

LITERACY TUTORING HANDBOOK

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LITERACY TUTORING HANDBOOK

A Guide to Teaching
Children and Adults to Read and Write

By

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To my parents, grandparents, and older sister Detta
for providing most of my early education.
R.P.S.

To my sister, Jan Fredrickson, who taught me to read before I started
school and instilled in me a deep appreciation of the written word.
J.R.

To my father, Paul “Pop” Siljander, for teaching his
children and grandchildren the art of “drawing letters.”
R.A.S.

*The two best predictors of early reading success
are alphabet recognition and phonemic awareness.*

Marilyn Jager Adams

*To some extent, interest and knowledge seem to perpetuate each other:
Personal interest in a topic fuels a quest to learn more
about the topic, and the increasing knowledge that
one gains in turn promotes greater interest.*

Jeanne Ellis Ormrod

Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, 1809–1894

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FOREWORD

In the *Wall Street Journal*, Christopher Windham (2004, April 27, p. D5) reported the results of a study funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) that found the neural brain activity of poor readers changed to resemble that of normal readers after intensive reading tutoring. The positive brain pattern change in the poor readers remained a year after the experimental intensive reading tutoring had concluded. This re-wiring of the brain in response to reading tutoring demonstrates the importance of one-on-one tutoring for all populations.

In the book, *Literacy Tutoring Handbook: A Guide to Teaching Children and Adults to Read and Write* by Siljander, Reina, and Siljander, a comprehensive up-to-date look at literacy tutoring is provided. Based on some of the latest reading research, these authors provide materials that, by far, are the most comprehensive currently on the market. The book investigates the depth of the illiteracy problem in the United States and the rationale and administration of a literacy-learning program. In the book, detailed tutoring information is provided including developing teaching objectives, teaching reading strategies, and a scope and sequence of teaching reading skills.

Having had more than 40 years in the field of reading education and reading tutoring, I find this book on literacy tutoring comprehensive, easy to read and apply, and practical in its program of tutoring principles and procedures. The material offers a wealth of teaching resources and Web sites in the appendix. Each chapter is a helpful guide to administrators and tutors wishing to help students become better readers.

This book has many applications. It could be used as a teaching resource for a college course on tutoring, a handbook for a club or an organization wishing to begin a literacy-tutoring program, or an individual guide to someone engaged in helping a person become a successful reader.

Congratulations to the authors for their hard work in putting this material together. I wish them great success in their endeavor to help poor readers become successful and productive reading citizens.

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Northern Arizona University at Paradise Valley
Former Reading and Curriculum Director
Phoenix Union High School District

PREFACE

A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.
(Henry Brooks Adams, 1838–1918)

There is no magic to literacy tutoring. Neither is it difficult to create an efficient literacy-tutoring program if the vision is clear and supported by quality leadership. A corporate executive once said, “Before anything worthwhile can be accomplished, one must first identify their objectives.” The statement applies well to the implementation of a successful literacy program.

From an administrative point of view, clarifying what it is one intends to accomplish and defining how to carry out the task is essential to a successful literacy program. Similarly, tutors must identify students’ literacy needs and then devise a plan to satisfy those needs. Like program administrators, tutors must identify specific and attainable goals.

The need for literacy programs is recognized in the United States. According to California Literacy (2003), approximately half of the Fortune 500 companies spend \$300,000,000 a year for employee literacy programs. The U.S. Military spends \$70,000,000 a year on basic skills remediation for recruits. Even the Insurance Institute of America, an educational institution supported by the insurance industry, provides a business-writing course to improve industry employees’ writing skills. Non-profit literacy programs exist in almost every U.S. Community of appreciable size.

The number of literacy programs in the U.S., and the amount of money spent to support them attest to the pervasiveness of the illiteracy problem. Reliable estimates suggest that 20–25 percent of American adults are functionally illiterate including the estimated 20 percent of adults reading below the fourth grade level. Relative to illiteracy, however, America is not alone; estimates suggest the incidence of adult illiteracy to be 24 percent in Canada, 23 percent in Scotland, and 20 percent in England.

While education policy makers in the United States ostensibly seek ways to include all children in the education system sufficient to provide them a quality education, they simultaneously, and sometimes imprudently, main-

tain policies that exclude children living outside the mainstream. The problem of too many students failing to be part of the school culture persists not only in the United States but also in foreign countries. Scotland, which is typically not thought of as a multicultural country, is one example. *Learning and Teaching Scotland*, in their *Scottish Traveller Education Programme* (STEP), state, “The diversity in pupils’ and families’ life chances and lifestyles today presents a challenge to education providers in their push to support inclusion for all” (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2003, p. 1).

Because many students do not thrive in school and leave without adequate literacy skills, there is a persistent need for literacy tutoring services. Unfortunately, many schools offer no remedial tutoring for struggling students, and most small communities offer no adult literacy tutoring programs.

In addition to guiding individuals who want to tutor their child, a friend, an acquaintance or even a stranger, *Literacy Tutoring Handbook* will help private organizations develop a literacy program or improve an existing in-house literacy program. Whether the sponsor of a literacy program is a private business, public library, social or professional association, or religious organization, this book provides information that will help administrators manage the program efficiently and affordably.

R.P.S.
J.R.
R.A.S.

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LITERACY TUTORING HANDBOOK

Chapter 1

THE ILLITERACY PROBLEM IN THE UNITED STATES

*Twenty-five percent of students enrolled in adult
literacy programs completed high school.*
(Indy Reads, 2003)

PROLOGUE

People perceive the problem of illiteracy in the United States in many different ways with the environment of the observer being a significant factor. Understandably, socioeconomic conditions can bias the observer's perception of the issue because although national data reveals a high incidence of illiteracy in the United States, regional variations exist; the literacy level is high in some regions and low in others. For example, a person from an affluent community, who attended well-funded schools, may not realize how many functionally illiterate people live a short distance from them. Conversely, people residing in high-poverty neighborhoods featuring poorly funded schools may read the statistics presented in this chapter and believe that their neighborhood represents the norm. Further polluting the perception of the illiteracy problem in the United States is the fact that many people frequently but unknowingly interact with functionally illiterate people. This can occur because many functionally illiterate people escape detection by successfully concealing their lack of literacy. Failure to recognize that someone is not literate tends to bias the perception of the illiteracy problem leaving the casual observer unaware of how many functionally illiterate people really exist. It is important that the reader keep these things in mind when contemplating the statistics based discussion in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Struggling learners are left to 'catch up' on their own, without support that meets them where they are.
(Jackson and Davis, 2000)

Literacy tutors teach children, adolescents, and adults. Generally, children and adolescents receive literacy tutoring because of current academic difficulty. Adults receive literacy tutoring because their prior academic experience left them without adequate literacy skills or because they did not have the opportunity to attend school. There are many reasons why some people attend school but leave without adequate literacy skills. The tutor who understands the reasons is better able to provide quality instruction.

Literacy tutoring programs are necessary because literacy is important for one to attain and maintain adequate life skills; however, many individuals failed to acquire such skills. In a broader sense, literacy is within the grasp of only those people who acquire competent reading skills, and many people do not. Statistics reveal that a high percentage of students quit school prior to graduating and that many who do graduate read below grade level, creating a problem for not only the afflicted individual but for all of society as well.

When students fail to master reading skills, other academic endeavors suffer as a result. Jeanne and Gerald Schumm (1998, p. 2) state, "When students can't effectively read and write, they also have trouble in science, history, and social studies classes that rely heavily on those skills." Their view is consistent with the earlier observations of Sweet (1996) who wrote, "Teaching children to read is the most important objective educators have to accomplish. Reading is a prerequisite for everything else, not only in school but in life itself." Daniel and Rayna Levine (1996, p. 41) offer a confirming opinion. "Because reading is important to success in most academic fields, reading achievement is the best single measure of academic achievement in general." Struggling students need quality tutoring, and the only option for adults who failed to acquire high school level literacy skills is to avail themselves to a literacy tutoring program.

Remedial literacy tutoring is important because so many students fail to thrive in school and leave, as graduates or dropouts, functionally illiterate. Indeed, the problem of illiteracy in America is persistent, an unfortunate fact confirmed by Daniel and Rayna Levine (1996, p. 45) who report that "less than 33 percent of high school seniors can fully comprehend front-page and editorial material in newspapers. . . . Students disadvantaged by poverty or race/ethnicity have much lower performance levels." Regna Lee Wood, Director of Statistical Research for the National Right to Read Foundation,

subsequently attested to this regrettable situation. Wood reported, “Today, 36 percent of our public school students are doing primary lessons in Title I or Special Education remedial classes, 70 percent of our high-school students can’t read 9th grade assignments [and] 30 percent of our 12th graders can’t read 4th grade lessons” (Wood, R., 1998, n.p.). The *Heartland Institute* echoed this observation in 1999 when they reported the following statistics.

Illiteracy isn’t confined to the 36 percent of public school students who are in remedial classes:

1. 70 percent of U.S. high school students can’t read ninth-grade assignments.
2. 30 percent of U.S. twelfth-graders can’t read proficiently at a fourth-grade level.
3. 50 percent of U.S. citizens are effectively disenfranchised because they can’t read ballot propositions or explanations of them.¹

‘Decision-makers must recognize that reading comes first,’ says Wood. ‘Instructors cannot teach anything except reading to illiterate students of any age, and the empirical and physiological evidence is overwhelming that this reading instruction must involve learning to spell sounds—that is, phonics’ (*School Reform News*, 1999, February).²

Regna Lee Wood, in her article entitled “The Dumbbell Curve,” reported another dismal observation. “NAEP and NALS³ reading tests show that nearly a third of our high school students can’t read, half can’t read 6th grade lessons or write a simple two or three sentence note, and almost two thirds can’t read 9th grade assignments in any core subject.” She goes on to acknowledge that there is a “scarcity of high school or college graduates with skills equivalent to those with 8th grade certificates in the Thirties and early Forties” (Wood, 1996, n.p.). Author Charles J. Sykes (1999, n.p.) later confirmed that many university graduates lack adequate literacy skills. He reported that, “A 1994 report by the Educational Testing Service found that half of the nation’s college graduates could not read a bus schedule and that only 42 percent could summarize an argument presented in a newspaper article or contrast the views in two editorials about fuel efficiency.” More recently, Vaishali Honawar (2005, p. 3), writing for *Education Week* magazine, reported that, “As many as 28 percent of college freshmen are placed in remedial courses. . . .”

Failure to achieve a functional level of literacy detrimentally affects the lives of afflicted individuals, but it is also costly to society, as statistics consistently verify. An estimated 85 percent of juvenile offenders have reading

1. Although an estimated 50 percent of U.S. citizens cannot read ballot propositions or explanations of them, it is important to understand that functional illiteracy is only one of the reasons for this high percentage. People in the United States who are literate in a language other than English but not literate in English are included in the 50 percent figure.

2. *School Reform News* is a project of *The Heartland Institute*.

3. NAEP—National Assessment of Educational Progress, NALS—National Adult Literacy Survey.