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## Tutors: The Tutor-Learner Relationship

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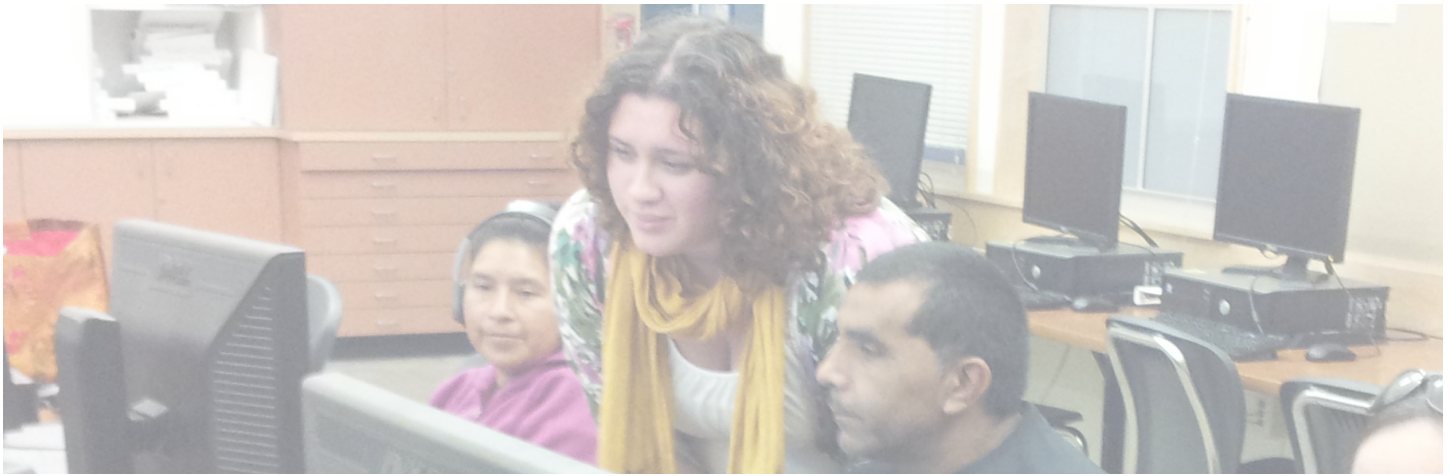


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## The Tutor/Learner Relationship

### Digital Literacy Acquisition in Brief: *What Research Tells Us about Tutors*

#### Overview

These findings are from an Institute of Museum and Library Services funded research project that interviewed more than 100 participants within a multi-state Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) Sustainable Broadband Adoption (SBA) project. The BTOP project included six lead partners who developed local networks of community organizations to provide adults with an opportunity to learn to use computers and the Internet.

While these networks created a variety of implementation strategies and ways to serve learners' needs, they shared these key features:



- *curriculum on the Learner Web, an online platform designed specifically for adult learners, which included digital literacy material in English and Spanish*
- *in-person tutor support*
- *the opportunity to work at their own pace and identify their own goals*



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# The Tutor/Learner Relationship

## Key Discoveries

- Learners and tutors reported that the most compelling feature of the digital literacy acquisition process was the relationship forged between learners and the tutors.
- Learners developed confidence and engagement in learning as a result of the encouragement and instruction that tutors provided. Tutors helped learners explore, which showed them how the skills they were learning were relevant. They differentiated learning opportunities, and personalized the experience of learning basic computing skills.
- Nearly all participants indicated that the most important quality for a tutor to possess is patience.
- Tutors were able to respond to the different ages and experiences of learners and what this meant in respect to what the learners' past experiences as well as the larger contexts of the learners' needs (such as GED, employment). By responding to learners' expressed needs and informally assessing their capabilities and interests, tutors were able to best help learners.

## Voices from the Field: Lived Experiences

Guadalupe's primary language was Spanish, and James was her tutor. The two formed a strong learner/tutor relationship. This close relationship blossomed because James tutored Guadalupe one-on-one (an arrangement preferred by many seniors). Once Guadalupe gained enough computer skills, James advised her on purchasing her own computer. They even discovered they had a shared personal connection--Guadalupe's adult son living in another state was a friend of James. Guadalupe expressed that she had learned a lot from James:

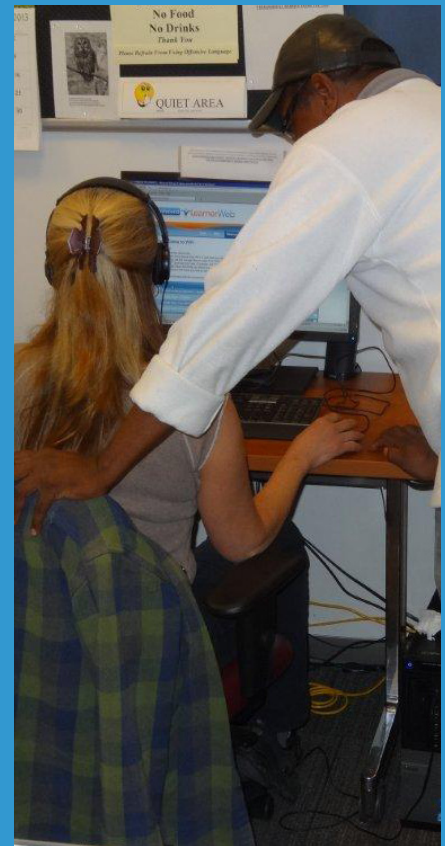
*"It's about patience, about being good to others... Alone I couldn't have done it. Absolutely I couldn't have done it. I couldn't even start the machine. But here you can work along and learn things, and when you're told, hey that's the right way, then you kind of get into the groove. And when you're stuck they come [and say] this is what you do. Oh no. I wouldn't do it without a tutor."*

James explained that forming a positive, supportive relationship with learners required being able to read what each person needed. He said:

*"Each person is different so you have to offer support differently. Like the one lady, I said, 'Oh right! Great!' And someone else might not like that. I'll just say, good job. You know, that's good for them. Or I'll say, see, you got it. Keep it up. It just depends on the person. You've got to read the person and see how to deal with them."*

## On the Ground

Volunteer coordinators can maximize tutor impact by emphasizing the importance of patience. By modeling the problem solving process, learners gain greater independence. Tutors should know that it's ok if they aren't computer experts; it is more important to engage learners in the process of figuring out how new things, such as online applications or tools, work. Tutors should be ready with resources and activities that engage a variety of learners. This can be as simple as using a web-based map to show people how to get directions to a place that is important to them or to see a satellite picture of their hometown.



# The Tutor/Learner Relationship

## What Do These Findings Mean For Your Work?

The quality of tutoring services paved the way to learner success. Quality included non-negotiable components such as patience, empathy, support, dedication, and commitment.

~ Program Administrator, Adult Learning Services



## Acknowledgements & Further Information

These research efforts were informed and supported by a National Advisory Committee and a Research Applications Committee made up of professionals who support adult learners.

More information about the project, research findings, publications, and project data can be found in PDX Scholar at:  
[http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/digital\\_literacy\\_acquisition/](http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/digital_literacy_acquisition/)

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## Digital Literacy Acquisition in Brief: What Research Tells Us about...

### Language Learners

- Tutors' Perspectives
- The Role of Online Materials
- The Learner/Tutor Relationship
- Learners' Perspectives

### Program Design

- Tutor-facilitated Digital Literacy Acquisition
- The Learner Path
- Volunteering in a Digital Literacy Program
- Learning Digital Skills in a Time-limited Program
- Learning Digital Skills in a Corrections Setting

### Tutors

- Personal Qualities of Tutors
- Tutoring Strategies and Organizing Learning
- The Tutor/Learner Relationship

### Learners

- Development of Self-confidence
- Measuring Success
- Impact
- Learners Who Become Tutors
- Self-paced Learning