

Tutoring Experiences

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Learning to understand another culture by working one-on-one with someone was the reason I got hooked on tutoring. I've worked with six students during a 15 year period. Some students I had for as long as four years and some for less time. All proved to be exciting adventures!

Upon completing several hours of painless training through the Brown County Literacy Council, I was ready to go.

My first student, as a new teacher, was Ba. He was a political refugee from Vietnam, who had been responsible for transporting people fleeing from Vietnam. His family had a fleet of boats, and he filled them with these desperate people and brought them through sometimes wild seas, and many other dangers, to safety in Malaysia.

Of course, I knew nothing of this at first, because when we met he could not even say "hello" in English. But thanks to the wonderful materials we had, along with Ba's tenacious desire to learn, we embarked on a long, but successful journey together.

After several months, he was able to get a job. This further enhanced his language skills, as he was forced to speak to, and understand, his fellow workers. Gradually, he began to fill me in on his former life and his dreams for the future. We became very good friends. What a thrill it was to be helping this courageous (and extremely polite and respectful) man get a new start in life! Now, many years later, he is living in Arizona, with a management position in an electronics firm. Ba is Arizona's greatest Packer-Backer!

Another student, Paul, was born and raised in Green Bay. He dropped out of school at the age of sixteen, frustrated at his lack of success, and just feeling dumb and hopeless. He worked at whatever odd jobs he could pick up with his limited skills. But getting married and having a son gave him initiative to seek out more help when he learned about the Literacy Council's program. With the ever-present help of the Literacy Council, I discovered he was dyslexic. Approaching his learning from this perspective, he admitted he was not dumb, but able to

learn! We soon were visiting the library to pick out books he could take home and read to his child! From there, he learned how to write checks for the first time in his life, fill out employment forms by himself, and eventually, passing a very difficult DOT written test, earning him a job as a semi-truck driver. Sharing in his joy and excitement at each level of progress was very satisfying to me!



Another joy was being assigned to a lovely, young Hispanic mother of two. She and her husband were such hard working people! They were determined to make a new life for themselves and their children in their country. She worked part time in a factory and did dressmaking at home to help make ends meet. But all this didn't stop her from asking for help with the language in her spare time. I tutored her in her home, as she didn't drive, so I got to know the whole family. Wonderful people!

A young Chinese man, Chung, who spoke no English, was another challenge. He was a cook in a Chinese restaurant, owned by his uncle. Chung, quite frankly, didn't care if he learned English, or not! Everybody else in the kitchen spoke Chinese, and that was good enough for him. But his uncle had bigger plans for him, and arranged the tutoring sessions. We generally met at a corner table of the restaurant, during slow hours when Chung wasn't needed in the kitchen. My efforts at getting this young cook to say "fried rice" –instead of "flied LICE" – was a source of amusement to the diners sitting nearby.

I'd definitely not recommend this environment for anyone starting to tutor! There are many other possibilities. The Literacy Council offices have booths set up for this purpose. The library will often let you work there, as well as the student's house, your home, a church, you name it. A place can always be found that is available for private conversation.

Finally, I would like to mention the matter of time. I wasn't tutoring all these years because I had nothing else to do! I had a full time job, with a husband and two children at home when I started tutoring. The scheduling flexibility with just you and your student make it quite workable. So don't let "busy-ness" stop you from experiencing this highly fulfilling tutoring adventure!