

Large Scale Unbudgeted Elementary School Tutorial Programs

SUSANNAH M. McCUAIG*

Children with remedial needs can receive valuable help through such a systematic tutorial program as described here.

IT IS possible, with luck and effective organization, to develop and maintain large scale elementary school tutorial programs without direct financial support by the local school district. The major potential benefit of such programs is the individual attention they provide to children with remedial needs. A second benefit, possible in areas having a college of education, is provision of important clinical and personal experience to teachers in training. A third benefit is increased community involvement and support.

The nature of the tutor's role varies in the two types of locality, those which have a participating college of education and those which do not. Where a college of education is available and willing to participate, the program can provide the tutors with personal involvement in the learning problems of children prior to their student teaching experience. Because these tutors are teachers in training, who have been professionally

instructed in pedagogical and psychological methods, it is possible to allow the tutors to exercise considerable diagnostic judgment, participate in planning, and direct instruction of individual children.

When teachers in training are not available, three other sources of unbudgeted staff should be considered. These are college or junior college students in noneducation programs, high school students with a special interest in education or civic assistance, and adults active in parent-teacher organizations. Because these tutors have no professional training, their most important function is to provide the child with immediate reinforcing attention and the awareness of consistent personal concern for his or her efforts. Diagnosis of the child's difficulty, planning of his or her assignments, and initial instruction in every topic must be carried out by the classroom teacher. Consequently, programs with nonprofessional tutors should be operated on a somewhat smaller scale and directed toward that segment of each classroom's remedial population suffering problems of attitude or motivation.

* *Susannah M. McCuaig, Assistant Professor of Education, University of Maryland, College Park*



The tutorial session usually includes a 45-minute work period conducted on a one-to-one basis in the school's large multipurpose room. Following this, an active 15-minute game period is organized by the tutors on a rotating basis.

Initiation of the Program

There are two critical requirements for the initiation of such programs. First is the location of volunteer management. The author feels strongly that this should be a single individual not a committee. The individual should be educated at the graduate level and familiar with responsibility. These criteria would tend to be met automatically when the tutors are teachers in training. The tutorial experience is likely to be integrated with a professional course in pedagogical methods, and the course professor would function as manager.

Similarly, the criteria tend to be met automatically when tutors from student service organizations are used. The professional adviser to the organization functions as manager. However, when tutors are drawn from parent-teacher organizations, the program manager would be likely to come from that organization. This is a source of potential difficulty, although not because competent volunteers are rare. There is a surfeit of educated parents who desire intellectually challenging responsibilities. Rather, difficulty can arise when an active member of the organization who is not qualified desires to manage the program. It is imperative that influences producing the appropriate selection be applied discreetly and that criteria be stated as diplomatically as possible.

The second critical requirement is enthusiastic support by the principal and par-

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icipating faculty. Such support would often be easy to win as few programs offer so much in return for so little direct expenditure. Yet there are important, scattered, tiny, indirect investments that are necessary to smooth operation. These are not monies or budgeted items but subtle adjustments in staff and material assignments which tend to occur under enthusiastic principals and to be lacking under a leadership that is merely tolerant.

There are two important requirements for the maintenance of unbudgeted tutorial programs. First is the establishment of tutorial commitment over some definite period of time. The second is careful adjustment of the program's structure to the peculiarities of local organizations and resources. These two requirements tend to be complexly inter-related and to define the individuality of particular programs. Generalities concerning these requirements have limited usefulness, but a specific example might be helpful.



When teachers in training are not available, the unbudgeted staff can be drawn from college students in noneducation programs, high school students interested in education or civic assistance, and adults in parent-teacher organizations.

Tutorial Program in Action

The author has functioned as a tutorial program manager for five years at the College Park Elementary School in College Park, Maryland. The author designed this role as a component of the reading-language arts block which she teaches at the College of Education of the University of Maryland. Tutors are students enrolled in the author's courses. For the first six weeks students meet on the university campus and basic reading-language arts methods are taught. It is explained that a tutorial experience will be an integral part of the block. During the sixth week, the College Park principal, Michael Kovak, and the College Park reading consultant, Shirley Worthington, spend one class period in the author's courses discussing organization of the tutorial program, the character of their school, and the needs of its children. Sample case studies are reviewed and kinds of available diagnostic information are described. A list of children with remedial or developmental needs, prepared by the reading consultant and classroom teachers, is presented. The dimensions of this list have been adjusted to that semester's enrollment in the author's reading-language arts block. One child from this list is assigned to each student enrolled in these courses.

From the seventh week through the sixteenth week of class, the students spend two hours each week attending the regular lecture

sessions of this methods block. The other two hours are spent in the public school tutoring their assigned child and evaluating tutorial progress with the professor. During tutorial, the class meets at 1:00 p.m. in a large multipurpose room of the elementary school. Twelve foot long folding lunch tables are left erect and available. Four college students and their pupils might sit at each table. Often tutors with kindergarten and first grade children prefer to sit on the floor or at small tables. Any available facilities are used.

During the first meeting, the tutor spends some time in undirected conversation with the child to learn his or her interests, and then administers both informal and formal diagnostic tests. These might vary from year to year according to the wishes of the school district. By the next session, a student is expected to have constructed appropriate lessons and materials. The university professor, the reading consultant, and the principal are available to the students as resource personnel.

Any tutorial period usually includes a 45-minute work period and a 15-minute game period. The work period is conducted on a one-to-one basis, but the games are organized by grade level groups. Control of the games rotates at each grade level among tutors assigned to that grade level. When a particular tutor has control, he or she is expected to organize group games that have



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optimum relevance to the needs of his or her assigned child. The games are allowed to become quite active, because it is felt that the value of associating intense learning with intense fun cannot be overstated. At the beginning of the second hour, children return to their classroom and the students remain

in the multipurpose room with the professor. Tutorial lessons and games are reviewed, discussed, and critiqued. A lecture is held on topics of immediate or likely relevance.

Replication and expansion of the program are occurring, involving many content areas. The program is considered by its participants and observers to be highly successful and beneficial as well as extremely economical. Needs of both tutors and children are met at no cost to either. The author believes that many localities could effectively maintain similar programs or analogous variations, that benefits to all involved children would be numerous, and that the only prerequisite to wide consideration of such programs is dissemination of the idea. □

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