The Conversation Tree: Community-Based Language Partnerships

Launched in Spring 2012, The Conversation Tree (formerly Students Advancing Literacy Skills in Adults) is a partnership between The Collaborative Center for Community-Based Research and Service and the Graduate School of Education’s Language Education program. The program was a recipient of the 2014 Human Dignity Award.

Undergraduate students are prepared through academic coursework to help adults acquire English language and literacy skills. Conversation Tree students serve as conversation partners or small-group facilitators supporting local community organizations offering English as a Second Language (ESL) services. As part of their preparation, students take a 3-credit Community-Based Language Learning class (05:300:406) offered through the Graduate School of Education where they learn:

- demographic trends in the United States and New Jersey;
- an introduction to second language learning theory and a funds of knowledge approach to learning and teaching;
- how to respectfully work with culturally and linguistically diverse community members;
- reinterpretations of civic engagement, community and citizenship in a global age; and
- practical skills such as how to design language acquisition activities.

Conversation Tree students will be expected to:
- attend the required 05:300:402 Community Based English Language Education course that meets on Tuesday evenings from 6:10 pm-9:00 pm at an off-campus site in New Brunswick; and
- serve at a Community Partner site for approximately 2 – 2.5 hours for 9 weeks (a minimum of 20 hours).

Program Outcomes

Since The Conversation Tree’s launch in Spring 2012, 73 Rutgers students have served nearly 3,000 hours for more than 00 community participants at nine different Community Partner sites. One of the program outcomes has been a model for teaching and learning English called the Conversation Café, which provides opportunities for learners to interact with proficient English speakers who have been prepared for intercultural conversation. Read about one of our Conversation Café’s featured in Rutgers Today here.

Program Personnel

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