

TUTORING TIPS & STRATEGIES – CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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This document covers the following topics:

1. Theory – How Children Learn
2. Tutoring Techniques
3. Program Structure
4. Determining a Student's Reading Level
5. Alternative Ways of Doing Assessment

1. THEORY – HOW CHILDREN LEARN

Learning to Read (Kindergarten to Grade 3) – there are 5 areas of reading instruction:

- **Phonemic awareness** – the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words
- **Phonics instruction** – teaches children the relationships between the letters of written language and the individual sounds of spoken language
- **Fluency** – the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. As children gain fluency, they focus less on decoding individual words, and focus more on the meaning of the story.
- **Vocabulary** – refers to the words we must know in order to communicate, and includes oral vocabulary and reading vocabulary
- **Text Comprehension** – helps a person to understand what they read, remember what they read, and communicate with others about what they read (Armbruster and Osborne, 2001)

Reading to Learn (Grade 4 and up) – focus on helping students develop into critical, responsible, and effective communicators. A fluent reader:

- Thinks of reading as a good thing and does it automatically
- Uses a variety of methods to identify words and their meanings
- Can read various kinds of texts and predict events in a story
- Relates the meaning of books to his or her own experience and knowledge, and understands what is new (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001)

Writing - Different types of Writers:

- **Beginning writers** - start to experiment with writing – may use pictures, write symbols that resemble letters, write groups of random letters, write words using real letters, and put space between words

- **Emergent writers** - write simple sentences using real letters, proper spacing between words, and some punctuation i.e., periods and question marks. They enjoy writing and show interest in writing in different ways, and they begin to plan, revise, and edit simple pieces of writing.
- **Fluent writers** begin to use strategies to spell words correctly, use different types of sentences when writing, begin to organize sentences into paragraphs, and use strategies for planning, revising, editing, and publishing their own written materials (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

Math

- Children learn mathematics more easily when they can connect math concepts and procedures with their own experience.
- An important part of learning math is learning how to understand and solve problems. Children are encouraged to use systematic trial and error and other strategies to develop their reasoning and solve problems. They also learn to communicate clearly as they explain their solutions.
- The main math areas that are covered include: Understanding Numbers, Measurement, Geometry, Patterns, and Understanding and Managing Data. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

2. TUTORING TECHNIQUES

Learning To Read

Phonemic Awareness

- Teach sounds along with the letters of the alphabet so that children see how phonemic awareness relates to their reading and writing
- Ask the child to isolate an individual sound, recognize the same sound in different words, or identify the word that sounds different
- Ask the child to listen to several phonemes (sounds), and then combine them to make a word. Lastly, the child can break a word down into separate sounds
- It is important to focus on one or two techniques at a time so the child does not get confused (Armbruster and Osborne, 2001)

Phonics instruction

- Teach children that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds. Knowing these relationships helps children recognize familiar words, and 'decode' new words. Phonics instruction, especially when it is systematic and explicit, is particularly effective for children who are having difficulty learning to read.
- Instruct students on how to relate letters and sounds, how to break spoken words into sounds, and how to blend sounds to form words.
- Encourage them to apply their knowledge of phonics to what they read and write.

- Tutor students on how to convert letters into sounds, and how to blend sounds together to form words
- Ask them to analyze the letter-sound relationship in words they know
- Encourage students to use their phonics knowledge to figure out new words
- Students can use their phonics knowledge to figure out how to spell a word

Fluency

- Practice repeated oral reading with your student as it substantially improves word recognition, speed, and accuracy, as well as fluency. Round robin reading in a large group is not effective. Four repeated readings of a text are sufficient for most students.
- Oral reading practice can be increased through the use of audiotapes, peer guidance, role plays, drama, etc.
- Model fluent reading
- Read books that are at the student's independent level (see 'Informal Assessment' below).

Vocabulary Instruction –

- Teach specific words before reading to help the student improve their vocabulary and reading comprehension. In particular, teach important words, useful words, and difficult words.
- Children learn words best when they encounter the words often and in various contexts.
- Effective tutoring strikes a balance between planned, focused sessions on specific aspects of word knowledge and spontaneous opportunities to discuss how words are used (Armbruster, B. and Osborn, J., 2001).
- Include word games so that the students have fun with words through riddles, puns, poetry, drama, etc. (McQuirter Scott, 2010).

Comprehension –

- Comprehension strategy instruction helps students become purposeful, active readers who are in control of their own reading comprehension (Armbruster, B. and Osborn, J., 2001).
- Encourage students to think about their reading i.e.,
 - Before reading, discuss their purpose for reading, and preview the text
 - During reading, teach them to be aware of what they do or do not understand, adjust their reading speed to the text, and fix any comprehension problem
 - After reading, check their understanding of what they read
- Use organizers to help students understand what they read, such as maps, webs, graphs, charts, clusters, story maps, etc.
- Ask questions to help students recall facts, interpret what they have read, and predict events.
- Ask students to generate their own questions about what they have read.
- Help students to recognize story structure by discussing the setting, key events, reactions, goals, attempts, and outcomes. Discuss how the content is organized into a plot.

- Help students learn how to summarize by asking them to identify the main ideas, connect the main or central ideas, eliminate redundant information, and remember what they read.
- In summary, 4 key tutoring strategies are:
 - Ask questions about the text they are reading
 - Summarize parts of the text
 - Clarify words and sentences they don't understand, and
 - Predict what might occur next in a text.

Reading to Learn

When tutoring students who know how to read, use the following techniques:

- Work with your student so that she can develop her own before, during and after reading strategies
- Ask questions to help the student to focus, and to think actively. With beginning readers, ask simple and direct questions. With more advanced learners, ask them to summarize, infer, and think critically about what they have read.
- Ask your student to generate her own questions.
- Talk to your student about how the story is structured i.e., plot, character development, conflict, crisis point, etc.
- Ask the student to summarize what they have read – orally or in writing. This helps the student to identify the main ideas, connect the main ideas, eliminate unnecessary information, and remember what they read.
- Use different tutoring techniques including direct explanation, modeling, guided practice, or application of what the student has learned.

Writing

- Discuss the writing process with the student – creating a draft/ editing/ final version, and that they may need to do several drafts before creating the final version.
- Always focus on the positive. Give feedback on what the student is doing right.
- Give feedback on the appropriateness of the student's idea, the level of detail, the point of view, organization of ideas, and how to express an idea.
- As well, give feedback on spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
- If possible, create opportunities for peers to give feedback to the student. It is important to model how to give feedback.
- Show the student the positive effects their writing has on readers.
- Identify potential areas where students may revise their writing to clarify meaning or to more fully engage readers
- Provide suggestions, observations and open ended questions, rather than instructions and criticisms

- Encourage the student to edit their own writing (Stagg Peterson, 2010)

Math

- Use real life examples when you are explaining concepts if possible
- Be positive about math
- Play games and cards, and do puzzles that involve math
- When you are solving a problem with your student, ask him to think aloud and talk about the strategies that he is using
- Suggest that the student act out a problem or draw a diagram or picture.
- Use physical objects to figure out math problems where possible.
- Encourage the student to self correct his work
- Realize that math is learned through building skills – starting with addition, then subtraction, then multiplication, then division. Once they have learned these skills, they can learn about fractions, percentages, exponents, decimals, etc. Your student may be experiencing challenges as they are missing a particular skill. If this is the case, do additional work to build this skill (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

3. PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Reading Program

- The four core steps of a reading tutoring session are:
 - Reading a familiar book
 - Doing word work,
 - Doing a writing activity, and
 - Reading a new book at the end.
- This is a very systematic approach, but the content is different for every child. Using this pattern, tutors can incorporate reading skills, such as pre-reading, word attack, comprehension, and reading fluency (Wasik and Slavin, 1993).

Tutoring Program

- Meet and greet your student;
- Agree on your goal (e.g., division of fractions, writing a descriptive paragraph). This should be based on student need and/or teacher feedback;
- Discuss ways to approach the assignment or concept;

- Dive in! Address the task at hand;
- Ask your student to summarize the learning;
- Summarize the process and the progress your student has made;
- Discuss what comes next and make plans for the next session.”

During the tutoring session, the students and the tutors may work on a variety of tasks, such as learning from textbooks, analyzing literature, taking notes, preparing and studying for tests, composing and editing writing assignments, and managing their study time (Northwest Regional Educational Library, 2005).

4. HOW TO DETERMINE A STUDENT’S READING LEVEL

There are 3 commonly used reading levels – independent, instructional, and frustration. As a tutor, it is important to identify these reading levels for a particular student so that you can choose appropriate reading material and know when you should provide more support. You can determine this by asking the student to read a page from a book at a specific reading level. Many books have the reading level indicated on the back or the front. The reading level is often indicated as RL 3 (Reading Level Grade 3).

Independent Reading Level – this is the level at which a student can read a book without help of any kind from a tutor or teacher (Shanker and Cockrum, 2010). If a student has 0 to 2 errors, this is his independent reading level.

Instructional Reading Level – this is the level at which a student would require some instruction from a tutor or teacher to understand the material. If a student reads a page and has 3 to 4 errors, this is his instructional reading level.

Frustration Reading Level – this is the level at which reading material is too difficult for the student to read. If a student reads a page and has 5 or more errors, this is his frustration reading level.

5. ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF DOING ASSESSMENT

- Ask parents and/or teachers about the child’s strengths, interests, and areas to improve.
- Record the number of words correctly read in one minute of oral reading
- Assess the number of questions correctly answered after reading a passage or story at a specified readability level. Do this for a passage that the child reads silently, and reads orally to see if there is a difference.
- Record the percentage of targeted sight words correctly pronounced; and/or
- Record the percentage and nature of oral reading errors.

*Please check the Member's Zone on the Frontier College web site for further resources (www.frontiercollege.ca)

It is also important to vary the assessment according to the age of the learner. For younger learners, it is best to assess vocabulary knowledge and word decoding ability, whereas for older learners, the assessment should focus on summarizing, prediction, inference, and strategic comprehension skills (Snow, 2002 as cited by McNamara, 2007).

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