SUBJECT AREA TUTOR TRAINING

Robin Melton
The University Of Texas at Arlington
Arlington, Texas

Subject Area Tutor Training (SATT) led by tutor facilitators offers stimulating learning opportunities for the tutors and tutor coordinators alike. Tutors have the opportunity to observe one or more tutors "in action" and to discuss real-life conceptual and affective problems pertaining to their subject area disciplines. Both the tutor facilitator and tutor audience experience boosts to their self-esteem from utilizing tutors as tutor trainers. In addition, there are several benefits for tutorial program coordinators such as enhancing support for and evaluation of current tutors and better interview questions for prospective tutors. Another benefit for program coordinators is that they do not have to belabor the relevance of subject area training to the tutors.

SATT is conducted as part of Level II College Reading and Learning Association Tutor Certification, which is offered over the course of two semesters. During the first semester of training, referred to as SATT, Part I, one or two tutor facilitators are selected from each of seven areas: Physics/Engineering, Computer Science, Chemistry, Mathematics, English/History/Political Science, Foreign Languages, and Business. Typically, tutors facilitators have distinguished themselves by tutoring a great number of hours and/or by receiving superior student evaluations. The first meeting with the tutor facilitators emphasizes the objectives of SATT, Part I, which are: (1) to give each subject area group of tutors an opportunity to examine and discuss problems unique to their area in a small group setting and (2) to give tutors an opportunity to learn techniques from a subject area facilitator as well as from each other.

Once the objectives are explained, examples of topics and methods incorporated into previous successful SATT training sessions are provided and discussed. When conducting subject area training for the first time, coordinators may want to mention areas of concern (a new textbook) or areas of uniqueness to a given subject area (sketching diagrams for physics) that have been gleaned from personal observation and tutor evaluations. Such observations may stimulate the tutor facilitators to think about potential topics for the upcoming training.

After sufficient enthusiasm is generated for the project, each tutor facilitator is given the following list of questions:

SPRINGBOARD FOR SUBJECT AREA TUTORING

Self-Analysis:

What tutoring tasks do I do particularly well?

How have I grown from the tutoring experience?

What subject area information have I learned?

What have I learned about people?

Do I look at people and their problems differently?

What changes have I made in my tutoring since I first started tutoring?

Tutee Analysis:

Describe the "typical" student.

How do students usually approach the subject area?

When do students generally seek your help?

Can you generalize about a level of understanding for the majority of tutees?

Do students like the subject?

How do you motivate students?

<u>Task Analysis:</u>

What methods of instruction and/or methods of testing are commonly used in the subject area?

What concepts are necessary for course mastery?

Which concepts are typically stumbling blocks for students?

How do you tutor those concepts?

How do you make sure the students understand them?

What topics are easiest to explain? Hardest to explain? Why?

Can you model aloud an effective thinking process to solve or think through a problem in the subject area?

What study habits are desirable in this subject area?

Once each tutor-facilitator has answered these questions, the tutor meets with the appropriate staff member to raise additional questions, to talk about the tutor's ideas for group activities, and to schedule a third meeting to fine-tune training session plans.

Inherent in the above activities are a number of challenges to the tutor facilitators. The first challenge lies in attempting to organize and articulate information about tutoring methods, which may have become almost as automatic as riding a bicycle; however, the vocabulary and verbalization are difficult. Other challenges include speaking before a group larger than four and presenting, not lecturing, before one's peers. Typically, the tutors' greatest fears are running out of information before the time for the session has ended and lack of preparation.

Although many of the tutor facilitators are apprehensive at first, they often lead very interactive, involved training sessions once they gain a sense of confidence. Examples of

SATT, Part I sessions include a Chemistry session led by a pre-medical chemistry student tutor. He divided his group of tutors into two groups to work and demonstrate chemistry problems and to answer questions relating to chemistry students. The Computer Science Engineering (CSE) tutor facilitator led a discussion on how to address students' programming concerns without actually doing the work for them. The CSE group then analyzed and discussed two case studies. The objectives for the CSE and Chemistry training were primarily to explore current practices and advance superior methods. The objective for the English training was clearly to inform. The English tutor facilitator presented information about a standardized test given to students. Participants took a quiz to assess prior knowledge about the test. The facilitator then gave the attendees an overview of the test rules as well as a sense of student difficulties.

Subject Area Tutor Training, Part II, involves all tutors at deeper participation levels. As in SATT, Part I, tutor facilitators are chosen. However, their task is to come up with a list of potential problems in their given disciplines which would be suitable for tutors to present to each participant. During a general meeting which all tutors attend, the tutor facilitators meet in small groups with fellow subject area tutors to divide up the problem list and to explain the desired outcomes for the upcoming demonstration session. The tutor facilitators are then responsible for calling on group members to help them with the problems and to remind them of the demonstration session, which is typically one to three weeks after the general meeting. While the tutor coordinators attend the sessions, the tutor facilitators are expected to lead the meeting. This can be a challenging area for tutor facilitators and training regarding timing, tact, and brief commentary are critical to the success of the training.

Some of the highlights of SATT, Part II, included a Foreign Languages Training Session in which each tutor presented a different difficult grammar concept. Most tutors gave more information to the audience than they would to their students in order to make sure all of the tutors had strong background knowledge. The tutors readily pointed out how much information the students needed for their classes. During the Business training session, tutors presented problems encountered in accounting, statistics, and COBOL. When the first accounting tutor presented debits and credits, a lively discussion ensued in which each tutor stated his ideas about the BEST ways to explain these concepts; this was contagious and carried over into the rest of the meeting.

Tutors' enthusiasm about their subject areas and tutoring methods is wonderful to experience. Hopefully, tutors are as energized by working with their peers as tutors coordinators are in attending conferences. This enthusiasm can be transferred to the students served.