

Transforming Lives with Differentiated Literacy Instruction

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Abstract

Reading lays the foundation for educational success because achievement in virtually all subjects hinges on the ability to read well. In spite of its importance, reading achievement is not automatic for every child. This article explores the motivational contexts that inspired struggling readers to build leadership qualities and expertise during individualized instruction in a university reading practicum. Differentiated instruction empowered students to face reading challenges more effectively as they were motivated by innovative reading opportunities and rose to new levels of academic proficiency. This research study highlighted strategies that transformed teaching methodology and gave struggling readers renewed enthusiasm. This differentiated approach demonstrated the transformative impact of instruction tailored to the needs and interests of students.

1. Introduction

Teachers view differentiated instruction as a key for effective teaching, especially when they see the impact of this approach in their classrooms. The value of differentiated instruction has been demonstrated in the research literature (Neville, 2010; Jones, R. E., Yssel, N., & Grant, C., 2012; Parsons, Dodman, & Burrowbridge, 2013). Differentiated instruction is more comprehensive than a list of strategies and pedagogical approaches. It is an educational perspective, which places the individual on center stage (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; Heacox, 2012).

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Differentiated instruction gives teachers opportunities to honor diversity as they highlight the importance of every student (Tatum, 2011). Teachers who differentiate instruction provide keys for access to instruction and help students to walk through doors of opportunity. They constantly explore ways to help each individual reach and exceed expectations as they match the curriculum with the needs and interests of each student (Tomlinson, 1999). Differentiated instruction has become an expectation with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Response to Intervention (RTI) (International Reading Association (IRA), 2010). Thus, differentiation is being woven into the fabric of the educational process. The overarching goal of the entire educational process is to help students maximize their achievement and experience educational success. Differentiation empowers teachers to help students to realize their potential.

Tomlinson (2003) presented tools and strategies for responsive teaching in the differentiated classroom. This approach frees the mind and opens a world of possibilities as teachers identify the specific needs of students and help them to become interested in the information, ideas, and concepts that are important for literacy development. Differentiated instruction helps students to meet the expectations of the standards while connecting the curriculum with the aspects of life they enjoy most.

2. Differentiated Instruction in a University Practicum

This article focuses on seven cases in which teachers discovered keys for differentiated instruction that helped students in elementary or middle grades to become enthused about reading, writing, and learning. Teachers and parents referred these students for specialized instruction because they were struggling with reading. Assessments showed that they were reading one to three grade levels below the classroom expectations. Teachers in this university practicum used creativity and innovation to provide reading and writing opportunities for students that connected their experiences with the activities they enjoyed the most. During the university reading practicum teachers could truly differentiate instruction by responding to students' progress and considering their knowledge, abilities, and potential for achievement (Tomlinson & Germundson, 2007; Heacox, 2012).

3. Review of the Literature

Reading lays the foundation for educational success because achievement in virtually all subjects hinges on the ability to read well. In spite of its importance, reading achievement is not automatic for every child. Each year school systems experiment with new programs to enhance student achievement and test scores, yet research studies continue to confirm that at least one in every five students experiences significant challenges in learning to read (Shaywitz, Escobar, Shaywitz, Fletcher, & Makuch, 1992; Hamilton & Glascoe, 2006; Colmar, 2004).

Programs for individualized instruction in colleges and universities provide opportunities to help students overcome challenges and experience success. These programs offer tangible ways to meet the literacy needs of children while providing in-depth experiences to college students. These college students form positive personal relationships with children while they create and implement literacy activities that increase competencies and the enjoyment of reading. At the same time, tutorial experiences can benefit the tutor-teacher by adding unique dimensions to the classroom teaching process. In other words, skills and experiences from the tutorial setting can positively affect a teacher's classroom instruction and vice-versa.

Research studies over more than four decades have shown the effectiveness of tutoring. The meta-analysis of Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik (1982) confirmed the expectation that one-to-one tutoring was effective from both affective and the cognitive perspectives. Then the meta-analysis of Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, and Moody (2000) identified adult-led one-to-one instruction as the most effective way to enhance academic achievement in the classroom.

When Bloom (1984) saw the success of one-to-one tutoring, he looked for ways to achieve the same effects in classroom teaching. In his seminal study, Bloom demonstrated that one-to-one tutoring enabled students to progress at a level of two standard deviations above peers who received traditional classroom instruction or mastery learning approaches. He coined the phrase "the two-sigma problem" in his quest for a method of classroom instruction as effective as one-to-one tutoring (p. 4). Thus, Bloom used one-to-one instruction as the standard of measure for effective teaching.

Qualitative researchers have provided rich descriptions of the impact of social interaction during tutoring, and they have typically concentrated on eclectic tutorial programs (McDaniel, 2002; Carr, 2003). Research shows that tutoring helps students to experience academic gains and increase self-confidence (Fitzgerald, Morrow, Gambrell, Calfee, Venezky, Woo, & Dromsky, 2002; Allor, Cheek, Smith, & Schorzman, 2006). The study that is the focus of this article explored the impact of tutorial scaffolding and the relationship between tutoring and classroom teaching.

4. The Design and Theoretical Framework of the Study

Many students enthusiastically embark on enjoyable experiences with the books they treasure. Unfortunately, struggling readers face challenges that hinder this enjoyment. Seven teachers embarked on a quest to help struggling readers enjoy literacy experiences during one-to-one tutoring. During these collaborative sessions they used innovative literacy strategies to differentiate instruction and help students to effectively navigate narrative and expository texts. These teachers conducted two hours of intensive literacy instruction each week for one semester. This research study explored the overarching question: What happens when the teacher becomes a tutor and applies the knowledge gained from tutoring in the classroom?

The instructional approach of the seven teachers in this study aligned with five recommendations from Derek, a sixth-grade African American struggling reader (Jenkins, 2009). Derek's five recommendations for maintaining reading success formed the framework for Jenkins' article. It seemed like the seven teachers in the university reading practicum had a conference with Derek before they began their tutorial sessions because their methodology for differentiated instruction aligned so well with his recommendations. The following paragraphs convey the alignment of Derek's five recommendations with the instructional approach of the seven teachers in the tutorial study.

4.1 Teamwork Helps My Dreamwork.

The tutorial sessions revolved around collaborative teamwork. The seven teachers emphasized opportunities for individual exploration (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) while they provided scaffolding, or cognitive assistance, to take students to higher levels of achievement (Vygotsky, 1934/1986.) After collaborative sessions with students, these teachers discussed the best ways to meet students' needs.

Collaboration was enhanced as students exchanged pen pal letters throughout the semester. The students tried to guess the identity of their pen pals, and the mystery was solved during a sharing session and celebration at the end of the tutorial practicum.

4.2 Build on My Past Successes.

Teachers in the university reading practicum used assessments to determine students' strengths and build on those strengths with meaningful literacy strategies. Each of these teachers emphasized the student's role as the builder of new knowledge structures for conceptual understanding (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). From a social constructivist perspective, they encouraged students to progress from the zone of actual development to the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). In order to provide this type of scaffolding, the teachers wrote goals for students in their lesson plans and designed authentic opportunities for writing, reading aloud, and study reading. These collaborative sessions helped students to gain confidence and explore new ways to navigate narrative and expository texts.

4.3 Connect Book Reading to My World.

The seven teachers focused on ways to connect narrative and expository texts with the world of students. This approach coordinated with emphasis on students' interests in the *Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing* compiled by the Joint Task Force on Assessment of the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English (2010). As teachers related the tutorial experience to the needs and interests of students, certain books and materials ignited the spark of enthusiasm.

4.4 Allow Me to Help Select Books, Topics, and Activities.

The seven teachers consistently gave students opportunities to choose books, topics, and activities for their sessions. Derek and the seven teachers knew the importance of giving students a sense of ownership because their views were shaped by Brozo's (2010) innovative literacy strategies and insights (Brozo & Simpson, 2003).

4.5 Provide Me with a Variety of Texts on a Single Topic.

Teachers found that a combination of narrative texts, expository texts, and Internet sources motivated students during their tutorial sessions. For instance, Elaine discovered that Megan, her tutee, was interested in solving mysteries and training dogs. Then she found a detective book from the series of *Wishbone Mysteries* that combined those interests. She was pleased that Megan found this book engaging. Elaine enhanced their tutorial sessions with information from the Internet and an expository text with secret codes.

5. Methodology

The seven teachers in this university practicum used differentiated instruction in the collaborative tutorial sessions to help students navigate narrative and expository texts with more effective comprehension. In this article the terms “individualized instruction” and “tutoring” will be used interchangeably in reference to the experiences of the teachers in the university reading practicum. Rather than using a set program, the seven teachers differentiated instruction with opportunities for reading and writing for authentic purposes in multiple contexts.

The seven teachers in this study had a range of teaching experiences before they tutored students in a university reading practicum. One participant had just completed a student teaching experience, and the other participants had extensive teaching experience. The teachers chose pseudonyms for themselves and their tutees. This qualitative study (Hatch, 2002; Wolcott, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) explored the nuanced and transactional relationship between the teachers’ tutorial sessions and classroom-based teaching. Lesson plans and reflective notes provided triangulation and verification of information that was shared in a conversational style during interviews and focus group discussions. During this research study from a sociocultural perspective, the teachers described the research-based literacy strategies and the books they used with students.

5.1 Data Analysis

Highlights of the tutorial experience and the impact of tutoring on teaching were evident when the interviews and the focus group discussions were transcribed, and the typological model was used for data analysis (Hatch, 2002; Wolcott, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Typological analysis was used to divide the data into categories that were relevant to the study. Common themes emerged during extensive data analysis. Following the procedure outlined by the typological model, specific categories were initially identified, which encompassed the relevant data. As themes emerged, color-coding with *Microsoft Word* categorized the data. Next, emerging patterns were analyzed. The entire data set was checked for internal consistency by searching for any contradictory examples. In the final steps of analysis, themes that emerged from analysis were used as the basis for categorically writing brief summary statements and collecting significant quotes from the interviews to explore relationships in the findings.

5.2 Interviews and Focus Groups

The typological approach, which is particularly appropriate for interview studies, revealed relationships and patterns in the research data. Throughout the process of examining the data from interviews and focus groups, the research questions were typologies, and questions from protocols indicated subcategories within the typologies. Extensive analysis, including ongoing data analysis after each interview and focus group, provided insight into the perspectives of the teachers.

6. The Six Cs – Keys for Differentiated Instruction

During interviews and focus groups the seven teachers described highlights from their university reading practicum. These highlights coordinated with motivating contexts that have been described and extensively researched (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). For example, Turner and Paris (1995) described these motivating contexts in terms of six Cs: (1) choice, (2) challenge, (3) control, (4) collaboration, (5) constructing meaning, and (6) consequences. The 512 pages of transcription from interviews and focus groups during this study clearly showed alignment with these six motivational contexts. Quotes from the seven teachers showed how the six Cs served as keys to facilitate differentiated instruction, which increased students' reading comprehension, writing fluency, and academic proficiency. When teachers described highlights from their individualized instruction in the university reading practicum, they also explained the ways they applied ideas from the tutorial process in their classrooms.

6.1 Choice – Rebekah’s Experiences

Many of the teachers’ comments aligned with the six Cs of motivation. For instance, Rebekah emphasized the importance of *choice*. Rebekah is a second grade teacher and a reading coach who tutored Amanda during the reading practicum. She has taught fifth grade and first grade during her three years of teaching. As a reading coach, she conducts biweekly sessions to share reading strategies with the teachers in her school. When I asked Rebekah to describe Amanda, a sixth grader, she said, “Amanda was very hesitant at first about reading and writing in general, but once she opened up, she had a real bubbly personality.”

As Rebekah tutored Amanda, she searched for just the right book, and she noted, “My biggest concern was her lack of confidence in her ability to read.” After Rebekah gave Amanda many choices with minimal results, she discovered that Amanda liked *Little House on the Prairie* (Wilder, 2008). This made her think that Amanda might like *Sarah Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 2004). Rebekah was pleased when Amanda really enjoyed this book. She gave her the sequel during the celebration at the end of the tutorial experience, and Rebekah was pleased when Amanda was excited about reading it. After her tutorial experience, Rebekah used browsing boxes in her classroom to give her students high-interest book choices.

6.2 Challenge – Elaine’s Experiences

Elaine is a special education teacher who tutored Megan in the university reading practicum. Elaine noted that Megan “was nine years old and in the fourth grade,” and she described Megan’s challenges with reading and spelling. During their first session, Elaine discovered that Megan liked mysteries and said, “I asked her about *Nancy Drew* mysteries....She said she had seen them, but she didn’t really like to read those because they were too difficult.”

Then Elaine found a book from the *Wishbone* series that combined Megan’s interest in mysteries with her interest in training dogs. Elaine noted that when Megan read about the dog detective named *Wishbone*, “She would begin to read with expression and stop to laugh about the jokes or the humor in the book.” Then Elaine “knew she was really enjoying that book and understanding it.” Elaine realized that Megan “needed to understand the strategies of working through words.” Elaine said, “Since she didn’t know those strategies, it increased her frustration level, and it seemed pretty low when we first started.”

Since Megan needed to learn to be a word detective and solve her own cases, Elaine and Megan created a booklet called *Wishbone Book of Spelling Strategies*, which served as a reference tool like the charts of word families Elaine used in her classroom. Throughout this spelling book, Megan used pictures and word analogies to correspond with Wishbone's investigations. Elaine said, "If she was stuck on a word, she would say, 'Well, I think this one is like that one.' So she used that prior knowledge to help solve the mystery." As they read and discussed this book, Elaine guided Megan to the next level of achievement with effective scaffolding.

Elaine was careful to give Megan and the students in her special education classroom opportunities to explore instructional-level books and materials. Then she sequentially guided them to the next level of achievement. Elaine discussed the ways she used running records, word families, think-aloud strategies, and response journals to provide the right amount of *challenge* to inspire Megan and the students in her classroom.

Elaine was delighted when Megan chose to read a book about Nancy Drew that seemed beyond her reach at the beginning of the tutorial practicum. Elaine remarked, "By the end of our sessions, I felt really excited when she came in one night and said she had checked out that *Nancy Drew* mystery for her library book. She said she was already on chapter nine." Elaine said, "At the beginning she was afraid of that book, and by the end she was plowing right through it, happily enjoying it."

6.3 Control – Susan's Experiences

Susan's comments also connected highlights of her tutorial experience with the six Cs. Susan and the other teachers in the study emphasized ownership to help students exercise *control* over the reading process. Susan is a first grade teacher who tutored Matt during the university reading practicum. During her seven years of teaching, Susan has taught special education and second grade. When she described Matt, a fourth grade student, she noted, "Matt really loved being the center of attention, and he really loved reading aloud to me. He viewed it as a performance." Susan remarked, "Matt was also highly energetic though he was very easily distracted and also hyperactive to the point where I would have to redirect his attention and calm him and get him back on task."

Susan concentrated on self-monitoring strategies and metacognition to help Matt and the students in her classroom take responsibility for their learning and determine whether they understood what they read. Susan said, "I would say the biggest thing is that they sense enjoyment. When they are in control, they can enjoy that book." Susan experienced initial concern when she realized that Matt was not taking control of his learning.

In a "moment of inspiration" she decided to use the metaphor of a tool belt to promote Matt's ownership of reading skills and strategies. She felt that reflection was a catalyst for this moment of inspiration. During their collaborative session, she said, "Okay, let's get out our reading tool belt." As Susan described the metaphor, she said, "We talked about the tools that you would typically see on a tool belt, and I associated those tools with the different reading strategies." Susan reflected, "I felt like that was like a light bulb moment for him because even though I didn't have a tangible tool belt, we could imagine putting on our tool belt." This visualization strategy helped Matt to gain new understanding of tools for comprehension.

After Susan saw Matt's enthusiasm for the tool belt and the way it empowered him to internalize the learning process, she used a tool belt as a metaphor to explain the components of comprehension in her first grade classroom. This helped her students to take ownership of the reading process as they connected the components of a traditional tool belt with the components of reading comprehension.

Susan was pleased when Matt's comprehension improved. Matt and his parents were enthused about the book that Matt and Susan created during their collaborative sessions. After they read and discussed *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1999), Matt dictated a story about baseball. Susan typed Matt's text after each session, and he chose illustrations from magazines to coordinate with the text. Susan facilitated this process so Matt could produce a professional looking book while he concentrated on ideas for the story, applying strategies for vocabulary development and word analysis in context.

6.4 Collaboration – Rosalind's Collaboration with Mary

Rosalind and Mary realized the value of *collaboration* when they gave Tyler and Cindy opportunities to read scripts on their instructional level in a small reader's theater performance.

Rosalind is a special education teacher in an elementary school, and she has been a librarian. When I asked Rosalind to describe her tutorial experience with Tyler, she shared, "Tyler was very smart, mainly street smart. There needed to be a connection. He needed to connect reading with his street smartness." She said, "He was very interesting and very challenging. Besides that, he was a very active child."

As Rosalind learned about Tyler's background and interests, she used a stage with action figures to help him to "enter his own world" and "build stories" about his interests. This prepared him for reader's theater with Cindy. During reader's theater, Tyler enjoyed assuming a leadership role as they read books on an instructional level. Rosalind and Mary saw the value of collaboration when Tyler and Cindy gained new confidence as they read dialogue during in this reader's theater performance.

Susan, Elaine, and many teachers mentioned the value of authentic, purposeful collaboration through pen pal letters. They noted their students' enjoyment when they also used pen pal letters in the classroom. Elaine mentioned that she gave her students shared reading opportunities "to spark discussions," and they recommended books to each other. Each of the teachers in this study used a variety of dramatic activities, games, peer tutoring, and cross-age tutoring to continue the emphasis on collaboration in their own classrooms.

6.5 Constructing Meaning – Mary's Experiences

The seven teachers described many literacy strategies for constructing meaning during tutorial collaboration. For instance, Mary used questioning strategies and Reading Recovery methods when she tutored Cindy. Mary encouraged her to "read the room" and scaffolded Cindy's vocabulary development. Each time Cindy mastered a new word, she had the opportunity to add that word to the alphabet book she was creating during their sessions. Then she drew a coordinating picture beside each word.

Mary had extensive training as a Reading Recovery teacher in an urban magnet school, and she was a reading coach for teachers during summer school. She also had classroom teaching experience. Before she became a classroom teacher, she found creative ways to encourage disturbed adolescents during the four years she worked in a psychiatric residential facility.

Mary noted that Cindy “was going into the second grade, and mother had pulled her out of the public school. She didn’t want to hold her back as the teacher suggested.” Mary noticed that Cindy “was so not confident and so lost,” and she wondered, “What would have happened if they had intervened a couple of years ago, and she didn’t have to go through the shame and embarrassment for those extra years?” Mary said, “She really thought she was dumb and couldn’t read....She often said, ‘You know I can’t read. You know I can’t read. I can’t read. I told you that, right?’ So that was really engrained in her that she could not read.”

In spite of Mary’s initial concerns about Cindy’s lack of confidence and extremely limited reading vocabulary, she was ultimately successful in meeting her needs. When I asked Mary what she said to help Cindy realize her potential in reading, she noted, “I think I really just presented it as kind of a puzzle and the little tricks you can learn and try to group things into similar categories....That’s the way the brain works.” Mary used “a lot of praise, a lot of trying to figure out what she was interested in and . . . just encouraging her.”

Mary drew on her Reading Recovery training as she explained, “You validate the response, and then you sort of accelerate their learning from there. But usually there is something right in any response.” While they constructed meaning collaboratively, Mary was pleased with Cindy’s creative writing as she developed contextual understanding of letters and words.

6.6 Consequences – Catherine and Angela Enjoyed the Impact of Their Instruction

Catherine is a fourth grade teacher who tutored Cassie. She was a special education teacher when she participated in the university reading practicum. After the practicum, she shared her knowledge of reading strategies during an in-service program in her school. When Catherine described her tutee, she stated, “Cassie was thirteen years old and in junior high school. She was several grade levels behind in reading.” Cassie experienced positive consequences as Catherine designed games and activities that coordinated with her interests and helped her to enjoy purposeful reading.

During sessions in the university reading practicum Angela, an experienced kindergarten teacher, provided scaffolding to help Philip experience growth and positive consequences.

Angela said scaffolding “helps the tutor build bridges toward the next level of independence in the learning process.” Angela described Philip as a sixth grade student who “was about three years below grade level in reading and had been through some discouraging experiences at school....His ability far exceeded his confidence in his ability.” Angela noted, “Philip could do more than he knew he could do. He had good comprehension skills. He could comprehend things that he could hardly decode at all.”

As Angela used pictures of motorcycles and appealing books to match Philip’s interests, he dictated language experience stories, and his confidence in his ability to read increased. He enjoyed creating and reading his own texts about motorcycles, just as students in Angela’s kindergarten class had enjoyed creating their own texts. Angela noted with a smile that Philip really did not want to leave when it was time to end their final tutorial session.

Angela’s scaffolding helped Philip “raise his level of inclusiveness of what he was willing to try,” and he began to see positive consequences from his effort. Angela said there was a “surprising difference” in his reading at the end of their tutorial sessions, and she “really thought he made more than a semester’s progress.” She said, “I think his success probably had a lot to do with the difference in what you can do with one child at a time rather than with a whole classroom with abilities all over the continuum.” Angela asserted that her tutorial experience enhanced her ability to meet the needs of each student in her classroom. She noted, “Like looking at one flower very closely helps you see the bouquet and not just a blur of color, it helped to illuminate the single child.”

7. The Transformative Impact of the University Reading Practicum

The seven teachers in this study found that effective literacy strategies had a transformative impact on the lives of students. They were surprised by the extensive impact of their individualized instruction. At the end of the university reading practicum, the teachers noted increased confidence, competence, and engagement in reading. The highlights of their tutorial sessions and classroom experiences showed that they all enjoyed the opportunity to shine the spotlight on a student’s strengths “to illuminate the single child.”

7.1 Cycles of Learning

Cullinan (1993) emphasized the power using books to meet and expand students' interests when she stated, "We can breathe the essence of literature into our readers' lives and make readers for life" (p. 6). The teachers in this study described cycles of learning in which students gradually gained control, or ownership, of the learning process. As a catalyst for this cycle, teachers provided students with high-interest, appropriate reading choices. Then students continued to read, they enjoyed reading more, and cueing systems became intrinsic. Figure 1 illustrates the cycles of learning in which students became successful, independent readers who gained ownership of the learning process.

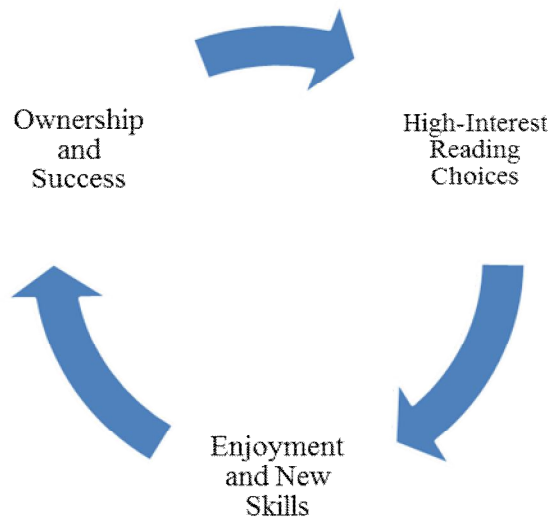


Figure 1: Ownership of the Learning Process

Rebekah concentrated on literacy awareness and experimented with various narrative and expository texts until she "found the book that lit that spark of enthusiasm." Susan saw a similar difference when she captured Matt's attention with the metaphor of a tool belt and helped him to take ownership of the reading process. Catherine used games and strategies to help Cassie develop a strategic stance and enthusiasm for reading. All seven teachers noted reciprocal cycles in their classroom instruction, demonstrating that tutoring impacted their classroom teaching.

7.2 Reflecting on the Experience

Analysis of transcripts from interviews and focus groups showed that teachers had social constructivist perspectives and used social constructivist strategies. They were surprised to see the extensive impact of the university reading practicum. Figure 2 illustrates the cycle in which their strategic tutoring led to positive changes in their tutees and transformed their teaching.

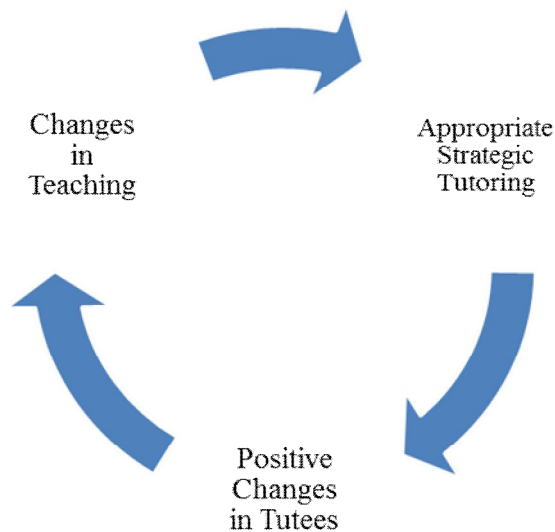


Figure 2: The Impact of Tutoring on Teaching

Since Cindy could only write nine words from memory during her first session with Mary, they read appealing books on Cindy's instructional level and created an alphabet book as Cindy mastered new words. Cindy and Tyler both gained fluency by reading instructional level books during reader's theater. This opportunity to read with fluency for an authentic purpose helped them to relax and enjoy reading as a social process. This gave them a new view of reading.

Susan noted that she changed her philosophy of teaching as a result of the reading practicum and her other university reading courses. During her teaching career, she initially "had a very quiet classroom." After she enjoyed class discussions and experienced the impact of her sessions and discussions with Matt, she developed an interactive, language-based classroom.

Catherine said, "Before the tutorial experience I was reluctant to do anything that I perceived to be fun, because I felt like it was a waste of time." During the university reading practicum, Catherine realized that sessions needed to be enjoyable for Cassie to stay engaged in learning. After she saw how much Cassie learned interactively, she started "staying up late at night to develop games and activities" for her class.

7.3 New Horizons

When the seven teachers saw the effectiveness of literacy strategies with their tutees, they continued to use these reading strategies in their classrooms and experienced a reciprocal relationship between the two processes. Rosalind summarized their perspectives when she said, "What I have learned from teaching applied to tutoring, and what I gained from tutoring definitely has helped me with my teaching....Oh yes, they go hand in hand."

The university reading practicum enhanced teachers' ability to individualize learning, guide peer tutoring, and create cross-age tutorial programs. For instance, Rebekah used a buddy-study program in her classroom to help her students analyze their spelling words and apply what they learned during writing workshop. This aligned with the instructional sessions in which Rebekah used "word fractions" for syllabication, along with activities to reinforce Amanda's spelling and vocabulary development. Rebekah's buddy-study program helped students in her classroom to take responsibility for their own learning as they generated ways to remember how words work. The experiences of the seven teachers aligned with research that demonstrates the benefits of peer tutoring and cross-age tutoring in various contexts (Topping 2001; Hsu, 2009).

8. Conclusion

The university reading practicum was transformative because the students and teachers experienced enjoyment that leads to an "optimal experience" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). When students experienced success during their tutorial sessions, they realized that they could actually meet expectations and experience success in the classroom. The seven teachers used differentiated instruction to provide keys for access to instruction that will help these students to walk through many doors of opportunity.

The teachers helped these students to more effectively navigate both narrative and expository texts as they transferred their learning to new contexts and experienced a gradual release of responsibility. The challenges they faced are a microcosm of the typical challenges teachers face as they work with struggling readers. These seven teachers found creative ways to differentiate instruction, emphasize interests, and instill motivation as they opened a world of reading to their students.

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