

**Where**

Southern Methodist University

**Who**

Dr. Stephanie Al Otaiba, Centennial Chair in Teaching and Learning

**What**

This approach allows preservice candidates and graduate students to work one on one with individual students and provide targeted, direct instruction.

**Purpose**

Structured tutoring is a practice-based approach that teacher educators can tightly align with coursework by providing candidates the opportunity to apply content and instructional practices directly acquired through coursework within a supervised, authentic environment.

**Description**

Driven by the belief that teachers need space within which to apply what they are learning, general education and special education candidates at Southern Methodist University have the opportunity to engage in structured tutoring throughout their preparation programs.

Tightly aligning the structured tutoring experience with coursework allows teacher educators to ensure that candidates are equipped with the skills necessary to experience success with their students. Candidates begin their experience by learning through coursework how to write a lesson plan based on a highly scripted program. Next, they learn how to teach that lesson to a student through their tutoring experience. They learn to collect data using diagnostic assessments and curriculum-based measures. Through these instructional experiences, all of which are provided under the careful supervision of teacher educators, the candidates learn to teach literacy as well as engage in action research and service learning. From Dr. Al Otaiba's perspective, the benefit of structured tutoring is reciprocal because the student and the teacher educator learn from each other.

The coursework and practicum experiences that Dr. Al Otaiba describes are initially highly scaffolded. Beginning candidates' coursework, specifically within the literacy program, starts with learning about the developmental stages of reading. Candidates then receive coursework that addresses more advanced stages of reading and teaches them about administering assessments and using data to inform reading instruction. Teacher candidates begin their experience working with an individual child by using a scripted intervention. In the subsequent semester, candidates work with a different child, but they have an opportunity to differentiate the intervention based on assessment data to better meet the child's specific needs. These learning experiences culminate with the final capstone course, in which candidates develop a formal action research project. The action

research project involves identifying an academic or behavior area to target for intervention, and then making instructional decisions about the nature of the intervention's design and the appropriate assessment required to monitor student growth. This project is presented to peers at the end of the semester.

During their structured tutoring experiences, candidates receive ample support and feedback from teacher educators through coursework and supervised fieldwork. In addition, candidates engage in rigorous and frequent analysis of their own teaching. Self-analysis of candidates' own effectiveness involves drawing upon data from curriculum-based assessments and mastery of learning objectives to determine whether students are making progress toward their academic goals.

### Impact

Research that Dr. Al Otaiba has conducted around the candidates' structured tutoring experiences demonstrates that this opportunity not only improves novice teachers' abilities to implement effective literacy practices, but also impacts the achievement of the students participating in the tutoring experience. Furthermore, Dr. Al Otaiba observes that the structured tutoring experience provides teacher candidates with the opportunity to realize the unique synergy between research and practice, which also profits inservice cooperative teachers. Novice teachers are exposed to important instructional and assessment decision-making processes as they engage in thoughtful discussions about their learning and their students' learning. Inservice graduate students benefit from the experience as well. Whether at the preservice or graduate inservice level, teacher educators who participate in structured tutoring experiences help their districts to improve their curriculum. In addition, these structured tutoring experiences strengthen alignment between the values and the content to which teacher candidates are exposed in their teacher preparation programs and the values and teaching experiences to which candidates are exposed within local school districts.