

### Question

Is one-to-one volunteer tutoring effective in increasing reading and math literacy of elementary-school children?

### Application

Interim report to policy analysts on articles that best met criteria for good research methods.

### Literature Search

ERIC, PsychInfo, Linguistics & Language Behavior Abstracts, Social Services Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, MLA International Bibliography; Web of Science, PAIS International (earliest - June 2004)

393 **articles identified** and imported to RefWorks™  
57 **met inclusion criteria** by abstract and/or full text review; 22 **articles included comparison or control groups**

**Spotlights on articles with best methods = 10**

### SUMMARY OF SPOTLIGHTS

Independently of whether parents or volunteers serve as tutors, tutors are trained, tutoring follows a defined procedure, the school grade level or SES background of the children, **tutoring improves reading skills.**

Studies report tutoring sessions in which  
**tutor reads to child as a “warm up”**  
**tutor and child read in unison**  
**child reads to tutor**  
**tutor and child discussing the material read**

Studies include procedures in which  
**child masters skill before advancing to next task**  
**child is encouraged, praised, and rewarded**

#1 Baker, S., Gersten, R., & Keating, T. (2000). When less may be more: A 2-year longitudinal evaluation of a volunteer tutoring program requiring minimal training. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 35(4), 494-519.

**Abstract** The purpose of the current study was to evaluate the effects on reading achievement of a low-cost, widely implemented volunteer reading program that has been expanding rapidly throughout the state of Oregon. Eighty-four beginning first grade students at risk of reading difficulties were randomly assigned to experimental and comparison groups. Adult volunteers tutored students in the experimental group in 30-minute sessions two times per week in first and second grade. At the end of grades 1 and 2, students were administered a number of standardized reading measures, including measures of individual word reading, reading comprehension, word comprehension, and reading fluency. Analyses revealed that students in the experimental group made greater growth on a word identification measure than students in the comparison condition; they also made more growth than a group of average-achieving students who were from the same classrooms as the students in the experimental and comparison groups. Students in the experimental group also scored higher than students in the comparison condition on measures of reading fluency and word comprehension at the end of second grade. Differences were not statistically significant on passage comprehension. Findings are discussed in the context of the reading achievement effects that other adult volunteer reading programs have attained. Pie suggest that in establishing adult volunteer reading programs it is important to consider how to balance the intensity of training reading volunteers to achieve measurable impact on reading achievement with real world realities of the volunteer tutoring experience and goals for the extensiveness of implementation.

### Relevance Summary

The program placed little demand on participating teachers and tutor coordinators. The assessment measures included pre-reading measures (phonemic awareness and alphabet understanding), reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension measures using part of the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test, and Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test.

### Key Quotes

*“SMART serves as a model for community members who wish to be more actively and positively involved with their local schools.” (p. 494)*

*“Volunteers desired information such as how to deal with students who have short attention spans, students who tell them ‘they did not want to read’, or students who appeared unhappy or angry. Some requested more age-specific training, including information on what to expect at a given age or grade level. Several asked for ideas for alternative strategies or activities to increase motivation.” (p. 507)*

*“The findings from our study suggest that accelerated reading outcomes can be achieved by volunteers with minimal formal training, using our own judgment and instincts on how to support literacy development.” (p. 510)*



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