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Constructing Adult Literacies at a Local Literacy Tutor-Training Program

Ryan Roderick

This study investigates how literacy was constructed at an adult literacy organization's volunteer tutor-training program. By drawing on qualitative analysis of training texts used during training, such as training evaluations, and data gathered from interviews with experienced tutors, it is possible to identify the assumptions about literacy constructed by the training program and tutors' training practices. Tutors seemed to present mixed assumptions about literacy: students simultaneously were given authority over their own literacy practices and literacy goals, while a sentiment of universally valued reading and writing skills was also present in terms of achieving fluency.

By way of introducing my use of the term literacy in this study, I want to address what Thomas Smith notes as two varying understandings. In Smith's review of governmental policies' assumptions about literacy, he notes that current definitions of literacy and learning are being "pushed and pulled in competing directions" (35). Literacy is "pushed" in the sense that an increasingly diverse student population is prompting educators to recognize those students' diverse ways of knowing as kinds of literacies. In addition, literacy is "pulled" in the sense that reforms to education, such as No Child Left Behind, have seemingly narrowed definitions of literacy to a standard, universally applicable set of reading and writing skills. It is this pushing and pulling of literacy that I want to introduce, because I am curious about where community literacy organizations might fit within these two very different sets of assumptions about literacy.

Recent research into literacy practices of student writers shows reading and writing abilities as inseparable from social, cultural, and generic contexts (Gee; Prior & Shipka; Berkenkotter et al.). Such an understanding of literacies as multiple and varied relative to their socio-cultural context suggests that teachers recognize the growing diversity of their students' varying reading and writing abilities. Brian Street and others refer to the understanding that literacy is always connected to social and cultural contexts as *New Literacies*. The concept of New Literacies "represents a shift in perspective on the study and acquisition of literacy from the dominant cognitive model, with its emphasis on reading, to a broader understanding of literacy practices in their social and cultural contexts" (qtd. in Smith 41). While a New Literacies understanding of language acquisition may now be the paradigm in most first-year composition courses, little research has been done to examine what role, if any, a New Literacies paradigm takes in community literacy programs. In what ways might literacy, as it is constructed in composition studies, align or diverge from literacy as it

is constructed in local community literacy programs, and what might this alignment or divergence mean for the work that community literacy tutors and students do? A 1998 survey of 271 literacy programs across forty-one states suggests that these programs largely understood being literate as ability with a fixed set of skills that, once learned, could then be applied regardless of the contexts in which they were used. According to the survey, 73% of adult literacy programs' instructional practices were somewhat to highly decontextualized and somewhat to highly teacher-directed (Purcell-Gates et al. 80-83).

However, adult literacy students are widely diverse in the purposes, skill sets, beliefs, and experiences they bring to their pursuit of literacy education (Greenberg). In light of Gee's and Russell's conclusions that reading and writing is always contextual, such a diverse population of adult literacy students suggests—as it did for Smith—that adult literacy tutors are working with a wide range of students and a variety of literacies rooted in an equally diverse range of social and cultural contexts. Such a climate of adult literacy education brings me back to my initial question: how are adult literacy programs constructing literacy given the complex climate created by emerging assumptions articulated as New Literacies and residual assumptions about literacy as a universally applicable set of skills?

A Review of Relevant Literature

Given the diversity of adult literacy students, and that many community literacy programs rely heavily on volunteers, student-centered pedagogies have been given some attention recently (Belzer; Godbee; Talarr). In addition, many community literacy programs train tutors to implement some version of a student-centered approach to tutoring. This approach has grown out of critical pedagogies, perhaps most notable of which is that developed by Freire. Student-centered approaches to tutoring structure learners' and tutors' roles/knowledges/abilities through an ongoing process of negotiation between two different sets of expertise, teacher and student. A student-centered approach means that tutors are expected to adapt their tutoring practices to further the goals and expertise of the particular learner they are working with (Talarr; Godbee). In addition, student-centered approaches to tutoring tend to work under the assumption that "literacy work [is] grounded in the life of the student," which is related to increased attendance rates and frequency or type of out-of-school literacy practices among students (Purcell-Gates et al. 74).

The move to student-centered tutoring has, however, posed some difficulty. Talarr noted that despite some attempts to train tutors in student-centered approaches, tutors tended to revert back to the teacher-directed strategies they themselves had been taught with as students (384). Similarly, when studying the assumptions about literacy constructed by one-on-one tutor and student pairs, Pomerance found that "despite the presentation of alternatives in the training, [volunteer tutors] tend to teach in conventional ways" (Abstract). In addition, Ceprano also noted that volunteer tutors, despite good intentions, tended to utilize instructional strategies that reflected their past experience as students, rather than the ones they encountered while being trained as a literacy tutor. Thus, Ceprano suggests volunteers find it difficult to develop productive tutoring strategies that overcome

“feelings of frustration and defeat for their clients” (63). However, Talarr’s experience using “active listening” as a training tool suggests that tutors may be prepared to reflect on and develop a productive student-centered approach (385).

As far as volunteer training goes, some researchers have advocated a “less is more” philosophy. In a study of one literacy program that focuses on children having difficulty reading, Baker et al. found “significant impact” on reading and writing skills of second graders despite receiving only one to two hours of training prior to being paired one-on-one with a student (510). Such little training was the result of a low-cost design, and it was believed that very little training would improve volunteer recruitment. However, since that study focuses on kindergarten through second grade students, it might be inaccurate to assume that such a training model could also be effective with volunteers tutoring adults. Belzer’s findings suggest that tutor training might not always transfer to practice, which leads her to claim that less initial training and more ongoing training in order to help tutors develop skills to respond to the specific needs and strengths of students and tutors as they work together (133-134). In addition to these challenges of transfer, D’Amico and Schnee show that there are social and political barriers to using literacy skills, which tutors often perceive as separate from reading and writing skills (136). Given that social and cultural factors are also a part of using reading and writing in certain contexts to do certain things, their study suggests that volunteers also be trained to address such factors.

Research Questions

In this study, I take up Talarr’s notion of training as a process that allows volunteers to move “beyond an ideology that focuses on learners’ deficiencies to one that focuses on their strengths, in order to be able to help learners build on them” (384). That is, I look at tutor training and how it affects volunteers’ disposition towards enacting a student-centered approach to tutoring. I ask the following research questions:

1. What sets of assumptions about literacy and literacy tutoring are being put into action through adult literacy tutor-training programs?
2. How does a student-centered approach to literacy tutoring affect the tutoring practices of volunteer literacy tutors who complete the training?

It is my hope that asking such questions will help uncover the ways literacy is being constructed at the local level. From there, I can speculate back on alignments with/divergences from New Literacies. The organization I studied trains tutors to work with both native and non-native English speakers. They offer two types of training, one of which they call “Basic Literacy” training, which prepares volunteers for work with native English speakers; and “English Language Learner” training, which prepares volunteers for work with non-native English speakers. In order to identify sets of assumptions about literacy being put into action through the organization, I draw on data from both programs.

Data Collection and Analysis

I looked at three sets of data from the volunteer tutor-training programs operating at a community literacy organization I am calling Eastern Adult Literacy¹ (EAL). EAL

is a volunteer community literacy organization that serves a fifty-mile radius around a small city in the northeast U.S. They recruit and train volunteer literacy tutors to enact “learner-centered” tutoring. Following training, volunteers are paired one-on-one with adult learners. Meetings between tutors and learners typically occur once a week in pre-decided locations—e.g. libraries, cafés, etc.—and these meetings usually last about an hour. EAL runs two tutor-training programs: “Basic Literacy” and “English Language Learner” training. Basic Literacy training is meant to prepare volunteers to tutor adults whose primary language is English, while English Language Learner training, as its name suggests, is meant to prepare tutors to work with those for who English is a foreign language.

Drawing from Smith & Schryer’s construct of “documentary society” (136), I mapped volunteers’ experiences as they were structured by a series of documents that situated volunteers in a “local course of action” (145). That is, I attempted to capture the way certain institutional documents allowed volunteers to enter and move through EAL’s tutor-training program (Appendix A). This construct allowed me to contextualize my data within an institutional role. The data I collected for this study included training evaluations from EAL’s Basic Literacy and English Language Learner tutor-training programs; interviews I conducted with tutors who completed the training; and the training texts used in the Basic Literacy training course.

Training evaluations from training sessions—dating from 2009 to 2011—serve as records of volunteers’ experience of the training as they were working through each of the five Basic Literacy training sessions. Each trainee completed an evaluation following each training session, thus it is likely that trainees’ responses on evaluations in later sessions may have been affected in some way by their growing familiarity with the document. In addition, their use of the evaluation after each session may likely have influenced their experience of subsequent sessions. Since I received the results of these evaluations only after they had been compiled into spreadsheets, I was not able to account for these influences.

I used thirty-four English Language Learner (ELL) Tutor-Training Evaluations and twenty-seven Basic Literacy (BL) Tutor-Training Evaluations. Tutor-Training Evaluations prompt a numerical evaluation of tutor-training sessions as well as open-ended comments. Numerical evaluations ask trainees to rate aspects of the training, such as “objectives of workshop,” “ideas and activities,” and “overall content” on a scale of 1-5. Since these ratings tended not to ever fall below 4, I did not find the numerical ratings useful for this project. Instead, I focused specifically on the open-ended comments, since they referred to a variety of aspects of the training, and often provided critiques. Comments also showed a range of ways in which trainees were talking about literacy tutoring.

The open-ended comments on training evaluations documented a time when tutors were experiencing training, yet had not been paired with a learner. This allowed me to see ways in which the training was acting on trainees to construct an image of adult literacy tutoring. However, it did not allow me to see what image of adult literacy tutoring was taken up once tutors began tutoring. Knowing how adult literacy tutors were experiencing actual tutoring sessions would allow me to compare those experiences with those constructed by the training. In order to collect those experiences, I decided to conduct interviews with experienced literacy tutors.

I interviewed eight tutors who had each completed tutor training more than two years prior to the interview. I limited my selection to only those tutors who signed their name to the training evaluation. Such a selection was made because it could allow me to compare what tutors described in the interview with the kinds of comments they made on evaluations during training. Six out of eight tutors—75%—were female. Seven out of eight were over the age of 45—87%. All but one had prior teaching experience. My sample of informants, although smaller than I would have liked, is roughly representative of the general tutor population at EAL. In an unpublished report, EAL indicated that out the 279 volunteers, 222—80%—are female, and 205—73%—are ages forty-five and older. Although EAL does not track which tutors had prior teaching experience, my observation of the Basic Literacy training program conducted in February 2012 found that only two out of the fifteen trainees had prior teaching experience.

Interviews were conducted in person at a public location that the informant and I had decided upon prior to the interview. These interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. I followed a prepared set of questions (Appendix B), however when necessary, I asked informants to elaborate on details I thought were important to my study. Our resulting conversation was, thus, somewhat open-ended, which Adkins, drawing on Patton, describes as a way to “be sure that the data [is] comprehensive while still allowing room for discussion and context to shape the results” (26).

I used Nvivo 9 to code and analyze patterns in comments on training evaluations, which were then looked at alongside information presented in the training texts and patterns in tutor interviews. Similar to Ozkan, I chose Nvivo 9 for my analysis because of its capacity to not only code data but also build theories, organize sources, run queries, pull coded segments of data from sources and view those segments collectively, or jump to a particular segment as it appeared in the context of its original source. Manipulating data in this way was very useful in this study, since I was, as Dorothy Smith recommends (29), being careful not to impose any predetermined theory onto the data, but rather looking for the data itself to suggest the kinds of assumptions about literacy that tutors were constructing.²

I used the training texts in order to triangulate trainees’ comments on training evaluations and tutor interviews. The Basic Literacy training program used two texts: *Tutor* (Colvin), a textbook published nationally by New Reader’s Press; and *The Training Manual*, a collection of handouts, a job description, and a list of resources prepared by the training instructors to correspond with each training session.

Limitations

The population size of tutors I interviewed limited me from being able to generalize about tutors’ reaction to the training as a result of their prior work and education experience, or as a result of their age, sex, and current profession. It would have been interesting to see, for example, if volunteers who had prior training as teachers were affected differently by the training than someone with no training in education, or to see how the construct of literacy operating in the training affected older and younger volunteers in their experience with the training and in their tutoring practices.

Given the fact that community literacy programs like EAL must serve highly localized populations, with a wide variety of differences (Greenberg 40), and the fact that programs are often restricted in different ways by funding, location, and the kind of presence they can establish in a community, they vary largely in their preferred methods of tutoring and in the ways they train tutors to enact those methods perhaps necessarily. Such a variety makes it difficult to generalize about literacy programs based on the data I've collected.

Findings: Training Texts and Tutoring Strategies

I found three kinds of similarities and divergences among the sets of assumptions tutors, trainees, and the training texts were constructing about literacy and literacy learning. First, I found patterns with regard to the way tutors, trainees, and training texts were defining literacy. Second, I was able to collect findings on the attitudes each took up with regards to planning and preparing for tutoring sessions. Third, I found similarities and differences among the strategies tutors, trainees, and training texts noted in their approach to tutoring.

Definitions of Literacy

Literacy is defined in *Tutor* and *The Training Manual* as a process of sending and receiving information, mediated by *thinking* (Figure 1). The diagram at right is taken from *The Training Manual*. A similar diagram appears in *Tutor*, although the circles around *reading* are not presented in *Tutor*'s version.

In Figure 1, literacy is further broken down as a relationship among four components of language: listening and speaking, associated with receiving information, and reading and writing, associated with expressing information. These components appear to be mediated by thinking, which is, in the diagram, a cognitive function. Listening, reading, speaking, and writing are further categorized in terms of receiving information and expressing information. *Tutor* tells us, "reading, writing listening, speaking—all require the individual to think, to engage in the process of expressing or receiving information" (14). *Tutor* also devotes special attention to reading, although in a different way than *The Training Manual*. *Tutor* defines reading from the perspective of three "views": "pronouncing words," "identifying and defining words," and "constructing meaning" (Figure 2). *Tutor* tells readers that the first two views of reading, "pronouncing words" and "identifying and defining words" are insufficient at explaining how reading actually happens (18). Although *Tutor* rejects these first two views, they ironically find their way into the diagram, seemingly enshrined in elevated positions above the third view, which *Tutor* adopts as an accurate explanation of reading. The third view defines reading as "bringing meaning to a text in order to understand it" (18). *Tutor* places its third view of reading at the foundation of the pyramid, perhaps suggesting that bringing meaning to a text is the foundation on which reading happens.

Training evaluations from Basic Literacy training included relatively few references to how literacy was defined, when compared to references to other parts of training like lesson planning and tutoring strategies. Out of 264 references to

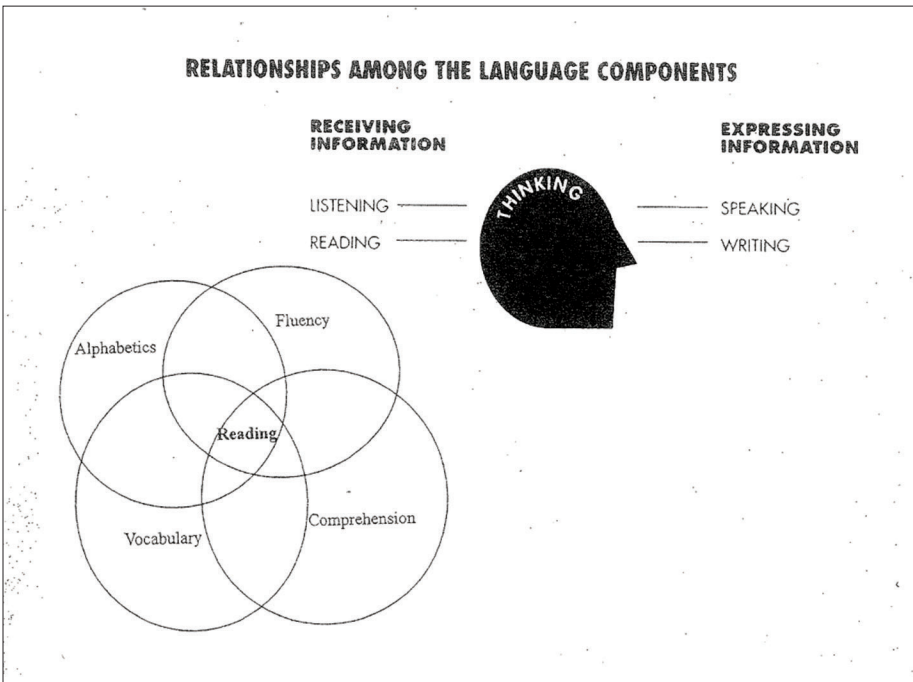


Figure 1. Relationships Among the Language Component. EAL's diagram constructing literacy for the Basic Literacy tutor-training program.

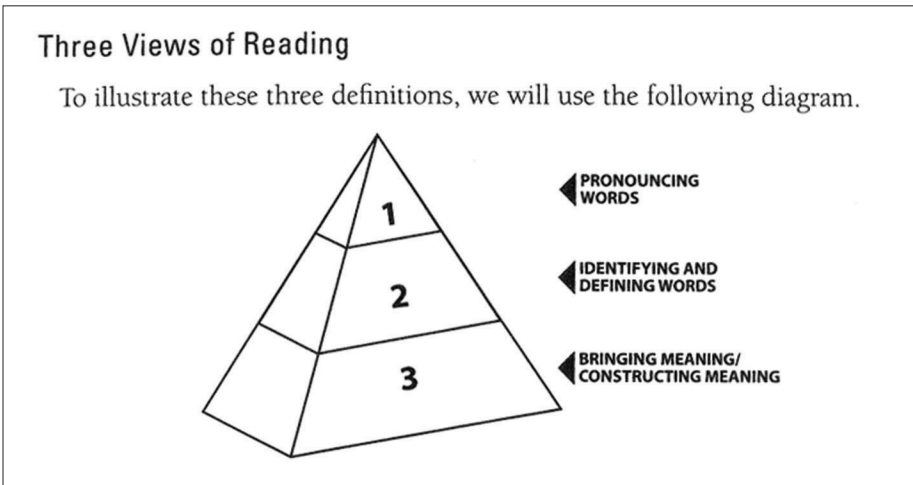


Figure 2. Three Views of Reading. EAL's construct of reading in its Basic Literacy tutor-training program.

useful aspects of Basic Literacy training, only nine referred to definitions of literacy; and out of eighty-nine references to least useful aspects, only two of those referred to definitions of literacy.

Despite the low number of references to definitions of literacy during the training, all of the tutors I interviewed acknowledged that students do have their own specific literacy goals. These tutors seemed to recognize differences in literacies in relation to different goals. Two tutors, Charlie and Hank, are typical examples of the tutors' disposition to their work:

Charlie:

Whether they want to learn how to
fill out a job application,
or if they just want to be able to read a blueprint, or whatever it is,
I mean that's what you gotta worry about.

Hank:

If they're specifically interested
in getting into a certain school
or taking a certain test.
I say help them.
Why not? It all goes hand in hand.

Although both Charlie and Hank use particular examples of the kinds of things they think a learner might be interested in working on, they both assume any learner-defined goal is what they, as tutors, should be concerned with.

Yet, even though tutors like Charlie and Hank implied that they gave their students authority over their own literacy goals, some others indicated that they were helping their students work toward an all-encompassing literacy. Amy, for example, spoke more directly about "reading ability," which came to mean a kind of universal act of decoding print. Amy was a former high school teacher in the 1970s. Her approach to literacy tutoring as fostering reading ability seemed to correspond with the training texts' definitions of literacy and reading as universal yet student-centered processes.

Amy:

the person you're tutoring needs a lot of praise
for their desire to **increase their reading ability**,
their courage in asking for that assistance,
and just not to give false praise, but to continually look for small gains
and praise, and help that person to see that small gains are very important
to getting at that larger goal they have of **reading more fluently**.

Amy notes a desire to increase her students' "reading ability." In noting this, Amy attributes ownership to students' literacy and distinguishes it from her own. That is, Amy gives the impression that, as a tutor, the literacy she is developing in her students is inherently *theirs*. In addition to making her students owners of their own literacy, Amy also indicates that achieving fluency is part of a "larger goal."

Discussion: Definitions of Literacy

The definition of literacy that EAL adopts in its training program seems to approach literacy as a cognitive phenomenon that occurs when thought mediates the reception and expression of information. More specifically, reading is defined as a process of “bringing meaning” to a text. Both of these can be seen as giving students ownership over their own meaning making abilities. However, residual aspects of literacy as a decontextualized set of reading and writing abilities are also present in these definitions of literacy and reading. In their definition of literacy, thinking is not tied to any social or cultural context. In the three views on reading, word identification, definition, and pronunciation are present in the top two places in the pyramid.

It appears that tutors are able to use this construct to make learners’ goals the center of tutoring instruction, though such instruction may also work to marginalize learners’ abilities by failing to acknowledge socio-cultural influences on the various ways reading, listening, speaking, and writing occur and for what purposes. Instead, learners’ goals may be acknowledged by tutors, but the approaches tutors take to pursue those goals may focus more on the kind of singular, decontextualized reading ability that Amy refers to.

The low number of references to definitions of literacy in the training evaluations may suggest that definitions of literacy were simply not something that trainees considered during training. As we will see in my findings about lesson planning and tutoring strategies, trainees’ comments on training evaluations suggests that they were more concerned with what they might do in tutoring sessions, rather than what kinds of assumptions about literacy they might be bringing to their work as a literacy tutor. However, despite the low number of references to definitions of literacy, tutors interviewed seemed to understand the need to let students set their own literacy goals, thus letting their students guide them rather than guiding students toward a preconceived ideal of literacy. For example, Charlie and Hank, like other tutors interviewed, indicate that students’ goals should be the focus of literacy instruction. However, Amy’s assumptions about literacy seem to include a decontextualized ideal of reading. Amy’s references to fluent reading and reading ability seem to represent universal characteristics of reading and writing separated from social and cultural contexts. Following Gee, we might ask in what contexts are fluency and ability measured?

Charlie’s and Hank’s approach to tutoring as a student-driven endeavor seems to reflect the definition of literacy set forth in *Tutor* and *The Training Manual*. That is, their attitude seems to authorize students’ own “thinking” as a mediator of “sending” and “receiving” information. Amy, on the other hand, is inclined to praise students for approaching an ideal reading ability or fluency. This suggests that students may be de-authorized of their way of thinking through encouragement toward an idealized way of thinking.

Lesson Planning

Tutor and the *Training Manual* present two conflicting approaches to lesson planning. The *Training Manual* presents a lesson plan worksheet that includes a predetermined

curriculum, while *Tutor's* approach, though it offers a structure, is open-ended. The lesson plan in *The Training Manual* presents tutors with a numbered outline that describes six portions of a typical lesson and explains the rationale for each portion. Each of these numbers is labeled as a predetermined activity, such as "read aloud," "word study," or having the tutor model writing for the learner (Appendix C). The use of numbered activities in *The Training Manual's* lesson plan may suggest that lessons should be planned in sequential steps, and that each lesson should include the predetermined activities. In contrast, *Tutor's* lesson plan presents a list of unnumbered lines. Scattered among the lines are four sections: "Review Previous Lesson," "Activities," "Homework," and "Reading for Pleasure" (Colvin). *Tutor's* lesson plan does not require tutors to plan lessons in steps as *The Training Manual* does. In addition, the format leaves open space for the tutor and learner to define what to do and how to do it. *Tutor's* lesson plan also differs from *The Training Manual* by including a space for goals to be defined and comments made by both tutor and learner.

Given the differences between the two training texts' approaches to lesson planning, it is also significant that trainees' comments on training evaluations frequently referenced lesson planning. Out of a total of sixty-one BL and ELL evaluations, tutors made reference to lesson planning on twenty-seven of those evaluations. This means that approximately 50% of training evaluations from both BL and ELL trainings noted lesson planning. Within those references to lesson planning, tutors expressed a desire to know more about lesson planning in ten evaluations. So, approximately one sixth of tutors indicated a desire to know more about lesson planning. Such a high frequency of comments regarding lesson planning suggests that it was an important factor for trainees at EAL.

However, despite its importance for trainees, only two of the eight tutors I interviewed discussed lesson planning in any detail. Interestingly, the two tutors' approaches to lesson planning diverged from each other in the same way as *The Training Manual's* and *Tutor's* approaches to lesson planning. The first tutor, Sarah, approached lesson planning in a similar way as the *Training Manual*. Sarah had a background in the hard sciences, and she told me that she felt she was most comfortable in a more rigidly structured work environment. Sarah mentioned that she previously volunteered for a different organization where she was accustomed to taking direction from a supervisor and negotiating her volunteer work with others during weekly meetings. Sarah indicated that she was reassured by her lesson planning strategy, which followed a predetermined set of steps, similar to *The Training Manual's* approach to lesson planning.

Sarah:

The training I had was good.

The two that stick the most with me that were the most helpful
was when there was an actual teacher.

She used to be a special ed teacher,

but she no longer was,

but she said, "I don't have time for lesson plans.

I go to Borders and I buy a book.

I follow the book."

She was very reassuring.

Sarah later revealed that the book she used was called *The Wilson Reading System*. According to Wilson Language Training website, the Wilson Reading System “directly teaches the structure of words in the English language with an organized and sequential system with twelve steps. Steps 1 and 2 emphasize phonemic segmentation skills (the ability to separate the sounds in a word) and blending the sounds together again” (Wilson Reading System). Sarah said that her choice to use *The Wilson Reading System* to plan her lessons grew out of the special education teacher’s encouragement that lesson planning was not necessary for literacy tutoring. She also told me that the special education teacher was, in fact, one of the BL training instructors at EAL.

Charlie was the other tutor who referenced lesson planning in his interview. Charlie revealed that he had previously worked as a fireman, and that the crews he worked with were the reason he decided to become a volunteer literacy tutor. He described an approach to lesson planning that seemed to align somewhat with *Tutor* in that Charlie left lessons open-ended. However, unlike the approach to planning set forth in *Tutor*, Charlie’s approach may have differed, given his emphasis on leaving lessons unplanned.

Charlie:

you can’t go in with a set plan,
you can’t go in with a lesson plan,
you just go in, and you do what they need.

[...]

That I kind of just kind of do whatever,
like I say I don’t concentrate on lesson plans, I don’t.
and I think with the clientele that I get:
the more informal,
the more relaxed,
the better off you are with these guys.

And I would stress that more in the training, than what they do.

Charlie’s improvisational approach grew out of his perception of his students and the kind of disposition he felt they had toward literacy education. Throughout the interview he implied that planning creates a tenser dynamic between him and the person he works with.

Discussion: Attitudes Toward Lesson Planning

I draw on these examples to show that Charlie and Sarah were not in fact confused about lesson planning; rather I want to illustrate the variety of lesson planning approaches that resulted from their completion of the same BL training program. Both Charlie and Sarah adopted two different approaches to lesson planning. Charlie’s approach was more open-ended, since he did not concentrate on lesson plans. Sarah’s was more regimented, as she adopted a step-by-step approach that involved predetermined activities from the *Wilson Reading System*.

However, neither Charlie nor Sarah used the specific lesson plan forms available in *Tutor* or the *Training Manual*. Their approaches were adapted after they completed the training and began tutoring. This suggests that the habits they

developed as tutors resulted not from the training but from the actual tutoring itself. Given their backgrounds, their approach might also support suggestions made by Ceprano and Talarr—that volunteers’ backgrounds tend to be a significant influence on the tutoring strategies they develop. Since they began tutoring after the training program ended, the training did not have control over the habits that Charlie and Sarah were developing. The fact that the lesson planning habits that Charlie and Sarah took up were divergent from each other might correspond with the BL training’s own inconsistent constructions of lesson planning. Charlie’s and Sarah’s development of divergent approaches after completing the training could support Belzer’s claim that “a few broad and important ideas”, such as an open-ended or a regimented approach to planning, tend to transfer from training to tutoring, whereas the specific techniques, such as the use of particular lesson planning forms, may not (135).

Tutoring Strategies for Developing Comprehension

Tutor defines comprehension as “the accurate understanding of what is read” (71). Using “the” to present “accurate understanding” seems to suggest that there is only one possible understanding of what is read. Likewise, tutoring strategies that focus on “the accurate understanding” seem to offer only one correct or incorrect answer. These strategies de-contextualize language by divorcing language from the role it plays in a particular text and social context. For example, teaching grammar rules, single word recognition, and phonics presents words and rules of language as separate from their function in a particular text. One printout in *The Training Manual* titled “Spelling Practice” describes steps for memorizing a single word, and the goal of “Spelling Practice” is to develop the ability to spell multiple de-contextualized words. Likewise, in *Tutor*, strategies such as “Phonics: Letter-Sounds Relationships” and “Word Patterns,” rely on de-contextualized language. In *Tutor*, “Phonics” strategies involved recognizing the sound of individual letters and then identifying those sounds in letters of individual words. “Word Patterns” strategies involve writing a list of words that rhyme, such as cap, map, and lap, repeating the words, and sounding out the letters in each word (Colvin).

The Training Manual adopts a different definition of comprehension. It suggests that the goal of teaching comprehension is to “help student[s] learn to monitor their own thinking while reading.” That is, *The Training Manual* defines comprehension as being self-aware of one’s own thoughts. One strategy that enacts this definition is the “think aloud.” *The Training Manual* defines “think aloud” as a “comprehension activity” that asks learners to read a passage and say out loud what they are thinking as they read. According to the exercise, some examples of thinking out loud include: making predictions about what the text will be about, coping with difficulties in the text, describing images, and describing how prior knowledge links to an understanding of the text. After the learner thinks aloud, the exercise asks the tutor to “discuss with the student(s) the kind of thinking you did while reading. Does he/she think that similar strategies would help him/her with comprehension?” (*The Training Manual* 10). Through this strategy, it appears that readers’ various interpretations are recognized insofar as those interpretations are thought aloud by the reader. The

purpose is not to find a single accurate meaning; rather it is to understand how a reader is constructing any particular meaning.

Out of all the evaluation comments specifically referencing tutor training, references concerning tutoring strategies were the most frequent (Table 1). The second most frequent were references to specific content covered in the training. I distinguished references to “content” from references to “tutoring strategies” by noting where trainees were simply made note of an idea that occurred during training as opposed to places where trainees mentioned something from the training that they felt could be practically applied to their tutoring. I identified any mention of practically applying some idea, method, approach, or tactics as “tutoring strategies.” The high frequency of references among trainees to tutoring strategies indicates that strategies that can be applied to tutoring are important to trainees.

Table 1: Aspects of Tutor Training Referenced in Evaluation Comments

	Total n	Tutoring Strategies	Content of Training	Questions about tutoring	Lesson planning	The use of resources
References	761	279 (36%)	124 (16%)	107 (14%)	68 (9%)	61 (8%)
Sources	65	44 (67%)	44 (67%)	41 (63%)	27 (41%)	28 (43%)

I found that the most highly referenced categories of strategies tended to refer to generalized strategies like “planning a lesson” or “working with a student,” rather than specific strategies like the “think aloud,” or “spelling practice,” which were just two of many presented in the training texts. In fact, the least-referenced strategies tended to be the more specific ones. For example, “how to do a read aloud” was only referenced three times, compared to “ideas to use when tutoring,” which was referenced 39 times (Table 2). These less frequently referenced strategies identified a particular goal or activity, whereas the highly referenced strategies referred more generally to issues that relate to tutoring, such as planning a lesson or working with a learner without recognizing planning a lesson for a *particular* purpose, or working with a learner to accomplish a *particular* goal.

Table 2: Evaluation References to Strategies Applicable to Tutoring

	Total n	How to plan a lesson	Ideas to use when tutoring	How to work with a student	How to do a read aloud	Pronunciation techniques
References	267	39	39	19	3	2
Sources	43	23	24	14	2	2

Also, four tutors interviewed indicated that they took up tutoring strategies generally. For example, when I asked Rebecca what strategies she would recommend

to new tutors, she pointed out that recommending specific strategies would be difficult, since each tutor-learner pair presents different challenges.

Ryan:

If you were to be met with a tutor that's just completing the training program, what sort of advice or strategies would you recommend to them in the tutoring?

Rebecca:

You know that's hard to say because, uh,
I think there's different types of tutoring that you do.
And I think as a student,
and I think the other students feel the same way,
we almost wish we would have known
what our tutoring assignment was gonna be
when we took the course.

When I asked Kathy a similar question about tutoring strategies, she also did not mention any particular strategies that a new tutor might use. Instead, Kathy described the resources that tutors might seek out to discover their own strategies.

Ryan:

If you had to recommend tutoring strategies
to a tutor that's just starting,
what tutoring strategies would you recommend
to someone just beginning
or what advice would you give?

Kathy:

Ok, you said volunteer
[...] There are many resources offered by [EAL].
Including on the committee there are other tutors
who are willing to help you
every time you get a little nervous or, you know,
run out of your own ideas.
So that's one, the resources are there.
You know all kinds of materials to help.
And, I personally love researching the internet.

For Kathy, it seems, tutoring strategies are something she developed while tutoring, by looking for answers on the Internet or in the resources EAL makes available to each tutor.

Discussion: Composing Strategies

General adoption of tutoring strategies, such as focusing on "lesson planning" and "working with a learner," may be the result of trainees not knowing who their tutor-learner match is. The fact that more general strategies tended to be referenced much more frequently than specific strategies might point to trainees' uncertainty about how these strategies might be useful in specific tutoring situations. That is to say, trainees were learning about tutoring strategies without having the experience of tutoring., nor did trainees know whom they would be working with. Therefore,

tutoring strategies introduced during training must have been conceptualized in hypothetical situations, such as planning for a lesson, working with a learner, or just generally tutoring. So when I claim that trainees could have been uncertain about how strategies would be useful, I am saying that without active tutoring experience, trainees might not have developed a sense of how these strategies would actually work in specific situations. Thus, they more often noted general strategies about working with a learner, and not a strategy for conducting a read aloud.

Allowing tutors to discover their own strategies is perhaps more useful than recommending strategies because of the challenges presented by the variety of tutoring situations, as Rebecca points out. As Greenberg reminds us, adult learners approach literacy organizations with a wide variety of goals (40), which in turn could challenge tutors to adapt strategies to unique situations. Because of this challenge, EAL's Basic Literacy tutor training may be more effective if tutors are taught how to search and adapt strategies to their own unique tutoring situations, rather than presenting predetermined strategies to be understood in an abstract sense, divorced from any actual tutoring. The same claim could be made for lesson planning. If trainees are matched with a particular learner while in the process of being trained in techniques of lesson planning, then trainees might be in a better position to adapt lesson planning techniques around the goals and interests of their learner, instead of conceptualizing lesson planning in an abstract sense around hypothetical goals and interests.

Conclusions

As volunteer tutors move through the training program and eventually onto tutoring, they are involved in a process of becoming "literate" in the practices of student-centered adult literacy tutoring. As Talarr suggests, the training process should aim to move volunteers into the habits and values of the institution in which participants are being trained (385). In the case of EAL, it seems that tutors were developing most of their tutoring practices after completing the training and as they were active in tutoring their students. A similar process of developing skills through participating in the work is reflected in Berkenkotter et al. who observe "Nate's" identity as a writer as it develops within and against the activity of Carnegie Mellon's Rhetoric Program (39-40). If we consider that tutors are still training themselves as they face their specific tutoring contexts, it's not surprising that tutors demonstrated a wide variety of approaches to lesson planning and "comprehension" strategies. Volunteers bring their own experiences to bear on their tutoring practices, and using those experiences, rather than training knowledge and resources, adapt their tutoring to specific students, and such students, as Greenberg mentions, also vary widely in their backgrounds, goals, and purposes.

During the time of this study, EAL's Basic Literacy tutor-training program was operating with two separate, and perhaps conflicting constructs of literacy, as evidenced by the program's definition of literacy. On one hand, literacy meant a cognitively situated reception and expression of information, which recognized literacies as multiple and grounded in the way an individual interacts with a text—a construct that positions reading and writing as contextual. However, the program's

definition of reading as also “pronouncing words,” and “defining words” constructs literacy as a set of abilities that can be learned once and for all and applied regardless of the contexts or purposes in which they are used.

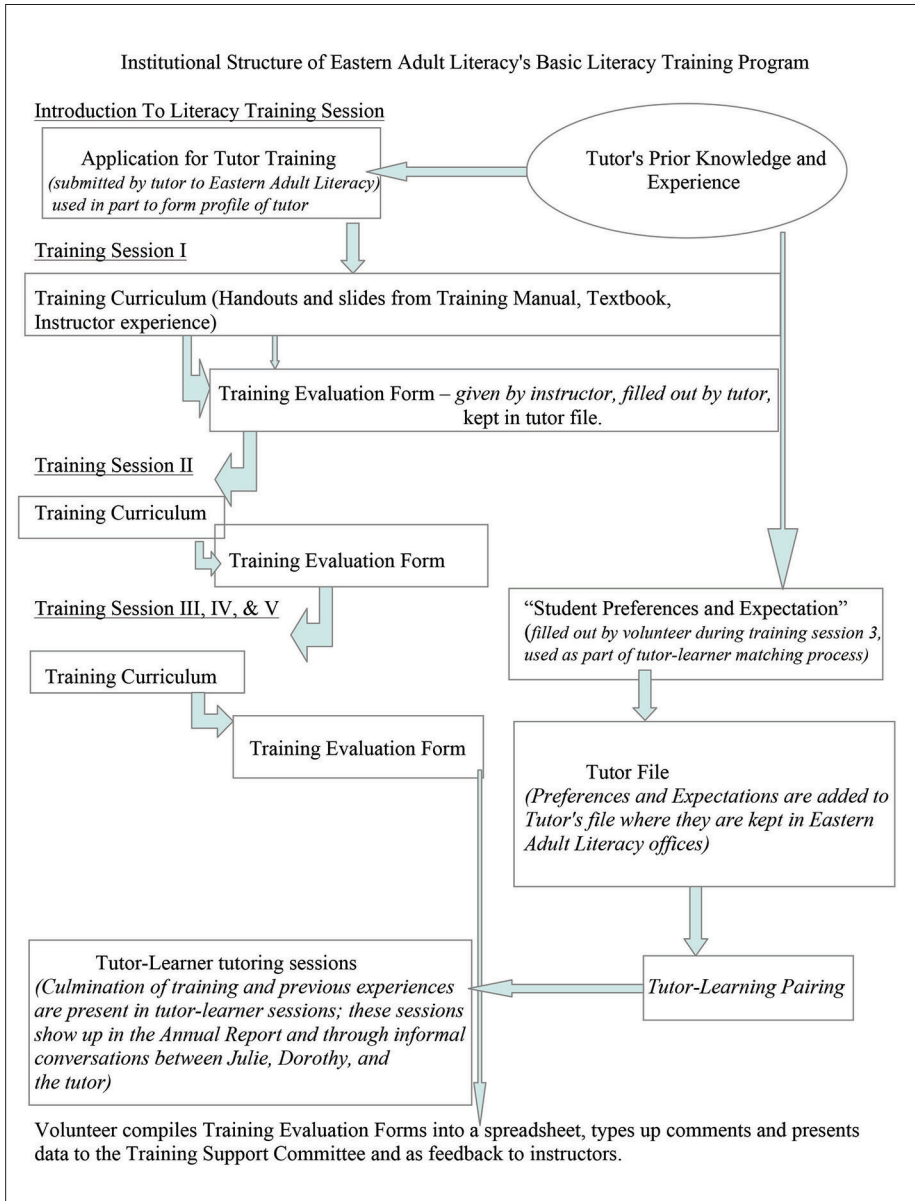
Given these assumptions about literacy, I also asked how such an approach to literacy tutoring affects the tutoring practices of volunteer literacy tutors who complete the training. Similar to their definitions of literacy, the training texts used to train BL tutors at EAL seem to implement tutoring strategies that construct literacy as detached from social contexts, thus inhibiting instructors from considering possibilities of matching trainees with tutors as part of the training. Basic Literacy training assumes varying definitions of comprehension. On one hand, strategies like “think aloud” and “The Language Approach” align themselves with a definition of comprehension that recognizes the validity of multiple possible interpretations of a text. The “think aloud” strategy is particularly unique, since it not only recognizes multiple possible interpretations of a text, but it also works to make readers aware of the interpretations they are making. On the other hand, many more strategies promote teaching de-contextualized language, which is aligned with the definition of comprehension as “the accurate understanding of what is read” (*Tutor*).

Based on my interviews with tutors, it seems that there is a felt sense that practical experience would in fact be a valuable part of adult literacy tutor training. Such a felt sense aligns with current understanding of literacy as a socially situated activity (as described by Gee; Russell; Prior & Shipka). In addition, Russell tells us that for newcomers, any new ways of acting or thinking are developed through continued interaction with others already habituated in those ways of acting or thinking (516). Newcomers to adult literacy tutoring—e.g. trainees—seem to begin developing conceptual grounding of student-centered tutoring in training; however, translating that knowledge to one-on-one tutoring situations seems altogether different than learning about it in a classroom. This study supports the argument that trainees’ notions of student-centered literacy tutoring remain incomplete without the actual experience of tutoring.

If, as Rebecca recommended, trainees are matched with learners as part of the training rather than as a result, then the conflicting constructs of literacy tutoring set forth by *Tutor* and *The Training Manual* might serve as fruitful sites of learning, since trainees could experience the effect that varying constructs of literacy have on the social contexts of literacy tutoring. This recommendation is in support of D’Amico & Schnee who argue that “political bureaucratic, cultural [...] and economic factors that govern access to jobs” play a significant part in adult literacy learning (136). D’Amico and Schnee argue that tutor training should prepare tutors to address the socio-cultural factors that are not reading and writing practices in themselves, but nevertheless influence how those practices are used in a particular social context. Such learning could occur as tutors bring their experience of tutoring into contact with the approaches to lesson planning and teaching strategies set forth by the two training texts. For example, a trainee who plans a lesson, meets with his or her learner, enacts particular tutoring strategies, and then attends a training session on lesson planning would be in a better position to critically examine concepts of lesson planning conducted in the training because that trainee has had the experience of testing those concepts in a real-life environment.

Appendix A

Figure A1. Institutional Structure of Eastern Adult Literacy's Basic Literacy Training



Appendix B

Interview Protocol used to Interview Tutors

Interview Schedule for Tutors

How long have you been a tutor?

1. What brought you to tutoring with [EAL]?
2. What tutoring strategies for tutoring would you recommend to a tutor who is just starting out?
3. What might you caution a beginning tutor against doing?
4. Can you talk a little about your experience with the tutor training program?
5. What, if anything, might you add to or change about the training process?
6. Is there anything specific from your training experience that you feel has made its way into your tutoring?
7. What was your experience like being paired up with a student?
8. Is there anything else you'd like to say about adult literacy tutoring in general?

Appendix C

The Training Manual's Lesson Planning Worksheet

TYPICAL LESSON TEMPLATE

The following outline provides a list of suggested components for a typical lesson. These suggestions should be used after the student/tutor relationship has been established. See Tutor, p.176-77, for additional information about planning for lessons.

1. Read aloud (10 – 15 min. at beginning of lesson)

Book Title: _____

2. Review reading and/or assignments from previous session (10 min.)

3. Student reads aloud to tutor (10 - 15 min.)

Selection: _____

4. Word Study (10 - 15 min.)

Activity: _____

5. Student writes with tutor (15 min.)

Selection: _____

6. Introduce new books or chapters to student; assign work for next session; set goals. (5 – 10 min.)

Book or chapter title for pleasure reading: _____

Assignment: _____

Goals: _____

Appendix D

Tutor's Lesson Planning Worksheet

LESSON PLAN

Student's name:

Lesson #:

Lesson date:

Tutor's name:

Length of lesson:

Lesson goal/objectives

Review homework

	This session	Next session
Review previous lesson		
New work or work in progress		
Activities		
Homework		
Reading for pleasure		
Student comments		
Tutor notes		

APPENDIX • TUTOR, 8TH EDITION

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End Notes

1. Names of organizations and participants in this article are pseudonyms.

2. My data analysis took on two phases. In the first phase of coding, I created nodes to label patterns in the data that looked to be recurring themes, or simply interesting in some way. I coded training evaluations and interview transcripts separately. Dealing with training evaluations first and then interview transcripts allowed me to distinguish patterns in training evaluations from those in the interview transcripts. This separation was made, because I did not want a close look at the tutors' interviews to inadvertently influence how I was reading evaluation comments. I coded evaluation comments under categories that represented the four questions asked of trainees: (1) "what was the most useful information presented?" (2) "what was the least useful information presented?" (3) "are you prepared to tutor?" and (4) "what other questions do you have?" After this general coding procedure, I looked for patterns under each category of question. For interview transcripts, I created nodes for each question I asked in my interview protocol. Then, I focused on one question across multiple informants. As I looked specifically at multiple informants' responses to the same question, I then created nodes to label those patterns as I did for the training evaluations.

In the second phase of coding, I analyzed the nodes that had been created from both evaluation comments and interview transcripts in order to identify similarities and divergences across the range of nodes I had identified. For example, in many cases, several separate nodes were compiled under a common label. That is, in one case I noticed that references to meeting the needs of learners, recognizing small gains, and modeling active learning were all constructing a tutor's role in a one-on-one tutoring situation. "Tutor's Role" then became a parent node under which nodes describing the tutor's role were sorted. Sorting the nodes in this way allowed me to identify what tutors and trainees were talking about most often and how many tutors and trainees were talking about the same things.

In addition to using Nvivo 9 to analyze interview transcripts and training evaluations, I conducted a close reading of the training texts, *Tutor* and *The Training Manual*, in order to draw connections among interviews and evaluations. I was not able to analyze the training texts in Nvivo 9, since I did not have electronic copies, and scanning the pages individually into Nvivo proved to be too time-consuming. In order to supplement my reading of the training texts, I drew on my notes from training observations. These notes helped guide me to sections of the training texts that seemed to be holding more importance for tutors and trainees.

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