

The Augustine Project

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Mission Statement

The mission of the Augustine Project is to improve the reading ability and thereby the academic achievement of low-income children who struggle with literacy skills. The Project trains and supports volunteer tutors who provide these students free, one-on-one, long-term, Orton-Gillingham instruction in reading, writing and spelling.

Orton-Gillingham is a structured, multisensory, phonetic teaching approach that has been proven to work with those who have language-related learning difficulties. Lessons use Wilson materials and include the five essential components of research-based reading instruction as defined by the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension.

The Need

- 17-22% of school-aged children have reading problems; among low income families the percentage is likely higher
- Children do not outgrow poor reading: 74% of poor readers in 3rd grade are still poor readers in 9th grade
- The National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2004 reported that 38% of fourth graders are functionally illiterate; in the inner cities the number rose to 50%; among African-American students the fraction was two-thirds
- 57% of children with learning disabilities leave school without a diploma
- 85% of all juvenile offenders have a reading difficulty and prison populations include a large percentage of non-readers
- For 90% of poor readers, early, intensive intervention can increase reading ability to an age-appropriate, average skill level

Tutor Training

Our tutors receive 60 hours of training before they are assigned an Augustine child. The two-week training class includes a practicum during which the trainee evaluates a student, and then teaches five consecutive Orton-Gillingham lessons (using Wilson materials) under the supervision of a master tutor. The course is taught by a team of experienced trainers who present such topics as the definition and characteristics of dyslexia, the essential components of reading instruction, the history and principals of Orton-Gillingham, phonological awareness, the scope and sequence of Orton-Gillingham

teaching via Wilson Reading System materials (including sounds, syllable types, spelling rules and semantics), screening instruments and procedures, sight words, cursive handwriting, phonics games and activities, language evaluation summaries and advocacy.

An Augustine Tutor's Responsibilities

After the training course, tutors sign a contract agreeing to provide an Augustine student 60 *pro bono* lessons. Tutoring usually takes place twice a week at the child's school during the school day. Each lesson lasts about 45 minutes. Tutors may borrow phonetically controlled readers, workbooks and reference materials from the Augustine library. The Project provides tutors with ongoing support and opportunities to share lesson-planning ideas. The Project director observes each trainee twice a year. Tutors administer pre- and post-testing in phonological awareness, word attack, rapid naming, fluency, comprehension and spelling. Test results are submitted to the director and tabulated for use in grant applications and reports.

Our Students

Teachers and curriculum coordinators refer their students to the program. We work with students in grades two through five who struggle with reading or written language. We hope to expand the Project to include middle school and high school students. We do not require that a student meet North Carolina's 15 point ability/achievement discrepancy to be assigned a tutor.

How is Augustine Different from Other Literacy Programs such as the Corporate Volunteers Program (Wings) and Read to Me?

There are many pieces to the reading puzzle. The *Read to Me* program encourages families to read together, stressing research that shows children who are read to and talked to are more likely to read well.

Primarily, the *Corporate Volunteers Program* targets kindergarten students to improve general readiness skills and cognitive development. This, too, is a proven piece of the reading puzzle.

Yet, despite wonderful programs such as *Read to Me* and the *Corporate Volunteers Program*, there are still many children that struggle with literacy skills because they have language-related learning difficulties. They may be dyslexic, have a learning disability, or simply lack a key skill such as phonemic or phonetic awareness. Nationally, 38% of fourth graders cannot read at a basic level, and for low-income, urban students, this number reaches 70%.

Rather than competing with existing programs such as *Read to Me* and the *Corporate Volunteers Program*, the Augustine Project serves children who are moving through the system still unable to read. For many of these children with language difficulties, it will take this kind of one-on-one, twice-weekly intervention to make progress.

This kind of intervention also requires a length and level of tutor training higher than is needed for most reading volunteers. Where the *Corporate Volunteers Program* can train

volunteers in 1-2 hours, Augustine tutors receive a minimum of 60 hours of training, including both classroom and practice sessions. Due to the length of training, tutors are asked to give a minimum of 60 lessons before leaving the program.

What is similar in all these programs is a focus of following the important research and recommendations of the National Reading Panel. This panel was charged in 1997 by Congress to determine what constitutes key skills and methods central to reading achievement.

Honors

In recognition of its work on behalf of low-income children, the Augustine Project was honored by the Learning Disabilities Association of North Carolina as recipient of its statewide Literacy Award for the year 2000. In 2001, Chapel Hill's Augustine Project Director was asked to join the Board of Directors of the North Carolina Branch of the International Dyslexia Association. Debbie McCarthy (Chapel Hill) and Becky Clingman (Winston-Salem) were invited to present at several IDA conferences.

Funding

The Augustine Project is funded by individuals, St Paul's Episcopal Church and grants. To date, grants have been received from The Winston-Salem Foundation and St. Paul's Outreach Funding. The Project continues to seek support from individuals and groups who support the important work of this Project in the community.

The Future

The demand for Augustine tutors far outweighs the supply. The knowledge and nurture an Augustine tutor provides can mean the difference between prison and productivity for an at-risk child. This service to "the least of these" transforms the lives of student and tutor alike.

Future Training Dates

The next scheduled trainings will be September 10-21 and October 15-26, 2007. Only twelve to fifteen trainees will be accepted for each session. Registrations will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. The cost (\$200) covers only materials and a small registration fee. The actual cost of this training is covered by the Project. Scholarships are available.

Contact Information

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