

After-School Tutoring Project

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Purpose

- Provides tutoring for children who are at risk for reading and writing failure and who have language-based learning differences such as dyslexia.
- Trains students and community members in a highly structured, systematic, sequential phonemic and phonics teaching method.

Background

Students asked the director of the Office of Service-Learning and the Bonner Scholars Program for techniques to help them work with children who have dyslexia or were struggling to read. Feeling unprepared to meet these students' needs, the director contacted the International Dyslexia Association for assistance in acquiring professional trainers to teach the students. Then the volunteer group met community organizations to establish possible partnerships. The Salvation Army agreed to provide the location to hold the tutoring sessions for at-risk children. Community businesses and organizations were contacted for donations to purchase the needed supplies and materials. A volunteer was found to work with Hood students to design the program, and a training calendar for the tutors was created. The group met with parents and local schools to share information about the program.

How It Works

Students are recruited to serve as tutors at the Office of Service-learning's annual fair. Interested students are interviewed by current tutors and are screened based on their perceived fit in the program and on their good academic standing. Tutors are given thirty-six hours of training in the Orton-Gillingham/Wilson method over the first two semesters in the program and often go through the training a second time to solidify their knowledge. The training provides them with a framework to teach learning-disabled children who are at risk for reading failure.

The After-School Tutoring Project publicizes the program in the local community, including state America Reads, other local colleges, local school systems, parents' groups, and the College's education department. The children who are to be tutored are assessed, and there is a parent orientation. Parents sign permission slips and are given an after-school calendar and program rules. Each child is paired with his or her own tutor and the two work together three sessions a week. The trainer teaches Hood students to evaluate their tutees' progress by giving them tests when they begin the program and tests at the end of a term. The tutors also complete evaluations of the training and the program itself.

What Makes The Project Unique

Bonniers receive valuable training from reading experts who are familiar with the current brain research on how children learn best. Experienced Bonners can expand their expertise and responsibilities by teaching beginning Bonners how to tutor. The community benefits because Hood students provide exceptional tutoring to children who cannot read. These students raise the bar for tutoring.

Benefits

It is important to expose students to the politics and competing worldviews regarding reading and tutoring methodologies. Individual and cultural assumptions regarding what children need to succeed in reading are challenged and affirmed in this program.

Timeline

Summer

The Bonner director meets with the Orton-Gillingham/Wilson trainer to design the training curriculum and schedule. The director meets with the site administrators at the Salvation Army. Materials for the coming year are purchased.

Fall

Tutors are recruited and selected, and they begin the first 18 hours of training. Tutees are assessed and parents are given the calendar, the rules, and permission slips to sign. Tutoring begins, with the pairs meeting three times a week.

Spring

Tutors begin their second 18 hours of training. Tutoring continues. End of year evaluations of students and tutors are performed. Tutors also evaluate the program itself.

Resources And Partners

Office of Service-learning/Bonner Scholar Program

- Coordinates the program.

Bonner Foundation Crisis Ministry

- Provides grant support.

The Salvation Army

- Provides space for the after-school program where tutoring occurs.

Atlantic Seaboard Dyslexia Education Center

- Provides training in the Orton-Gillingham/Wilson teaching method.

Overcoming Challenges

The tutors' training requires a heavy commitment in time and effort, and the training by professionals is costly.

It is necessary to retool the students' notions on how to be good tutors and bring them to an understanding of the many factors that impact the success of at-risk children. At-risk children often do not show up for tutoring due to unstable family situations, and tutors sometimes have difficulty controlling the children's unruly or disruptive behavior. It can also be difficult to navigate through the politics of teaching children to read. The Bonner staff members observe tutors and have individual meetings with them to address individual issues and concerns.

Evidence of Success

The program's success is evident from the positive feedback given by parents, children, and teachers. The student tutors also report that their extensive training in the Orton-Gillingham/Wilson teaching method greatly increases their level of professionalism and ability to provide the services to children.

How to Make it Grow

More funding is required to provide the program with a full-time coordinator, who is needed to run the program. A link with the education department at the college would help expand the program.