

One frequently asked question about the Early Steps project is: What is a literacy mentor and what does s(he) do?

The Early Steps Literacy Mentors (Becky, Trisha, Jan, and Bev), are a critical component to this research project. Before the project went into "high gear", the mentors were trained in adult learning processes, communication, observation and feedback, as well as additional preschool language and literacy skills. Their main focus is to assist the participants in the implementation of newly acquired language and literacy skills taught in the monthly class. Have you ever sat through a college class, positive that you understand everything that is being taught, just to walk out the door and forget everything? Current research suggests that adult students are unlikely to implement what they have learned unless there is some type of "follow up." In this case, the mentor is the "follow up." If there are any questions that come up - the mentor is there to answer them. They also demonstrate language and literacy activities, role-model appropriate adult-child interactions, assist in developing a literacy-rich environment, assist in room arrangement and classroom management, and provide feedback to the participant directly related to language and literacy activities. The Literacy Mentor has the best of both worlds: She is in the classroom with the participant and children, but does not have supervisory responsibilities. She can and does develop a much different relationship with the participant than, let's say, a supervisor. We can easily state that our Early Steps program would not have the depth it currently does, if not for the Literacy Mentors.