Florida Library Literacy Tip Sheet
State Library and Archives of Florida

Small Group Tutoring

Introduction

Adding small group tutoring to a volunteer library literacy program can be one of the most effective ways of meeting the needs of learners. It can also be an exciting, innovative way to extend your library literacy services.

In this Issue

This Tip Sheet provides information regarding questions to consider before incorporating small group tutoring into your library program. It is intended for program administrators, and presumes familiarity with literacy program management. Questions to be considered by program administrators are discussed, followed by a series of program decisions to be made by staff. Classroom instruction is considered as another option.

Questions to be Considered

There should be an informed decision made regarding whether or not to include small groups in a library literacy program. This should be part of a long range plan determined by staff with input from the advisory committee, trainers, and program partners. Full discussion of the impact of the addition of small group tutoring should take place with all the program stakeholders.

Why small group tutoring?

Small group tutoring will serve more learners and offer instructional alternatives to learners. Small group tutoring recognizes the social context of adult learning. Adult learners may prefer to discuss and interact with others, read what others have written, or listen to what others have to say. For many, small groups offer motivation and support to continue their studies. The small group format incorporates the advantages of group interaction with the individualized attention of the one-to-one approach.

What is involved?

Questions of scheduling and cost need to be considered. When is the best time to introduce the program? At the beginning of the next fiscal year? At the next cycle of training? How much time will recruitment of tutors and learners take? When can staff development training for tutors be provided? Should the program start with a few pilot groups? Additional staff time will be needed to support small groups for training, record keeping, and scheduling. You will also need multiple copies of instructional materials. These issues will need to be resolved prior to full implementation of the program.

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What kind of small group should the program start with?

A practical way of getting people to participate in small groups is to focus the group's work on a specific topic. This may include topics such as family literacy, health and nutrition, reading the newspaper, financial literacy, or writing projects. How you choose to organize groups will depend on your program's size and managerial style. Learners can be involved in the selection of topics if tutors and staff analyze the learners' reasons for wanting to improve their reading, writing, and math skills, and then offer groups focused on such topics. It is also possible to begin with a group that is organized "to learn to read and write" or "to speak and read English" if the learners are carefully selected based on their ability levels.

How should the idea be introduced?

An orientation should be held for interested library staff, trainers, learners, program partners, etc. It should not be assumed that people accustomed to one-to-one or classroom instruction will jump right in when offered the chance to work in a small group situation. Internal marketing is an important step, even before a pilot or demonstration group is started. During this session, people have the opportunity to ask questions and air doubts. It provides a chance for group collaboration to establish the dimensions and character of the program. Remind those involved that one-to-one tutoring or classroom sessions will continue as feasible. If volunteers and/or students are interested, they can participate in both one-to-one tutoring and small group tutoring. Students who are on a wait list for one-to-one can participate in the small group sessions while they wait.

Program Decisions to be Made by Staff

Once a decision has been made to begin a small group component or pilot program, there are some decisions to be made before implementing the program. It will be necessary to allocate the work associated with the general oversight of the program to a specific staff member. These responsibilities are not much different from administering one-to-one tutoring or a classroom program. Program planning, recruitment of tutors and learners, and the training sessions will occur over several weeks.

The following questions should be resolved before proceeding with a small group tutoring program:

- *Will tutors/instructors and learners be recruited initially from within the program, outside the program, or both?*
- *What should you look for in a group member (tutor/instructor or learner)?*
- *How similar should the group members be?*
- *What about literacy/English ability level?*
- *Are suitable small group meeting areas available?*
- *What will be the costs to implement this program?*

- *What additional support may be needed?*
- *How will the program be evaluated?*
- *What training resources are available?*
- *What kind of literacy/English collection is needed?*
- *What is the typical/best size of small group?*
- *How many students per instructor?*
- *What is the appropriate size of the classroom?*

Additional Alternative - Classroom Instruction

In addition to one-to-one and small group tutoring, library literacy programs may consider classroom instruction. The library literacy program could schedule classes sponsored by the local Adult Basic Education (ABE) program, which is provided by the public schools and the community colleges in Florida. Paid instructors could be scheduled in the library to serve larger numbers of learners who are ready to take advantage of ABE/GED and English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. Even within the context of classroom instruction, the library literacy program could still offer one-to-one and/or small group tutoring with volunteers to support learners in these classroom settings. Libraries co-sponsoring a class must have sufficient space/classroom.

The following groups will support your efforts. Your program should become a member of ProLiteracy America (www.proliteracy.org), Literacy Florida! (www.literacyflorida.org), and Florida Literacy Coalition (www.floridaliteracy.org). The State of Florida also provides training, technical assistance, and grants for library sponsored programs.

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You may also visit http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/bld/Literacy/BLD_literacy_index.html.

Resources

Clark, Dorothy and V.K. Lawson. *Small Group Tutoring: Basic Reading Administrator's Guide.* Syracuse, NY: Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc., 1990.

Lawson, V.K. and Barbara J. MacDonald (Eds.). *Tutoring Small Groups: Basic Reading.* Syracuse, NY: Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc., 1990.