

Evidence That Tutoring Works

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When tutors work closely with teachers and are provided with intensive, ongoing training, they can make a difference in a child's reading success. Learn what researchers have found about the elements of tutoring programs that lead to increase reading achievement. Research has consistently shown that well-designed tutoring programs that use volunteers and other non professionals as tutors can be effective in improving children's reading skills. Among the features of tutoring programs associated with the most positive gains are extensive training for tutors, formal time commitments by tutors, structured tutoring sessions, careful monitoring of tutoring services, and close relationships between classroom instruction and curriculum and the tutoring services provided. Students with severe learning disabilities require special tutoring services, which can be provided by professionals, combined with non professionals under careful supervision.

What the research shows about tutoring

[Tutoring programs that incorporate research-based elements produce improvements in reading achievement.](#)

A meta-analysis of 65 published studies that used rigorous evaluation methods to evaluate high-quality tutoring programs found positive, though modest, achievement effects across all of the studies (Cohen, Kulik, & Kulik, 1982). A British tutoring program involving 2,372 elementary and junior high students who were tutored by trained parents and peers for an average of 8.6 weeks improved their reading comprehension 4.4 times the normal rate and word recognition 3.3 times the normal rate. Four months after the end of tutoring, the average tutee was still improving at twice the normal rate in both comprehension and word recognition (Topping & Whitley, 1990). Two tutoring programs in Dade County, Florida, that trained cross-age and adult volunteer tutors to work with elementary school students found that tutees outperformed a randomly assigned control group of students who were not tutored (Madden & Slavin, 1989).

An after-school tutoring program in which low-achieving second- and third-graders were tutored for one hour twice each week by trained and supervised university students, retirees, and suburban mothers also generated strong improvements in the tutees' reading skills. In each of two years, the tutored group outperformed a closely matched comparison group on word recognition, passage reading accuracy, and spelling. Fifty percent of the tutored children made a full year's gain in reading while only 20% of the comparison group children did (Morris, Shaw, & Perney, 1990.)

Other studies have shown that carefully crafted peer, cross-age, and adult tutoring services can improve reading achievement among disadvantaged, mildly disabled, and limited-English-proficient students (Bender, Giovanis & Mazzoni, 1994; Warger, 1991).

Tutoring can also lead to improvements in self-confidence about reading, motivation for reading, and behavior, both among tutees and among peer or cross-age tutors.

The Partners for Valued Youth employed at-risk middle school students with limited-English-proficiency to tutor low-achieving elementary school students for four hours every week. After participating in the program, tutors had lower drop-out and absentee rates and higher self-concept scores than a randomly selected control group. Tutees also experienced improved reading scores, lower absentee rates, and fewer disciplinary referrals (Robledo, 1990).

Surveys of targeted groups of students who are tutored in reading have shown positive results for students' self-confidence as readers, motivation to read, and views of their control over their reading abilities (Cohen, Kulik, & Kulik, 1982; Lepper & Chabay, 1988; Topping, & Whitely, 1990; Merrill, et al.,1995).

What research says about high-quality implementation

Researchers who have examined multiple tutoring programs generally agree on the factors that generate the most consistent positive achievement for tutees. Six such factors are:

Close coordination with the classroom or reading teacher

When tutoring is coordinated with good classroom reading practices, students perform better than when tutoring is unrelated to classroom instruction (Venezky & Jain, 1996; Reisner, Petry, & Armitage, 1990; Jenkins & Jenkins, 1987).

Intensive and ongoing training for tutors

Tutees whose tutors participated in ongoing, intensive training throughout their participation in a Dade County tutoring program outperformed tutees whose tutors did not complete the ongoing training sessions (Wasik & Slavin, 1993).

A review of college-based tutoring programs that recruit college students to tutor younger children concluded that tutor training was a key to project success (Reisner, Petry, & Armitage, 1990).

The importance of tutor training is reinforced by several other studies, which provide specific advice on the types of training that yield the best results. Jenkins and Jenkins (1985) point to the importance of training in interpersonal skills so tutors do not become impatient with tutees. Warger (1991) says training should include strategies for reinforcing correct responses and properly correcting incorrect responses.

Well-structured tutoring sessions in which the content and delivery of instruction is carefully scripted

In their meta-analysis, Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik found that structured tutorial programs demonstrated higher achievement gains than unstructured programs. Wasik and Slavin (1993) reached similar conclusions when they examined five successful tutoring programs.

In a study of the use of tutorial scripts in teaching mathematics, McArthur, Stasz and Zmuidzinas found that the most successful tutors often have well-rehearsed scripts for responding to student errors. The results are general enough to apply to reading also (McArthur, Stasz, & Zmuidzinas, 1990).

Careful monitoring and reinforcement of progress

A study of tutoring for 30 first-graders at risk for reading failure reported that successful tutor-tutee relationships were characterized by strong reinforcement of progress, a high number of reading and writing experiences in which the student moved from being fully supported to working independently, and explicit demonstration of appropriate reading and writing processes (Juel, 1996).

Frequent and regular tutoring sessions, with each session between 10 and 60 minutes daily. More sessions a week result in greater gains.

Rigorous evaluations of tutoring programs reported positive results for programs whose tutoring sessions ran from 10 to 60 minutes in length, although longer sessions did not necessarily result in better outcomes (Brailsford, 1991; Warger, 1991; Robledo, 1990; Jenkins & Jenkins, 1985).

Tutoring programs in which tutors met with tutees at least three times a week were more likely to generate positive achievement for tutees than programs in which tutors and tutees met twice a week (Reisner, Petry, & Armitage, 1990).

Specially designed interventions for the 17 to 20 percent of children with severe reading difficulties.

The most important strategies for improving early reading instruction and learning have been identified as creating an appreciation of the written word, developing an awareness of printed language and the writing system, teaching the alphabet, developing students' phonological awareness, developing phonemic awareness, teaching the relationship of sounds and letters, teaching children how to sound out words, teaching children to spell words, and helping children to develop fluent, reflective reading (Kame'enui, Adams, & Lyon, 1996).

Trained volunteers under careful supervision from reading or resource teachers have proved to be effective instructors for learning disabled and other students with disabilities (Madden & Slavin, 1989).

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