

NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION
TE HUNGA RANGAHAU MATAURANGA O AOTEAROA

Rae Munro Award 2008

Masters Thesis Title: Strategies and Characteristics of Effective One to One Literacy Tutors

The recipient of the 2008 Rae Munro award for an excellent Masters-level thesis is Tracey Bennett.

Tracey Bennett completed her BTch (Hons) degree from the University of Waikato in October 2002. At the time she had two sons, a newborn and 18 month old, so she decided to delay her goal of becoming a registered teacher. Tracey, however, wanted to utilise her new teaching skills so in February 2003 she joined the Hamilton Children's Reading Centre tutoring team, tutoring three afternoons a week. The Reading Centre, a collaborative effort between the University of Waikato and the community, provides specialist diagnosis and tuition for children experiencing reading difficulties. In July 2004 Tracey agreed to manage the day-to-day running of the Reading Centre.

During her time as manager Tracey developed a particular interest in the characteristics and strategies of effective reading tutors which became the focus on her MEd thesis research. Researchers in New Zealand have investigated the effectiveness of one-to-one tutoring programmes; however there are very few studies on tutor effectiveness especially in the context of New Zealand education. Tracey's research explored the strategies that effective one-to-one tutors of literacy used as well as the observed and perceived characteristics distinctive to effective one-to-one literacy tutors.

Three effective tutors were observed at the Reading Centre during their regular tutoring with two of their tutees over a period of four weeks. To determine the strategies used and the characteristics distinctive to the three tutors, tutoring sessions were audiotape recorded, and observational notes were recorded. The time spent engaged in various teaching activities was recorded and tutors were required to comment on the successes and challenges of the session in a journal entry after each tutoring session. Individual and group interviews with the tutors were conducted to gain further insight into observational data and journal entries.

Numerous strategies were identified during observations of the three effective tutors. The majority of each one-to-one tutoring session focused on the teaching of direct letter-sound relationships, listening to tutees read, and phonemic awareness activities. Open questions were asked more frequently than closed questions. Tutees were praised frequently. Scaffolding was observed regularly throughout tutoring sessions. The effective tutors used Questioning as their most frequent type of help and used Demonstrating least frequently. High levels of engaged teaching were maintained throughout tutoring sessions. A higher percentage of words were spoken by the effective tutors than the tutees. Written planning did not appear to play a role in the effectiveness of the tutor. Role reversal was a strategy used frequently by one of the effective tutors. Effective tutors used a variety of ways to motivate tutees to read, complete homework, and remain on task.

Many characteristics of effective tutors were revealed during observations and journal entries. The ability to establish positive, caring relationships appeared to play a major role in the tutees' learning and confidence. The tutors believed being responsive to tutees' emotional needs was the most important characteristic of an effective tutor. The tutors ensured that the sessions were positive and laughter was frequently observed. Good communication was maintained with parents and tutees. The effective tutors were flexible during tutoring sessions, yet consistent with routines. The three effective tutors were knowledgeable and experienced in working with children experiencing reading difficulties. They believed effective tutors are aware of their tutees' areas of greatest need, understand their tutee, and maximise all teaching opportunities.

Tracey submitted her MEd thesis for examination in June 2007, five months after the birth of her third son. The thesis was a particularly well constructed and well written document, demonstrating considerable skill in academic writing. Tracey graduated in October 2007 with first class honours.

