships are developed more easily when tutors meet with the same child regularly over time.

Family Involvement

In addition to supporting programs, members, and volunteers, the Corporation for National and Community Service strongly supports parents in their efforts to be their child's first and most important teacher(s). High quality programs provide appropriate opportunities for parents or guardians and families to get involved with student learning. Strategies for family involvement *may* include help for parents and/or family members to support learning at home, volunteer opportunities for families, and opportunities for families' concerns to be heard through advisory committees or group meetings.

III. Standards for Tutors

Any tutoring or literacy program is deeply influenced by the quality of its members and volunteers. Qualification standards that guide the recruiting process will help target tutors with the essential skills to help children learn. Applicants for Corporation funds must identify what their standards are, and what evidence will establish that they have been met. The Corporation will be considering the establishment of tutor standards for grantees over the course of the year.

As you recruit, select and place tutors, consider the following critical skill areas and how you will assess them:

Literacy Skills That Support Tutoring Activities

Tutors need to be able to do what is expected of them. To assess competency in the literacy skills tutors will need in your program, consider using the following:

- Demonstration of reading and writing skills through a brief writing sample, reading aloud, or other literacy assessments
- Demonstration of competencies developed during training

- Demonstration of second language proficiency or fluency, currently extremely valuable in many educational settings
- Familiarity with libraries, children’s literature, and any background in reading instruction or education courses
- Knowledge and demonstrated skills in appropriate subject areas, especially for homework help programs

Education

Individual programs can choose to set specific education requirements for their tutors, such as post-secondary education or coursework in education or reading. In these cases, look for:

- Documentation of successful completion of a course or degree program;
- Letters of reference; and/or
- Certificates and diplomas.

Although literacy skills and education are the most important criteria for identifying tutors, you should also consider other skills and factors that could influence tutors’ effectiveness and your program’s ability to retain them.

Experience with Children

Through written applications and interviews, programs can:

- Ask for details about work or life experience related to children.
- Explore applicants’ knowledge of child development and attitudes about behavior management (*What are the best things about working with children? The hardest?*).

Personal Goals and Motivation

Through interviews or the application process, programs may also:

- Ask for statements about why the assignment is a good fit;
- Learn about personal values and motivation that may support or deter the selection of individual applicants; and
- Extend knowledge of an applicant’s fit for the work, dependability, and personality by asking for and checking references.

Attitudes Towards Education and Schools

Rely on tough interview questions to uncover attitudes or experiences that could make tutoring difficult or inappropriate for some individuals (*What would you do if a fight broke out? What do you expect from a school?*).

For sample interview questions for tutors, review LEARNS’ *Growing a Volunteer Tutor Program*. National service programs can get a free copy by calling 1-800-860-2684, ext. 142 or by e-mail: nsrc-shipping@etr.org.

IV. Curricula and Tutoring Strategies

The tutoring section of the 2003 AmeriCorps Grant Guidelines asks successful applicants to describe tutoring curricula (the knowledge and skill focus of tutoring sessions) and tutoring strategies (how content is delivered) that are scientifically based and include the five components of reading instruction identified by the National Reading Panel *or* demonstrate that their program activities are aligned with a school receiving No Child Left Behind funding and providing instruction in the five components.

Scientifically-Based Research

Scientifically based research is research that meets the following major criteria:

- Use of rigorous, systematic and empirical evidence that includes control groups;
- Presence of convincing documentation, with adequate data analysis, to establish outcomes;
- Reliance on measurements and methods that are validated through multiple investigations in numerous locations; and
- Acceptance by a peer-reviewed journal or approval by a panel of independent experts.

The beliefs underlying this shift are that using what works matters — and that what works can be identified through rigorous, scientifically-based research. Most federal programs and local and state education agencies receiving federal funding are currently working to meet this expectation for scientifically-based programming, but the process will take time and we are currently in a period of transition. As a step in this direction, the US Department of Education has established the What Works Clearinghouse, which is charged with: (1) articulating standards for scientifically-based research, (2) compiling results of acceptable research, and (3) making this information available to education decisionmakers. You can review the standards and tools that are currently under consideration on the What Works Clearinghouse Web site at: www.whatworks.ed.gov. The clearinghouse is in its formative stage.

Scientifically-Based Reading Research

A considerable body of research exists on effective reading instruction. In 1997, Congress asked the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development and the US Department of Education to convene a panel of experts to systematically review existing reading research to determine what children need to know to be able to read. In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) issued the results of their research review in the *National Reading Panel Report: Teaching Children to Read*. The panel identified five key skills integral to literacy development: ***phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension.***

The 2003 Guidelines require programs to include these five components in their tutoring curricula and to train tutors in them. To learn more about the components of reading and explore the implications of National Reading Panel findings for tutoring programs, review the answers to *Frequently Asked Questions about the National Reading Panel* at: www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/toolkit/NationalReadingPanel_FAQ.pdf. The US

Department of Education Web site (www.nochildleftbehind.org) and your state education agency also have information on these elements of reading instruction.

To see what the elements might look like in a tutoring program, review *Tutoring Our Youngest Readers: Focusing on the five major reading strategies*, online at: www.nwrel.org/learns/tutor/win2002/win2002.html. This article provides specific activities one-to-one tutors can engage in to support student learning around each of the five components. For activities that support learning the components in small-group settings, see *Room for One More? Strategies for small-group tutoring*, online at: www.nwrel.org/learns/feature/index.html.

Scientifically-Based Tutoring Research

Compared with the number of studies on classroom instruction in reading, few scientifically-based research studies have been conducted around volunteer reading tutoring and, as a result, less is known. What does one do during a transition period such as this? In the absence of scientifically-based research, support the scientifically-based reading instruction that is or will be occurring in your state or district and use evidence-based practice and professional wisdom to fill in the gaps. As new research findings become available, incorporate them into your program design.

For example, if your program's curricula align with the reading curricula of a school receiving No Child Left Behind funding, clarify with the school the specifics of how your program will support its instructional plan for teaching the five components.

Community-based programs not partnering with a school will want to indicate in their proposal how they will access reading expertise for curriculum design, tutor training, and tutor support on an ongoing basis. You may also want to include local sources of reading expertise, such as university professors, Title I specialists, or local literacy councils in your advisory group, or formalize a partner relationship with one of these groups, so that you will have access to reading expertise on an ongoing basis.

Tutoring Strategies

The area of tutoring strategies is one of those in a research transition. While individual studies look at aspects of tutoring practice, these studies are seldom replicated by other authentic and similar studies in multiple locations to establish the required reliability that makes them *scientifically based*. In spite of this, existing studies and proven practice can provide some useful direction in this area.

For example, some general design conclusions can be drawn from *How Effective Are One-to-One Tutoring Programs in Reading for Elementary Students at Risk for Reading Failure? A Meta-Analysis of the Intervention Research*.¹ (You can review this article at

¹ Elbaum, B., Vaughn, S., Hughes, M.T., & Moody, S.M. (2000). How effective are one-to-one tutoring programs in reading for elementary students at risk for reading failure? A meta-analysis of the intervention research. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(4), 605-619.

large metropolitan or university libraries, or purchase it online at: www.apa.org/psycarticles/) These conclusions include:

- Peer tutoring: “Students who were tutored by their classmates or by older students made greater academic gains than did untutored students (Cohen et al. 1982; Mathes and Fuchs, (1994)” (605).
- College student and volunteer tutoring: “College students and trained, reliable volunteers were able to provide significant help to struggling readers” (616).
- Frequency planning: “The same amount of instructional time, delivered more intensively (frequency of sessions), tends to have more powerful effects” (613).
- One-to-one or small-group instruction: “Two studies compared a one-to-one intervention over the small-group intervention...(both) indicating no advantage for one-to-one over small-group instruction” (616).

Based on the limited scientifically-based research that is available to validate specific tutoring strategies, we suggest that programs adopt a balanced and integrated approach to tutoring to support a wide range of student skills. Plan sessions that include a variety of strategies that support the five components of the National Reading Panel (see list below), and consult school professionals for their recommendations, as well.

- Reading children’s literature and stories aloud to students (*comprehension/vocabulary*)
- Students reading and practicing leveled texts (*all skills*)
- Talking about stories, experience, and meaning (*comprehension/vocabulary*)
- Writing and journaling (*comprehension/vocabulary/phonics*)
- Students re-reading familiar texts for speed, accuracy, and expression (*fluency/comprehension*)
- Learning high-frequency words (*vocabulary/phonics*)
- Hearing/repeating word and letter sounds (*phonemic awareness*)
- Doing letter-sound games and activities (*phonics*)
- Making music and rhymes (*phonological awareness/vocabulary/fluency*)
- Engaging in dramatic play (*comprehension/ vocabulary/fluency*)

For examples of how these strategies and reading components might look in a tutoring session, view *Sample Session Plans* at: www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/toolkit/SampleSession.pdf.

A final note on the research issues around tutoring practice: During the course of your program, you might consider partnering with reputable researchers to establish scientifically-based evidence (using a control group) on the outcomes of a particular tutoring focus. Such an effort would be an important contribution to the field.

Reading and Tutoring Materials

Careful selection of books is extremely important to tutoring success. Working with inappropriate texts may result in frustration or lack of challenge for the learner. There is no recommended list of scientifically-based tutoring curricula, books, or materials. However, you can inform your choice of materials by considering the following:

- **Alignment with school reading program.** If a school partner has selected a particular reading curriculum, and you will be working with their recommended texts and methods, provide this information in your application, along with any research justifications used in making this choice.
- **Advice from reading professional.** If you are not working with a school partner, document ways that an advisory panel, education professors, librarians, and/or reading specialists are advising you in your selection of books and other reading materials.
- **Publications and Web sites.** Many excellent lists of children's literature created by professionals and organized by skill or reading level exist. Use these lists or the advice of your local school or children's librarian to inform your choices. Provide in your application a list of reliable resources for good book selection. For one of many sample book lists organized by reading level, see the LEARNS Literacy Assessment Profile (LLAP), online at: www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/llap/index.html.

V. Tutor Training

Ongoing tutor training and support are standard expectations for volunteer tutor programs in national and community service. Tutor training should take place both before and during service to ensure that tutors can support student learning. Research shows that tutors who receive intensive training are more effective in improving reading skills than those who do not receive training.² A successful training program will consider what tutors know, what they need to know, and how to close that gap most effectively. Involving volunteer tutors in the development and execution of the training plan can lead to increased volunteer satisfaction and retention. Training should reflect the skills and knowledge your tutors need to meet the specific goals of your program.

Planning Training

The Summer/Fall 2001 issue of *The Tutor*, *The Verdict Is In: Trained Tutors = Increased Student Learning* (www.nwrel.org/learns/tutor/sum2001/sum2001.html), outlines the essentials of developing and implementing an effective tutor training plan. In this document, you will find:

- Guidelines for training delivery;
- Suggested content and timing for tutor training;
- Tips for finding trainers;

² Elbaum, et al., 2000

- Peer approaches to training;
- Training evaluation strategies; and
- Resources for tutor training.

Another valuable overview of volunteer training can be found in the Fall 2001 issue of *The Resource Connection* (www.etr.org/nsrc/pdfs/newsletters/training.pdf), produced by the National Service Resource Center. It includes information on the following:

- Designing training
- Conducting needs assessment
- Finding effective trainers both inside and outside your program
- Evaluating your training

Training Content that Addresses the National Reading Panel Recommendations

Because skilled tutors are one of the most important means of meeting the goals of your program and the needs of the children you serve, training content needs to reflect the goals of your program, the needs of your tutees, and the actual activities in which tutors will engage. The 2003 AmeriCorps Grant Guidelines require literacy and tutoring program applicants to show how the five components of reading are addressed in tutor training. Consider this as part of the process of aligning training content with tutoring curricula and program goals.

Training Activities

Training provides opportunities for tutors to learn and practice the skills they will need to support students' learning. *Tutoring Our Youngest Readers: Focusing on the five major reading strategies* (www.nwrel.org/learns/tutor/win2002/win2002.html) and *Room for One More? Strategies for small-group tutoring* (www.nwrel.org/learns/feature/index.html) provide examples of one-to-one and small-group tutoring activities that can be introduced and practiced in training sessions. Other ready-to-use training activities that address the National Reading Panel components and other important training topics can be downloaded from: www.nwrel.org/learns/trainingopps/training/index.html.

Peer Training

LEARNS and the Corporation value the knowledge and expertise of practitioners in the field. To see effective practices around training and other topics submitted by your national service peers, visit EpiCenter (Effective Practices Information Center) at: www.nationalservice.org/resources/epicenter/.

VI. Tips and Additional Resources

Tips

Identify realistic student achievement outcomes. Think carefully about the results your program can realistically achieve and plan accordingly. Aim for excellence tempered

with realism. What you can achieve will be dependent upon the frequency, duration and quality of tutoring as well as the characteristics of the students you will serve. Call on education partners to help you match the amount and kind of services you are providing (outputs) with realistic expectations for student achievement (outcomes). For example, one hour of reading aloud a week for six months cannot be expected to result in significant grade level reading gains.

Identify outcome targets over multiple years. Significant and lasting impacts take time and do not occur in a vacuum. Your program is one influence among the many success factors students need to make long-term gains. Consider identifying outcome targets for a multi-year program (three years for new AmeriCorps programs). As you do, ask yourself these questions: *What Year One outcome targets will lay a good foundation for our program? Is it possible to work with the same children for more than one year? How many second-year members or community volunteers might offer continuity for a multi-year effort? How will transition among volunteers, staff, and children affect outcomes?*

Be prepared to adjust your outcomes down the road. You will likely refine your logic model over time as you gain more knowledge and experience with your program environment, resources, tutors, and student needs. You may also be asked to renegotiate your outcomes with the Corporation.

Avoid re-inventing the wheel. Likely, there are tutoring programs very similar to your own. Research these to learn how other programs identify outcomes and adapt them to your own context and needs.

Additional Resources

- *Day one ... in the life of a program coordinator*
This monograph helps you identify and tackle the many components of your tutoring program's first weeks, including assessing your resources, defining goals and objectives, and involving stakeholders. It also includes a sample Memorandum of Understanding and other forms. Available online at: www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/startup/index.html
- *Growing a Volunteer Tutor Program: Engaging Communities to Support Schools*
Developed with input from seasoned program directors, this book offers advice for surviving the critical start-up year of a volunteer tutor program. The book follows Maria Martin, a fictional program director, as she launches a volunteer tutor program in a make-believe community. Through four seasons, Maria encounters many of the challenges that arise in the real world of school-community partnerships, including finding schools willing to open their doors to tutors, recruiting volunteers, helping tutors work effectively with teachers, and providing funders with proof that the program helps children succeed. Available by calling 1-800-860-2684, ext. 142 or by e-mail: nsrc-shipping@etr.org
- *On the Road to Reading: A Guide for Community Partners*
Developed in collaboration with the US Department of Education, this guide shows community partners how to become involved in setting up a volunteer tutor program.

It presents a step-by-step process and describes how most children learn to read, how tutors can help young readers, and how community partnerships support the progress of literacy. Available online at: www.etr.org/nsrc/pdfs/otr/ontheroad.html

- *Documenting Progress and Demonstrating Results: Evaluating Local Out of School Time Projects*
This brief, part of the Harvard Family Research Project and The Finance Project's series entitled *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation*, provides out-of-school time programs with the evaluation resources necessary to improve their programs and to demonstrate results for sustainability. Available online at: www.financeproject.org/OSTlocalevaluation.pdf
- *National Service Resource Center Sample Forms Collection*
www.etr.org/nsrc/forms/index

Finally, tutoring is an intervention that supplements regular classroom instruction. The gains your tutees make will most likely be a result of your work, the work of the students' teachers and parents and, quite possibly, other interventions and supports. The important thing to remember is that together we *can* increase reading skills and together we *can* make a difference for our kids.