

DRAFT FOR SOUTHAM NEWS

Written by Jack Pearpoint and Marsha Forest

YES YOU CAN HELP!

"Tell me, I'll forget
Show me, I may remember;
But involve me and I'll understand..."

People who cannot read and write come in all shapes, sizes, colours, religions and ages. They fit no neat orderly pattern, and therefore require creative flexible approaches.

People who want to help other people to read and write also come in all shapes, sizes, colours, religions and ages. They too fit no neat orderly pattern.

Our experience at Frontier College over the past 89 years has proven to us that all people are capable of learning and that people trained in programs like our SCIL (Student Centred Individualized Learning) approach can unlock doors into new futures and new hopes for students.

The key to SCIL and similar approaches is that it is designed to serve the needs of the students. "What do you want to learn and how can I help you" is the major question we train our tutors to ask. This is based on the belief that people do know what they want but are often not encouraged to ask.

Research shows that the best schools and programs have philosophies that are simple and to the point. Our philosophy can be summed up very simply: "we believe in our students." We look for tutors who see the glass as "half-full" not "half-empty". We want people who see other people as full of potential and ability - not empty jars to be filled or fixed with prescriptions.

At Frontier College most of our tutors work one-to-one at the beginning, but peer tutoring and group work can accomplish equal results. The key is the people. So, in screening potential tutors, we look for the following qualities:

1. People who believe that everyone can change, grow and develop all through their lives.
2. People who have many interests and networks.
3. People who like to read and write.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD TUTOR?

Let's look at a few tutors and see if a pattern emerges.

Richard: Age 35; spent 15 years in prison; high school education; a skilled woodworker; three children of his own.

Mandy: Age 47; Ph.d in English literature; single; teaches at university.

Shafik: Age 25; some university; loves to read; wants to travel; was in car accident and uses a wheelchair.

Devinder: Age 57; elementary teacher; speaks French; writes children's stories; has seven children.

Linda: Age 39; lived in an institution half her life; was labelled mentally handicapped; learned to read and write through Frontier program; now married and working.

What do all these people have in common:

1. They all volunteered to tutor - i.e.: THEY WANT TO ENTER INTO A RELATIONSHIP and help someone.
2. They are all willing to attend the SCIL Training Sessions and make at least a six month commitment to a person.
3. They are all people who see possibility and capacity - not impossibility and "can'ts".
4. They all can live with a system that uses no tests, no labels, and no set recipes for learning.
5. They are all flexible, open and friendly.
6. They all like to read and write.
7. They all are enthusiastic about this new venture.

In almost every other way they are very different, and that is necessary and desirable.

IF YOU WANTED TO TUTOR TONITE....

It is necessary that you be trained. But common sense is the key ingredient. Most tutor training sessions explain that there are five main elements in every good lesson:

1. READING
2. WRITING
3. SPEAKING
4. LISTENING
5. THINKING

BEGINNING TACTICS

Relax. Have a coffee together. Talk. EXCHANGE stories. Then...

1. Find out everything you can about your student. How? By asking. Slowly. Don't push. Create an autobiography. There is no better place to begin than with the person him/herself. Their lives, wishes, dreams, fears, hopes, etc. Not just age, weight, height - but how they feel, what their passions are. Create a history with the person. Their past, present and future. Also share who you are. Never ask what you yourself are unprepared to answer.

2. Be a good observer. Keep your eyes open. Watch. Use your eyes as well as your ears to see as well as to hear what the student is telling you. Learn about your students by observing their lives. How do they interact with you, with others. Keep a record of your observations for planning your curriculum. A

successful curriculum will begin WITH not FOR the student.

3. You are teaching people to read and write. You therefore must do the same. READ. WRITE. Read aloud to the student each session. Have him/her dictate a story to you. Record the story. Read it back. Voila! There it is, the student has a story in print. Save these stories. When the student can read, let him/her read his/her own stories aloud to you, to others.

4. If you have a paper and pencil you are ready to begin. Sure expensive books and materials are good, but if you can't get them, just start. Go to the library. Make friends the the local librarian. For adults use adult materials. It is insulting and degrading to teach adults with material made for children. Some great starters include: a telephone book, the yellow pages, local newspapers, advertisements, T.V. guides, catalogues, menus, posters, buttons, signs, etc.

5. Use music. Play records. Read Lyrics.

6. Give the student an assignment he/she can succeed at. Something interesting, non-print oriented and relevant - Example: Have people verbally interview their own family members.

All this is an ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE. You are trying to determine:

Who is the student?

What are the student's strengths?

What are the student's needs? Be very specific -- Not just "learning to read". Does the student want to read letters, material at work, a newspaper, grocery products, songs, etc?

Goals: Based on the needs, set goals and target dates with your student. Review this often and modify it as needed.

TUTOR MAGIC - THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

We have observed volunteer tutors at work and are convinced that the thing we do best is to allow people to see their strengths and become confident that they can learn. We replace DIS-ability and IL-literacy (diseases) with self confidence and meaningful skills.

For example, Thomas, 25 years old, one of the millions who slipped through the system. He could not read and write a word. He was convinced he was stupid as he was a graduate of the special education system. He was labelled slow, learning disabled, dyslexic, etc. He believed every word. Enter SCIL. A volunteer tutor met Thomas. They got to know one another. The tutor asked what Thomas wanted - what his dreams were. Three key areas emerged.

1. An avid interest in woodworking

2. A desire to be a mechanic

3. A love for his 5 year old twin neices.

There is the curriculum. Enough for any good tutor to work on for months.

Using Thomas's interests, an individualized program is created. Thomas learned quickly as the material was totally relevant to his life. He learned to write about cars, and how to fix them. He joined the library and took out books on woodworking and cars. He and his tutor practiced filling out job applications and role played for interviews. Within six months, Thomas was reading and writing, and got a job doing house renovations at \$11.00 per hour. He also convinced his mother to get a tutor.

Another example. Daryl is an excellent tutor. His student, Anna, decided she wanted to be a model. A friend of Daryl's laughed, "Anna, a model? You've got to be kidding! Let's be realistic. What's she going to model? No way!"

Daryl listened to Anna and phoned a friend whose daughter is a professional model. He got the name of some agencies. Part of their next lessons involved researching for information, writing for job applications, etc. Will Anna be a model? Maybe yes, maybe no. Can she get a related job in the area? Maybe. But Daryl followed Anna's lead and it is taking them in the right direction.

Another student, Lance, decided he wanted to attend his tutor's university classes - and go to university. Lance, labelled mentally handicapped, had never even finished elementary school, let alone high school. Did Gloria, his tutor tell him to "be realistic"?, or did she trust Lance enough to invite him to her course "as a guest" to see if he enjoyed it. Lance (on his own) decided it was "too much reading and writing" and that he'd visit once in a while. He did however like the university and now works as a courier from the central office.

SUMMARY OF KEY ELEMENTS IN A GOOD LEARNING SITUATION:

- o The tutor and students are active participants.
- o There are more chances for success than failure.
- o There is an abundance of student/tutor - made materials.
- o All materials used are relevant to the learners.
- o Learning is interdisciplinary, i.e. math is related to art, and reading is part of everything. Learning is not chopped up but is interrelated.
- o The tutor is consistent.
- o The tutor is flexible.
- o The tutor refuses to let the students give up.
- o The tutor has a rich fund of knowledge, information, and resources.
- o The tutor believes that all people can learn, want to learn, and have the capacity to learn.

In short, anyone reading this article who has an interest in tutoring someone having trouble reading and writing CAN. There is no mystery or magic involved. Years of experience around the globe have shown that ordinary citizens involved in literacy programs can work small miracles on a daily basis.

Call any literacy program in your community and ask if you can help. Send a donation - because literacy programs across the country lack stable funding.

You can volunteer to help in a wide variety of programs and places - including schools, community based programs, institutions like hospitals and prisons, workplaces - but most important with your family and friends.

You do not have to have a degree in english to read to a child - and demonstrate to them the magic of books. You can change the future for a child with 15 minutes a day. Its not much to ask. And the rewards are mutual.

HERE IS A LIST OF THINGS YOU CAN DO

- o **BECOME A TUTOR:** Anyone who can read and write who has the desire to help another person, and who has the time to take some training, can be an effective tutor. Research on "peer tutoring" shows that both the "tutor" and the "student" learn and win.
- o **TALK TO YOUR EMPLOYER:** Wherever you work, some of your colleagues have a hidden literacy problem. Raise the issue! Over coffee, on the safety committee, with your shop steward, at lunch, talk about this article. Better yet, post his on your bulletin board.
- o **READ TO YOUR CHILDREN:** Overwhelming research shows that children who are surrounded by books, magazines and newspapers, and who are read to by adults, become good readers. If you want your child to be a good reader, and enjoy worlds of adventure, history, romance and travel through print, here are a few hints:
 - o Read to them - 15 minutes a day;
 - o Read with them;
 - o Read out loud; read silently; read together;
 - o Discuss what you read with you child;
 - o Read alone in front of them.

In short, set a good example. Don't forget, you are a VERY important role model for your child. If you read and enjoy reading, chances are they will copy you.

o **GIVE A FRIEND A BOOK:** Give a book or a magazine or newspaper subscription, or pens and paper. Visit a used book store. Always inscribe books you give...it makes it extra special. And if you have good books and magazines around, help someone start a library. Not everyone can afford it on their own.

o **JOIN THE LIBRARY:** If you are a member, survey your friends.

Are they? Recruit them. Take home a book, a record or computer disk.

o **WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR:** Literacy is an important issue - write about it - or any other topic you choose!

o **READ AND WRITE FOR SOMEONE WHO CAN'T:** The isolation a person feels being cut off from friends and family - and unable to read their letters - or write - is unnecessary frustration. Whether the cause be a stroke, an accident, or lack of opportunity makes no difference. There are people in your community who need your partnership. An unsighted student needs readers; a person with hearing difficulties or cerebral palsy could use a good scribe; a person in a hospital, institution or prison needs your partnership.

o **WRITE A LETTER TODAY:** Answer last year's unanswered holiday cards. If you want your children to write - set a good example. Have a family writing hour. Write each other notes and songs and poems. Keep a journal. Keep a book of favourite jokes or recipes. Send them to a friend. We all like to receive mail. And remember, there are thousands of people in nursing homes, prisons, and other institutions to whom a letter is a treasure. You can give someone a wealth of pleasure...write.

o **WRITE YOUR PREMIER AND YOUR PRIME MINISTER:** Our elected representatives need to know what we consider important. Tell them. Write. Ask questions. Together we can solve almost any problem.

o **BECOME A PEN PAL:** You can be a friend to almost anyone - almost anywhere - with a pen and some paper. Explore the world...make a new friend.

o **TALK TO YOUR CHURCH, SYNAGOGUE, MOSQUE OR TEMPLE:** Your religious congregation could be an important source of support for literacy - volunteers, space, awareness, funds and promotional activities. It is an existing network that could be mobilised to support existing or create new programs.

o **MAKE A GENEROUS DONATION:** In addition to time and talent, literacy programs everywhere need cash. You can help.

LITERACY IS A COMMUNITY ISSUE!

Literacy is not merely a matter of schooling. It is fundamental to our way of life. Thus the responsibility and opportunity to resolve the critical problem of illiteracy rests with us. We can do it. We have the skills and the talents. We are the resources. We can make Canada a nation of readers. There are no adequate excuses.

The last word must go to a student - who not only learned to read and write, but has since created a remarkable new literacy

program for urban street people. This was the first poem Tracy LeQuyere wrote.

DON'T PASS ME BY

I'm just a man at thirty-three
Who just learned to read,
I was here all the time
But people just passed me by.

One day a woman said I will
show you a lie.
I know you can read with
a little time.
I won't pass you by.

So she gave me a little time,
and I gave her a little time.
See this writing,
I will have more in time.

Don't pass me by!