Behind the Center's Door: Characteristics of Tutoring Centers Offering Remedial Reading Instruction

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BEHIND THE CENTER’S DOOR: CHARACTERISTICS OF TUTORING CENTERS OFFERING REMEDIAL READING INSTRUCTION

Carrie Green-Quaintance

A Thesis

Submitted to the faculty of the Office of the Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Master of Science in Education with a Major in Special Education
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Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education with a major in Special Education.

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Abstract

This thesis identifies characteristics and common practices at private tutoring centers that offer remedial reading instruction. Directors at four centers were interviewed and responses were analyzed to identify the general process by which a student receives reading tutoring. Results are presented in the areas of reading programs, enrollment process, cost, qualifications of tutors, student growth, parent support, and positive characteristics of centers.
Acknowledgements

I would first like to extend my appreciation to the directors of the four centers that participated in this study. You all do a wonderful service for our struggling readers and their families and your dedication is changing lives.

Thank you to Dr. Leatherman, my advisor and co-researcher. You have been an inspiration to me as to what a professional special educator can and should be.

Thank you to my mom and dad for always helping me with my homework, buying me an endless supply of books to solidify my own reading skills, and for still being proud when your 28-year-old daughter calls you to tell you her grades. Without your support and encouragement, I would never be where I am today.

Finally, thank you to my husband, Ben, for helping out more than you had to so I could have time to work on my thesis. It means so much to me each time you tell me how proud you are that I have accomplished this next academic goal of mine. You have kept me going when I have felt overworked, and I could not have done this without you.
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Chapter 1:

Introduction

The struggling learners in today’s school have a number of safety nets in place for them based upon the Response to Instruction model. Upon noticing a problem, their classroom teachers can call a meeting among a number of experts. These could include past teachers, special education teachers, literacy coordinators, and behavior specialists, to name a few. These people brainstorm possible interventions or alternative strategies to try with the students in order to meet their specific needs. Sometimes the students are enrolled in research based interventions and spend time outside of the general education classroom receiving instruction geared toward their specific learning problems. Various interventions are tried before a student is referred for special education services. This Response to Intervention/Instruction, or RTI, process is taking place in schools across America as part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Problem

Despite these safety nets, however, there are still students in the system who are reading far below grade level. Many of these students end up receiving special education services and participate in instruction with highly skilled teachers who have so many students they cannot possibly meet all their needs. Where does a parent turn?
One option a parent has is beyond the classroom door to the door of a private tutoring center. These businesses are set up for parents at their wits end, who feel their child’s needs are not being met within the public school setting. Gordon, Morgan, O’Malley, and Ponticell (2007) report that approximately 56% of tutoring that occurs outside of the public school is conducted by these professional tutors. Parents may feel uneasy, however, about this setting as little general knowledge is known about various centers, aside from the ones that frequently advertise.

**Importance of Topic**

The average person, or even the average teacher, is not an expert on the multitude of tutoring options available. Reading centers can be found in the phone book or through a simple internet search, but these resources rarely provide detailed information about the characteristics and practices found at these sites. There are certain questions a parent needs to ask in order to find the best setting for their struggling reader.

**Definition of Terms**

For this research the term “tutoring center” or “reading center” will be used interchangeably to refer to the business that offers remedial reading instruction. Most research participants used these terms when referring to their individual business. Gordon et al. (2007) describe the general public’s viewpoint of what a “tutor” is and one of the categories
is as follows: a paid, professional individual who offers help on diagnostic and/or developmental instruction, focuses on helping a student learn how to learn, and gives instruction for typically three to six months. The term “tutor” and “reading teacher” will be used to describe the individuals who work with students at these reading centers.

**Research Question and Approach**

The major question in this research was: What are the characteristics, similarities, and differences among centers that offer remedial reading instruction? In an attempt to discover characteristics of private tutoring centers, directors of various sites were interviewed, and center websites and flyers were analyzed. For this qualitative study, similarities between these sites were identified in hopes to provide an overall picture of what takes place at these centers and what parents can expect upon enrolling their children.

**Summary**

Despite the number of safety nets put in place by the public school systems, there still exists students who are struggling readers. Undoubtedly, the reasons for this are as varied as the students themselves. One alternative for these students is the private tutoring center. Because there is limited research on the practices of these centers, this thesis will identify common characteristics found in these settings.
Chapter 2:

Literature Review

There has been little research on the characteristics and commonalities among private tutoring clinics in the United States in the past ten years. After the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001, the public schools have focused on providing interventions to students who are struggling academically. A number of studies can be found that concentrate on the public schools’ efforts in reaching this population, with fewer studies noting the role of the private sector.

Tutoring Worldwide and in America

Although solid numbers of American students receiving tutoring are hard to find, a number of studies have examined the prevalence of tutoring in other countries (Bray, 2006; Ireson, 2004; Silova, 2010). Stevenson and Baker (1992) referred to the private tutoring in Japan as “shadow education”, because instruction often follows the school curriculum, though it is often out of the direct spotlight as the public schools often are; it occurs in the shadow of the public school system. Although there are many educational laws regulating public schools in America, the private tutoring clinic operates as a business and does not have to adhere to similar enforcement. The high prevalence of children in foreign countries receiving tutoring has led to a number of these countries passing legislation regulating aspects of the tutoring
experience. Silova (2010) examined a number of countries in eastern Europe and central Asia and found some common regulations. The definition of a tutor or “freelance teacher” is explicit, and public school teachers are often not permitted to tutor their own classroom students. These tutors must have an academic degree to teach every subject they are tutoring, and the setting they are tutoring in must meet health or hygiene requirements.

There are many types of tutoring that occur around the world that can be found in the local American community. Ireson (2004) and Silova (2010) both mention the tutoring that occurs in the public school system, which mostly takes the form of RTI groups and special education services. Private tutoring can be given by licensed teachers with Gordon et al. (2007) reporting that about 30 percent of children receiving tutoring outside the public school setting are being taught by teachers who are instructing outside of school hours or during the summer. Students are also being tutored at private educational institutions. Ireson (2004) discusses that these institutions offer large group or individual tutoring, and also includes parents and family members as another type of tutoring situation.

**Enrollment Process**

Without strict regulations governing the private center, the process by which students are accepted and enrolled undoubtedly varies
between settings. Sanacore (1991) offers a description of this process that is common among centers. First, students who are having extreme difficulties in the school setting are often referred to the center. Parents are then interviewed to determine educational history and any relevant developmental information. Students are next administered tests that give an overall indication of functional level and deficits. Some common assessments include the Nelson-Denny Reading Test-Revised, Gray Oral Reading Test, and the Woodcock Johnson Reading Mastery Tests-Revised (Vurdien, 1993). From the test results, an academic plan is developed that best fits the students’ needs.

**Characteristics of Successful Tutoring Programs**

Some studies have examined the characteristics of successful tutoring centers. Programs that are highly structured with plenty of time spent preparing lessons and materials often lead to a higher success rate among tutees (Gordon, 2009; Houge, Geier, & Peyton, 2008; Ireson, 2004; Sanacore, 1991). Tutors who are highly trained and/or certified, experienced teachers can easily call upon training and past experience to better meet the needs of the struggling learner (Houge et al., 2008; Vurdien, 1993). The ways in which tutors interact with students is also found to contribute to success. As found by Juel (1996) and supported by Cromley and Azevedo (2005), successful experienced tutors use explicit cognitive modeling, instructional scaffolding, and motivational
techniques more than inexperienced, less successful tutors. Time and grouping also play a factor in student success. Vurdien (1993) found that students who received over 50 hours of instruction were more successful, while Ireson (2004) found that students who were tutored in a one-to-one setting scored an average of two-thirds of a standard deviation higher than students in larger groups. Adequate parent education is another success indicator as parents oftentimes are at a loss at how to best help their children who struggle (Gordon, 2009; Ridout, 1992).

**Reading Intervention Programs in Schools**

The business of creating successful reading intervention programs for school use has increased since No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Interventions that are used in the public school system must be scientifically research-based in order for a school corporation to purchase the program. The actual reading programs used to remediate students with reading difficulties is the central factor in the success of any type of remedial program. The Orton-Gillingham approach of teaching phonics has a long history of research and success for students with dyslexia (Joshi, Dahlgren, & Boulware-Goode, 2002; Oakland, Black, Stanford, Nussbaum, & Balise, 1998). The various programs of the Lindamood-Bell company, including LiPS, Visualizing & Verbalizing, and Seeing Stars have proven results in both the school and private setting (American Federation of Teachers, 1999; Sadoski & Wilson,
The American Federation of Teachers (1999) also mentioned Reading Recovery, Direct Instruction, and Early Steps as other successful programs in their report to Congress. Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, and Moody (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of 31 studies on tutoring for elementary students and found that there was a significant effect size (0.67) across a wide range of tutoring interventions, indicating that most reading programs are successful with struggling learners. This could be due to the fact that students' needs are being met more accurately in a small group setting with extra support. This is supported by Ireson (2004) who found that any program with time reading and writing extended texts is more successful than programs focusing merely on letters and words.

**Effects of Tutoring**

Although unregulated and little studied in America, tutoring clinics have several positive and negative effects (Ireson, 2004; Silova, 2010). Student motivation and grades are often increased because learning is individualized and tailored to the needs of the students. Students can learn subjects in ways that are not taught in the public school system and the cost is oftentimes less than the cost of private schools. However, the cost can be significant to families, and it is often only the more wealthy families that can afford private lessons. This leads to increased social inequalities. Some tutors may not be highly qualified, and students
may experience fatigue after attending a long day of school, in addition to private tutoring lessons (Ireson, 2004; Silova, 2010).

**Summary**

Current research on the characteristics of American private centers that offer remedial reading instruction is scarce. Much of the research focuses on school interventions as this has been a trend in our schools during the last ten years. Students who are identified for special education often still struggle with learning how to read and a private tutoring center could be the best environment to meet their needs. Because of limited research, this thesis will identify characteristics of these centers in an effort to broaden the knowledgebase about what happens behind the doors of these centers.
Chapter 3:  Methodology

Participants

One representative from four different reading centers agreed to participate in this study. No real names have been used. Advance Academy was represented by Jen, the center’s Instruction manager. One of Rise Tutoring’s co-founders, Kim, agreed to share practices from her center. The Orton-Gillingham Center was represented by Sam, the center’s founder. Finally, Carol, the site director from The Duncan Center, also agreed to be interviewed.

Setting

Each of the four centers was found by a simple internet search using the phrases “reading clinics”, “tutoring centers”, “reading centers”, and/or “academic help”. Each center is located in an urban area within the Midwest. Advance Academy currently services seventeen students and has been in business since 2003. Rise Tutoring is currently servicing sixty-eight students and has been operational since 1998. The Orton-Gillingham Center has thirty-one students at this time and opened its doors in 2006. The last center, The Duncan Center, is part of a national chain of tutoring centers with the first center opening over thirty years ago. This local center services 100-150 students currently.
Data Sources

The data sources in this study included individual interviews with administrators of the four learning centers offering remedial reading instruction. Center websites and flyers used for recruitment were also analyzed to glean more information about tutoring practices and characteristics.

Individual interviews with clinic directors.

All centers were found through an internet search. Individual representatives were contacted via e-mail and a mutually agreed upon time was determined for the interview. Participants were provided with a copy of interview questions before the interview took place. Written permission was obtained and sent to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Each representative from the centers participated in one or two one-hour interviews. All discussions took place during the summer of 2011. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed into narrative texts for analysis. Interview questions were focused to include information about basic practices at the clinics and can be found in Table 1.

Review of clinic websites and flyers.

Most centers in this study had some type of flyer describing their center and all maintain a business website. Information could be found that would help a parent get to know the motto and practices of each center.
Collection Procedures

Qualitative research can be defined as a “systematic approach to understanding qualities, or the essential nature, of a phenomenon within a particular context” (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Furthermore, qualitative studies answer questions about “what is happening” and “why or how it is happening” (Shavelson & Towne, 2002). This study examined the characteristics, similarities, and differences in practices and services found at learning centers that offer remedial reading instruction. The major question in this research was: What are the characteristics, similarities, and differences among centers that offer remedial reading instruction?

Summary

In an effort to broaden the knowledgebase on the practices of these centers, center directors were interviewed and promotional materials were evaluated to identify some general characteristics that parents can expect when enrolling their sons or daughters. Overall themes were identified upon review of the data. A picture will be painted of the daily practices at these businesses.
### Table 1

**Interview Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic category</th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading sessions and setting</td>
<td>What are the reading programs offered by centers?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What are the time frames for sessions and how are these determined?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What are the teacher-to-student ratios? Are small group sessions ever used?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrollment process</td>
<td>Are there requirements in order to qualify for tutoring? For example, must a student be functioning two grade levels behind?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How is success measured? What assessments are used?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Do families sign a contract? If so, what is included?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Is the institution for profit or non-profit?</td>
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<td>What is the average cost for tutoring sessions?</td>
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<td>Qualifications of tutors</td>
<td>What are the qualifications of tutors?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What type of training do they receive?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Are there regulations or legal guidelines a center must follow?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student growth</td>
<td>How is success measured? What assessments are used?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How is student growth reported to parents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent support</td>
<td>Is there any training or support offered to parents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive characteristics of centers</td>
<td>What are the positive characteristics of your center?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4:

Research Findings and Analysis

When a family makes the decision to seek outside services for their struggling reader, they are faced with a daunting task with the possibility of few to many choices based on where they live. All of the centers included in this study were found through a simple internet search. Parents are often referred to centers by teachers, doctors, and other parents.

Research findings are presented in themes that reflect the process of a child being enrolled in and participating in remedial reading instruction. These themes are as follows: the reading centers and programming, enrollment process, cost, qualifications of tutors, student growth, parent support, and positive characteristics of centers.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data sources for the research were interviews of representatives of four centers and reviews of center websites and promotional materials that are publically available.

Interviews.

Before the interviews commenced, each website was reviewed to find answers to the interview questions. These interviews were semi-structured, as questions were asked to clarify or expand on any information not answered by the website. A copy of the interview
transcript was sent to each participant via e-mail and they responded via e-mail, as well. These member checks (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) allow for fidelity of the narratives of the interviewees. Typed transcripts can be found in Appendices A-D.

**Analysis.**

Responses were reviewed to analyze commonalities in practices and services. Data was triangulated (Creswell, 2008) in this case study as several types of centers were represented including one “chain” tutoring clinic (a clinic that has more than one location across the country) and three local clinics within the Midwest. Answers to interview questions were analyzed to determine common themes and practices at local centers (Patton, 2002). Center websites and promotional materials were examined before and after interviews commenced for cross-reference. An overall picture was painted of what goes on behind the door of companies in the business of teaching students how to read.

**Reading Centers and Programs**

Four tutoring center representatives agreed to participate in this study. All centers are located in an urban area within the Midwest. No real names have been used. After students are evaluated and determined to need remedial reading instruction, sessions can begin. Each center uses different programs and has different time frames for
tutoring sessions. In addition, varying teacher/student ratios can be found at each center.

**Advance Academy.**

Advance Academy currently services seventeen students in the areas of reading, spelling, writing, math, comprehension, and academic management. Advance Academy was founded by concerned citizens and parents and opened its doors in September of 2003. Jen, the center’s Instruction Manager, agreed to be interviewed.

Although Advance Academy is not endorsed by Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes, many of their reading programs are Lindamood-Bell programs. Students coming here may be instructed using LiPS or Seeing Stars for phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, as well as Visualizing and Verbalizing for comprehension needs. For reading fluency, the center uses the Read Naturally program. Jen described how students receive basic reading instruction and then the focus becomes fluency: “We sort of supplement when a student gets to a certain level in the Lindamood-Bell reading programs, then we add on instruction in reading fluency” (personal communication, July 22, 2011). As many struggling readers often struggle greatly with fluency, a “key part of the reading programs here is that it’s not only working on reading, it’s working on processing speed. So we’re always trying to force that processing speed. We’re working on those
areas of greatest need but we’re always trying to just keep pushing, pushing, pushing to get more reps. It’s like building your reading muscle.” (personal communication, July 22, 2011)

Advance Academy offers two main programming options for the struggling learner. The first is the Academic Independence Management (AIM) Program for less severe deficits. Students enrolled in this option attend the center for two to three sessions per week. In this option, students will develop strategies and techniques to help them monitor, adjust, and regulate the production controls necessary for adequate academic performance. Focus areas could include specific subject management, test taking, study skills, writing, organization, and/or management skills.

Students who have a greater reading deficit will be enrolled in the Intensive Program. Students come to the center for four hours a day, with the sessions broken into four fifty minute blocks. Students typically attend between 120 and 160 of these fifty minute blocks, which roughly calculates to eight to ten weeks. Generally, students come from eight to noon on a daily basis, meaning public school students are missing the entire morning at their home school. Because Advance Academy is modeled after a Lindamood-Bell clinic, all sessions are conducted individually with no small groups being offered.
Rise Tutoring.

Rise Tutoring is currently servicing sixty-eight students in the areas of attention, memory, visual and auditory processing, language, reading, math, study skills, and test taking strategies. In addition to offering services at the center, Rise Tutoring is also a state provider of Supplemental Educational Services to area schools. These Supplemental Educational Services refer to “free extra academic help, such as tutoring or remedial help, that is provided to students” who attend a Title 1 school that is determined by the state to be in need of improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Rise Tutoring sends tutors to Title 1 schools for after school small group tutoring sessions. One of the center’s co-founders, Kim, agreed to be interviewed. She helped found the center in 1998.

Rise Tutoring is another center in the area that utilizes Lindamood-Bell reading programs, though it is not endorsed by them. Students here could participate in LiPS, Seeing Stars, and/or Visualizing and Verbalizing based on the results from the academic testing. For fluency instruction, students will participate in the Read Naturally Program. Students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or students who need to increase their processing speed in relation to reading, also have the opportunity to use Interactive Metronome. Students read phonetic sounds or sight words printed on a page to the tone rhythm they hear on the
metronome. Rise Tutoring also uses optometrist designed programs. “Those really go a lot into the eye tracking, the reversals that you see. They’re just strategies for reversals. They’re for line skipping. Even just something as random as excessive head movement when you’re reading” (personal communication, July 8, 2011).

Students coming to Rise Tutoring attend one hour sessions two times a week. It is recommended that they receive thirty hours of tutoring at which time they are retested to determine if more instruction is needed. Kim stated that more than half of the students continue with additional sessions after the thirty hour mark. Although the center has tried small group sessions, they currently do only one-on-one sessions, placing a great emphasis on the individualization that this allows.

The Orton-Gillingham Center.

The Orton-Gillingham Center (hereafter referred to as The O-G Center) is the most specialized of participants. They primarily work with students with Dyslexia and focus on the areas of reading, writing, and spelling. They are currently servicing thirty-one students. The center’s founder, Sam, agreed to be interviewed. Sam created the center in 2006 after previously directing another center that utilized a similar educational approach.

Although The O-G Center only offers one type of method to remediate reading deficits, this method does cover all five essential
components to reading as found by the National Reading Panel in 2000: phonemic awareness (if needed), phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension. Sam also stated that some students “might have some written expression depending on where the student is in the program” (personal communication July 15, 2011). Each session includes three specific drills so students practice letter-sound correspondence: a visual drill, an auditory drill, and a blending drill in which they blend sounds together to form words. In addition, there would be a

“word review section that includes aspects of language that were previously taught including single syllable, multi-syllable phrases and sentences. There are all kinds of things we do in that grouping as far as fluency work. There would be a spelling component, a dictation component. There’s going to be oral reading. There is going to be a section on irregular words...you might have some written expression depending on where the student is in the program.” (personal communication, July 15, 2011)

All students at The O-G Center are met with individually. This is a key component to the O-G method. “It’s very prescriptive and diagnostic. Every session that we have we’re looking at what the student knows and doesn’t know, what they’ve mastered and what they haven’t mastered. Then we design the next lesson based on their
performance on the previous lesson” (personal communication, July 15, 2011). There are no small groups sessions offered. Sam stressed the importance of working in one-on-one groups with students with Dyslexia.

Students at The O-G Center attend one hour sessions two to three times per week. Sam stated that most students attend twice a week, more for economic reasons, rather than student need. Most students stay at the center for up to two years. Students attend every week throughout the year, and instruction is not stopped during the summer.

**The Duncan Center.**

The fourth center, The Duncan Center, is part of a national chain of learning centers. The first Duncan Center was created over thirty years ago and offers services in the area of reading, writing, math, test preparation and homework help. This local franchise currently services 100-150 students that attend the center two to four hours a week. Carol, the site’s director, was interviewed for this study.

The Duncan Center does not use any specific reading program, and instruction is skill driven. Carol stated that “there is an extensive research and development program through The Duncan Center [headquarters] and we update those based on state standards” (personal communication, July 20, 2011). Students are tested in the areas of phonics, sight words, oral fluency, oral comprehension, word meaning, and comprehension. Based on these results, student need is
determined and instruction is designed at the center to remediate reading difficulties.

Students may come to The Duncan Center as many times per week as the parent decides based on their time, finances, and goals. Carol stated that most students typically come an hour at a time. Although instruction is individualized and new material is not presented until mastery has been attained, students are placed in groups of three. Carol described a positive with this type of grouping: “So if I’m the instructor, for example, I may be working with a third grade reader, a sixth grade writer, and a fourth grade math student. So there is no temptation for me to ever group instruct” allowing the tutor to focus on an individual’s particular need (personal communication, July 20, 2011). The Duncan Center does offer larger groups as more of a camp setting, but never for reading instruction. Carol gave the example of a fraction/decimal camp that met a couple hours a day for four or five days.

**Enrollment Process**

After contact has been made with a reading center, students are first assessed to determine academic need. Each center administers a battery of tests. One of the tests used at every center is the Gray Oral Reading Test for rate, accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Similarly, two of the four centers used the Comprehensive Test of Phonological
Processing (CTOPP), the Lindamood Auditory Conceptualization Test (LAC), and a portion of the Detroit Test of Learning Aptitude (DTLA).

Both participants from Advance Academy and Rise Tutoring mentioned that parents sometimes get confused with the purpose of the initial testing. It is not to be a diagnosis of any type of disability. Jen, at Advance Academy, stated that “they feel like when they come in here, we’re going to do this assessment and they’ll come away with some type of diagnosis. Realistically, as with every assessment, it is a snapshot in time of that child’s academic functioning” (personal communication, July, 22, 2011). Kim, at Rise Tutoring, further describes the purpose of the initial testing: “Those give you the starting point. So those aren’t so much to give the parents a level, they’re more to say here’s where to enter the program” (personal communication, July 8, 2011). This is similar across settings as the tests are given with the results feeding the decision for what will be worked on in various sessions. Parents will meet with a center employee to go over testing results and discuss the plan for sessions.

**Requirements to qualify.**

If a student’s test results show a need for remedial tutoring, the center will agree to work with the student. There are, however, certain students who will have difficulty accessing services. Each center discussed a willingness to at least try working with most students.
Students with a low IQ, low language, or Autism will typically have a tough time getting into a typical reading center. Certain centers will take students on a more “probationary status”, as Kim from Rise Tutoring stated (personal communication, July 8, 2011). Sam, from The O-G Center, further clarifies that parents are a big factor in this determination as “it depends on if the parents have an understanding of how big of gains we’re expecting in the process” (personal communication, July 15, 2011). Carol, at The Duncan Center, agrees that “the biggest qualifier would be a parent’s realistic goal for tutoring” (personal communication, July 20, 2011).

**Cost**

Both The O-G Center and The Duncan Center are for-profit organizations. Both centers charge a flat rate fee of $40 per hour. The Duncan Center has had this fee since 2005. It is important to remember that the session fee covers the session itself, as well as any preparation time the tutor is taking to plan and gather materials.

Two of the four centers, Rise Tutoring and Advance Academy, are nonprofit organizations. Because of this, these centers offer financial assistance to their clients. Rise Tutoring has a normal fee of $35 an hour. Families may also apply for the Financial Assistance Program which is based on household income and size. Kim further explains that “a good barometer of whether you’ll qualify is whether your child is on free or
reduced lunch at school because the tiers that we use to determine the tutoring rate are based on the Federal Poverty Guidelines, which are what establish the free and reduced lunch guidelines” (personal communication, July 8, 2011). However, each family is reviewed individually and if a family has another financial hardship, such as a child with Leukemia, they could still qualify. If a family does qualify for the Financial Assistance Program, they will receive a modified rate for a total of thirty sessions. At that time, the family could reapply for the program. Kim further explains how this happens in her nonprofit organization:

“We subsidize that basically by, kind of the overhead that we always put aside every month from the income of the tutoring center. We set aside immediately for the Financial Assistance Program. So we’re self-funded to a degree but then we also get donations. Sometimes we write grants. Over the years we’ve had other sources of funding that come in and it adds to that. It makes it so we can add more people to that. In these last couple years, we’ve been inundated with requests for it.” (personal communication, July 8, 2011)

Families seeking tutoring at Advance Academy will have their session rate based on parent income. An automatic reduction is also given for the number of children living in the household. During the last fiscal year ending July 1st, 2011, the average hourly rate was $33.79.
Some families, however, paid as low as $20 per hour, while others paid as much as $70. Jen stressed the importance The Advance Academy places on this manner of determining cost: “We really, really try to make our services affordable to every student. We’re constantly seeking out grants to help us make up that difference between what the families are bringing in and what it actually costs to have a session” (personal communication, July 22, 2011).

Qualifications of Teachers at Reading Centers

Another area investigated contributing to student success is the qualifications of and training offered to the tutors at the reading centers. Center directors shared basic educational requirements before tutors are hired, as well as what training opportunities are required after a teacher has been employed.

Degrees.

Every center hires only individuals with a bachelor’s degree. Advance Academy, Rise Tutoring, and The O-G Center do not necessarily require the degree to be in education, however. Rise Tutoring requires at least one year of experience working with children in some setting, although this setting does not have to be a classroom setting. Kim mentioned some of the tutors have degrees in counseling, speech-language pathology, or psychology. According to Advance Academy’s website, their instructors have degrees in communication,
English, or elementary education. Sam, at The O-G Center, noted that instructors who are teachers usually are more successful because of their ability to write lesson plans and usually have the best rapport with students. In contrast to these three centers, the Duncan Center hires only individuals with a state teaching license to teach reading.

**Training.**

After hiring, each center trains their teachers in a slightly different way. Advance Academy has a very rigorous hiring/training process. Before individuals are hired, they are given a test to determine if they possess any type of learning disability themselves. They then participate in a modeling phase, in which Jen will demonstrate a part of one of the reading programs and they have to mimic her teaching. She is looking for how quickly they can pick up the program and what type of language they use. Next, they will be interviewed individually. If the center decides to offer them a position, they are required to sit in on an actual reading session so they know what will be expected of them. After this process, they receive ten hours of training on two reading programs. Jen will observe the teachers periodically and will step in to model portions as needed. Every Friday at Advance Academy includes a staff meeting. This allows the teachers to discuss individual students, as well as allowing the opportunity for additional training. Jen stated that
Advance Academy continuously updates their training and resources by attending national conferences.

Rise Tutoring requires their reading teachers to participate in about forty hours of training. During this time, they are trained in all three Lindamood-Bell programs (LiPS, Visualizing & Verbalizing, and Seeing Stars), Read Naturally, Interactive Metronome, as well as math programs. Kim discussed the fact that the Rise Tutoring Training Manual is very thick and also includes the things the center does for memory, attention, and visual-auditory processing. After this program-based training, teachers receive individualized training with every client they take on.

“You get your first four clients and then the trainer sits down with you, goes through the pretest results, helps you do all your goals and objectives, and helps you do all your lesson planning. They then directly talk about that human being who has a disability and tell you how to manage your session” (personal communication, July 8, 2011).

Instead of having a comprehensive training about the characteristics of various disabilities all at once after being hired, Rise Tutoring waits until a tutor has a client with a certain disability before training them on the strategies that would be beneficial to that student. In addition to the program and disability training, tutors at Rise Tutoring attend an average of two staff developments a year. Some occur at the center and some
may occur at national conferences, such as the Learning Disability Association Conference. Kim stated that the next in-house training will be a psychology professor from a local university giving a two hour presentation on memory. They usually send a few people to conferences who then come back to the center and present the information to the other employees.

To learn the Orton-Gillingham approach at The O-G Center, it typically takes about forty-five hours of classroom work. Sam discussed the fact that “the real key is not only to go through the course...but the real key with this approach is to work somewhere where you can be supervised with somebody who can tell you if you’re doing the approach correctly or not” (personal communication, July 15, 2011). Sam’s own training comes from this type of training. He has received forty-five hours of training with a 100-hour practicum, as well as advanced level training, practicums, and teacher training courses that allow him to correctly train the tutors at his center. Because this center offers one very specific approach to teaching reading to students with Dyslexia, it is critical that the teachers are implementing the various aspects of the approach with fidelity.

As previously stated, the Duncan Center only hires reading teachers who are state certified teachers. In addition they must become “Duncan certified”, as Carol described it (personal
communication, July 20, 2011). Tutors participate in a series of classes with a test at the end to see if they “really have it” (personal communication, July 20, 2011). There are three or four instructors at the center that teach those classes depending upon the strengths of each instructor. The classes take about twenty hours to complete.

Student Growth

After giving the initial assessments, students will begin working with a trained professional on their individual reading needs, regardless of which center they attend. However, each center measures student success in a slightly different way. In addition, communication of this success with parents occurs in various manners.

Advance Academy and Rise Tutoring both provide regular communication to parents after each session in the form of written anecdotal reports. Jen, at Advance Academy, expressed that a report might include something such as, “Billy knows all of his vowel sounds. They’re fairly stable this week” (personal communication, July 22, 2011). At Advance Academy, fairly stable means 85% accuracy with self-correction. In addition to including what the student worked on at Rise Tutoring and what to work on at home, some parents of students with behavior or attitude concerns could receive information about how students performed behaviorally. In addition, both centers re-administer the tests given before tutoring began to determine overall student
growth. At Advance Academy, this occurs after 80 hours of their intensive instruction, while Rise Tutoring retests after 30 hours. Both centers administer the B form of the tests that measure what was targeted during the tutoring, such as comprehension. Since some students continue reading instruction, this new testing is used to determine further support. Parents will receive information of new testing results at that time.

Sam, at The O-G Center, describes the Orton-Gillingham approach as very prescriptive and diagnostic. “Every session that we have we’re looking at what the student knows and doesn’t know, what they’ve mastered and what they haven’t mastered. Then we design the next lesson based on their performance on the previous lesson” (personal communication, July 15, 2011). In essence, students are being informally assessed daily on various drill work, reading, and spelling. Tutors will make note of the error patterns made and design further instruction based on the errors students exhibit. To communicate with parents, each student is given a notebook where he or she records new concepts that are learned. When the parents come in to pick up their child, the tutor will talk about what was taught and what they may need to review at home.

Tutors at The Duncan Center also use daily work to determine student success and guide instruction. More formalized growth is
reported to parents every four to six weeks with documentation. On The Duncan Center headquarters' website, it is stated that a child's math or reading skills will improve by one full grade level equivalent in only 36 hours of instruction, or the center will provide an additional 12 hours of instruction for free. When asked about this success guarantee, Carol stated that the guarantee only applies if

“they come three hours a week. We do have an informal guarantee. Corporate has a guarantee but the centers don’t have to do that, but I would never deny anyone that guarantee. It’s in reading and math only. So we would benchmark the first assessment, and let’s say in vocabulary your fifth grader was at a fourth grade, second month. Then they would need to be at a fifth grade, second month at the end of forty hours.” (personal communication, July 20, 2011)

The center will also retest at the end of a specific amount of hours to determine growth.

**Parent Support**

Parents of students with learning problems are often frustrated and confused about their child’s needs and/or special education services and laws. Most centers expressed a desire to someday have some type of support services for parents. Both Jen at Advance Academy and Kim at Rise Tutoring stated that parents have asked for advocacy services,
but they were not willing to offer those services as they did not feel they were experts on special education laws. Jen stated that she will attend IEP meetings if parents request this, but her role would be more of simply sharing what the programming at Advance Academy looks like. Sam, at The O-G Center, agreed that there is definitely a need for some type of support group for parents, but he has not had the time. He stated that he will attend IEP meetings, as well, and “will write IEP’s how they’re supposed to be written. Whether they’re accepted or not depends on how much the parents want to fight the school system” (personal communication, July 15, 2011). Although he does not like doing it, he has attended mediations and has been to court in the past. No center offers classes to train parents on the various programs, as most programming is very detailed and time-consuming. All centers maintain a high level of communication with the parents, usually during pick-up time.

**Positive Characteristics of Reading Centers**

All representatives from each center were asked to describe what positive characteristics their clinic possesses that could be implemented in a regular public school setting. Because each center offers different programming options, each individual had a slightly different view of what made their particular center successful. Most reflected back to their individual reading program.
Jen, at Advance Academy, mentioned a number of positives her center possesses that could be implemented in any educational setting. She first stated that the reading programs used at the academy were obviously the biggest reason why students learn to read in this setting. She expanded by describing the multi-sensory aspects of the programs. “I think regardless of the program, what makes the biggest impact is if you can feel something...These programs do just that” (personal communication, July 22, 2011). Jen further explained some of the key components of the Lindamood-Bell reading programs: questioning and metacognition. “We like them to be right, but we also like them to be wrong because that encourages them to re-evaluate their thought processes” (personal communication, July 22, 2011). This allows the tutors to use “more of the Socratic questioning. Instead of being so worksheet driven, being more discovery based” and “responding to the response” that the student gave (personal communication, July 22, 2011). Also, because the students are taught in individualized sessions, this allows them to build confidence by being successful.

Kim, at Rise Tutoring, mentioned the individualization that occurs at her setting. “If you combine one-on-one with pretesting...it’s not so much which program you pick, it’s that you pick it for the child” based on their individual needs. “You take that one-on-one and combine it with an individualized targeted program. It think that’s the key”
(personal communication, July 8, 2011). She further explained how this could work in a public school setting:

“The schools are missing out on the fact that a lot of these parents would pay, they don’t necessarily have to find the funding. There are people who would pay to have their child individually tutored during the school day. There are people like us who could go out and write grants for the kids who can’t afford it. We could get a grant to say we’re going to go into this school system to these kids on free and reduced lunch that are proven on paper to have a learning disability. They have been tested by your school psychologist. It wouldn’t even cost the schools money because we are bringing the money in or the parents are paying for it...If a school becomes more like a business, business people think about how can I do more with my money?” (personal communication, July 8, 2011)

She further predicted that charter schools may eventually implement this type of programming.

Sam, at The O-G Center, agrees that the reading program at his center is the core of the success. He mentioned that teaching the structure of language is crucial and that “87% of our language is phonetically correct”, indicating that this systematic teaching of phonetic concepts could teach how to accurately decode most words
He described in detail how this could be implemented in a public school setting, beginning at the classroom level and re-teaching as necessary in small groups. “So if we teach the structure the way that this approach teaches it at the classroom level, then bring it down into small groups, and then individual, we could meet most of the needs of even the dyslexic population with public education” (personal communication, July 15, 2011). Although this is basically the definition of the Response to Instruction (RTI) process, it differs greatly in that he is recommending one approach, the Orton-Gillingham approach, for our struggling readers.

Carol, from The Duncan Center, stated that some school districts have, in fact, implemented the positives of the center in the school already. She explained that in some big cities, Title 1 money has been used to “build” a Duncan Center in the school using regular teachers trained in The Duncan Center approach (personal communication, July 20, 2011). Although this is not the case in her particular area, she did mention two characteristics previously stated by other centers. First, the confidence her center creates in students as students “only compete against themselves” not anyone else (personal communication, July 20, 2011). They are competing only against their past performance. In addition to this, she feels the individualization of skills her center offers is another advantage.
The financial assistance programs at Advance Academy and Rise Tutoring could also be considered a positive characteristic for these respective centers. Being a non-profit organization allows the centers to set aside a fund for students who are economically disadvantaged, as so many struggling readers often are. These assistance programs allow students who would otherwise have no access to private reading instruction the chance to receive individualized instruction.

Summary

The reading programs at all centers in this study are either highly research-based or skill driven. Groupings are always small or one-on-one with all instruction individualized based on results from student test scores and current performance. Although it was not specifically stated by center participants, the typical population at most centers is students with Dyslexia or a specific learning disability as centers hesitate to work with individuals with Autism, behavior disorders, or cognitive disabilities. Cost for tutoring ranges among centers from a flat fee of $40 to slightly more or less if the center offers financial assistance or rates based on parent income. All tutors are college educated and highly trained by their respective centers. Parents receive informal data on student growth periodically, though no other formal support for parents is offered. Center positives include: multisensory aspects of specific programs, type of questioning used by tutors, high levels of
individualization combined with pre-testing, and an increase of student’s confidence. After the interviews, there was an overall feeling that centers were highly supportive of public schools and viewed their role as a support to the public school curriculum.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The interviews and materials reviewed presented findings that were similar to previous research. These included the enrollment process, reading programs, teacher qualifications, and positive characteristics. In addition, some new themes emerged that added to the overall knowledge about these private centers, including the type of population served, the concept of “reading therapy”, and student growth data.

Connections to Previous Research

After analyzing interview data, it became evident that the reading centers were employing some techniques and practices similar to those mentioned in previous research. Students enrolled at these centers obviously benefit from these best practices.

Enrollment process.

The enrollment process found at the centers was identical to that previously reported by Sanacore (1991) and Vurdien (1993). Students are referred, parents are interviewed, students are assessed using various standardized tests, and an educational plan and/or goals are developed based on the parent interview and test results.

Reading programs and teacher qualifications.

Three of the four centers primarily work with student that could be considered as student with Dyslexia. This phenomena is explained in a
section to follow. In teaching this specialized population, Advance Academy, Rise Tutoring, and The O-G Center offer research-based reading programs that are designed to work with students with Dyslexia or other serious reading needs. The Lindamood-Bell programs and the Orton-Gillingham method are tried and true programs that can be used to remediate reading deficits (Joshi et al., 2002; Oakland et al., 1998; American Federation of Teachers, 1999; Sadoski et al., 2006). Although not all tutors are licensed teachers at these centers, they are highly trained in the programs that work for students with Dyslexia. It is ironic, however, that the tutors at The Duncan Center are the only ones required to have a teaching license, though this center does not particularly focus on students with Dyslexia or use program that are research based. Even without the research-based programs, the fact that they have licensed teachers may increase the successfulness of the reading tutoring they do have. Parents should ask a tutoring center about the reading programs used, how these were chosen, and how tutors are trained in the programs.

**Positive characteristics of successful programs.**

There has been research indicating characteristics of successful tutoring centers, and many of these characteristics were found in the centers in this study. Structured reading programs often lead to higher success rates among tutees (Gordon, 2009; Houge, et al., 2008; Ireson,
The Lindamood-Bell programs, Read Naturally, and Orton-Gillingham were all found in the centers in this study and are all examples of solid reading programs. Houge et al. (2008) and Vurdien (1993) discuss the importance of highly trained and/or certified teachers in relation to student success. Each center in this study only employs tutors with bachelor’s degrees who then participate in rigorous training opportunities. Most tutoring is provided in a one-to-one setting, as supported by Ireson (2004). Although no center offers formalized training or support groups for parents as Gordon (2009) and Ridout (1992) state are success indicators, each center representative did mention the importance of this type of program.

**New Findings**

In addition to finding characteristics mentioned in previous research, some new information was also discovered. This includes the population of students served at reading centers, the concept of reading “therapy”, and student growth data.

**Population served.**

After discussing programming and characteristics with the representatives from each center, it can be concluded that each center is highly skilled at servicing the population it focuses on. Students with a Specific Learning Disability in the area of reading can generally be thought of as having varying degrees of Dyslexia. Shaywitz and Shaywitz
(2004) describe these students as having a difficulty in reading although they possess the intelligence, motivation, and education necessary for developing fluent reading. Advance Academy, Rise Tutoring, and The O-G Center focus directly on working with this population. All stated a willingness to try working with individuals with cognitive disabilities, Autism, or behavior disorders if parents have reasonable goals. Carol, at The Duncan Center, also stated a willingness to work with any student based on attainable parent goals, but she also stated that “less than 10% and maybe even less than 5% of our children are labeled. So kids come to us for remediation” (personal communication, July 20, 2011). Parents of students with disabilities should ask a center before beginning whether they specialize in working with students with severe learning needs, as these centers often offer programming and training for their tutors that is more specialized than a center that does not.

**Tutoring vs. reading therapy.**

Although previous research uses the general terms of “tutoring” and “tutor” to describe a program or individual that provides instruction outside of the typical school day, some of the participants did not view their center as a “tutoring center”. Sam, at The O-G Center explains,

“I don’t like the word tutoring actually. We’re really reading therapy. And there’s such a difference between tutoring and therapy. People look at it as when you come and work with
somebody, they think of it as tutoring. What we do here is therapy.” (personal communication, July 15, 2011)

Jen, at Advance Academy, also described the intensive nature of her programming as the reason she refers to the instruction as therapy rather than tutoring. She further compared the reading therapy to other therapies when describing a local school district’s refusal to allow children to leave the public school setting for Advance Academy’s Intensive Program. The district had issued a blanket statement saying “a child will not be let out of school regardless of therapy. I don’t care if they’re going to OT, speech, or Advance Academy. They are not to be leaving school for therapies” (personal communication, July 22, 2011).

This comparison does support the term “reading therapy”. If you consider a student with severe language needs or fine motor deficits needing language or occupational therapy, then of course a student with severe reading deficits would need intensive reading therapies. This switch in mindset may help parents in understanding the urgency for seeking appropriate help for their child, as well as schools rethinking the programming options available to students with Dyslexia or Specific Learning Disabilities.

**Student growth data.**

None of the centers interviewed had information readily available that offered statistics on student success or growth. Schools are made to
track student growth in multiple ways and this would be a wise piece of information for a business to have available for parents. In contrast, schools could implement several of the positives that the center participants mentioned including using any of the research-based reading programs with fidelity, matching programming to student need based on assessments, and having individualized grouping options to increase student confidence and success.

Without statistics proving student growth, it is difficult to prove that reading centers truly do produce results. Although it is common sense that a program offering individualized attention would produce a high success rate, centers did not have this information readily available. This would be a very beneficial area to explore for further research. The lack of quantitative data may be a direct reflection of the specifications of the Lindamood-Bell and Orton-Gillingham programs. Data that is reported is more anecdotal, and students do not move on unless the reading teacher has seen mastery of a specific concept. This is very different from a public school classroom setting in which instruction is usually fast paced and made to match the majority of the learners. Keeping records of student pre- and post-test results, as well as keeping accurate anecdotal records could be proof of the success rate these reading centers offer to their clients.
Summary

The four centers in this study had examples of information found from previous research. The enrollment process at each center was virtually identical, tutors were educated and highly trained, and each center possessed positives that were found to contribute to student success supported by past research. This study found that the majority of students serviced are likely students with Dyslexia or a specific learning disability who participate in more of a reading therapy.
Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusions

For parents of students that are struggling learners, it must be difficult and scary to find appropriate programming options for their children. Certain questions should be asked of every center including, but not limited to: What training and educational levels are required of reading tutors? Does your center specialize in students with disabilities? What reading programs are used and how are these chosen for students? How is student growth measured, tracked, and how is instruction modified? What financial assistance programs can be offered?

As a former tutor and special educator who has been trained in the Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes programs, in addition to Orton-Gillingham, I have worked with special education students who have severe reading deficits. It is often difficult to give these students what they truly need in a public school setting: dozens of hours in one-on-one instruction that is guided by a highly qualified teacher. With the high caseload that a number of special educators face, these students are often receiving a minimal amount of exposure to high quality, appropriate instruction. Tutoring centers can provide this type of instruction with a number of programming options available to families.

Overall, each center that was interviewed provides a nurturing, individualized program for their specific population, whether that be
students with disabilities or students simply needing remediation. Tutors are highly trained and continued training is encouraged. Individualized instruction will more than likely produce positive results for learners, though centers that specialize in diverse learners may produce the best results for students with reading difficulties.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

There were limitations in this study that could be corrected in future research. First, only center directors were interviewed while valuable information would be found in interviewing teachers or instructors that work with the students. Furthermore, information gleaned from students and their families would provide a very unique and important perspective to the study of tutoring center characteristics. A larger sample size of centers from different areas of the United States would allow for a more generalized picture with possible regional trends being fond. Overall, the more centers included and individuals interviewed who are associated with tutoring centers, the more common characteristics could be discovered.
References


Appendix A: Advance Academy Interview  
(I=Interviewer, J=Jen)

What are the reading programs used by tutoring clinics?  
We use the Seeing Stars Program by Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes and the LiPS Program. For comprehension, we use the Visualizing and Verbalizing also by Lindamood-Bell. For reading fluency, we have the Read Naturally Program. We’ve sort of supplemented when a student gets to a certain level in the Lindamood-Bell reading programs, then we add on instruction in reading fluency.

I- So will you do more than just those reading programs with students? If they have a certain skill deficit, will your tutors work specifically on that or do they stick to the program?

J- Because of the nature of the center, we work one-on-one with all of our students. We really have the luxury to work one-on-one intensively. I think a lot of classroom teachers would call it a luxury. The programs are designed to meet basically any reading skill deficit; it’s just a matter of how long do you spend on one particular part of the program. For example, we have pacing sheets which are a lot like lesson plans, and so every student begins with the same basic plan. Then about a week in after we get a feel for that student and where their strengths and weaknesses lie more in depth (it’s one thing to do an academic assessment, it’s another thing to be in the mix), we really individualize that plan. Jenny may need more time working on vowel sounds while Billy needs more time on b’s and d’s. The program has methods that work in those areas, and again, it’s just about how much time you spend there.

The key part of the reading programs here is that it’s not only working on reading, it’s working on processing speed. So we’re always trying to force that processing speed. We’re working on those areas of greatest need but we’re always trying to just keep pushing, pushing, pushing to get more reps. It’s like building your reading muscle. We want to get as many reps as possible.

C- That seems so important in the regular classroom to have the stamina to get through the day.

J- We find that a lot of our students don’t have that stamina. They are building it here at the same time. It’s a great process for them. It can also be painful to our instructors but that’s the way it goes.
Are there requirements in order to qualify for tutoring? For example, must a student be functioning two grade levels behind? Will you take any student?
We don’t turn anyone away. I guess it’s best to understand how the center works. It’s based off of a Lindamood-Bell Center. Basically, Lindamood-Bell decided that (our city) wasn’t a big enough market, but the founders of the center knew that there were a lot of students that needed them here. So, it’s based on a Lindamood-Bell Center and we work intensively with students which means four 50-minute sessions a day, four to five days a week for 120 or 160 of those sessions. So when the student comes into us, they fall into either an intensive category. We do an academic assessment and determine where their skills lie, and then we place them. “You need this program for this amount of time.” Or we find students who have all of the processing skills in line. They’re those students who get called lazy, not working to potential. “He’s just not trying hard enough.” So they have all those skills in line, they just haven’t figured out how to make it work in the classroom. They’re the chronically disorganized students, the ones that can’t turn in a paper on time to save their lives, they don’t keep assignment planners. They’re brilliant in a lot of ways but they don’t know how to study. If it doesn’t get in there, they don’t know it. Fortunately a lot does get in there, but they don’t know how to study or take notes. That reeks havoc on their academic career.

So we see two types of students and no one is ever turned away. I guess I have to say that there have been maybe two times in the past five and a half years where we have said, “Your student is not ready for the type of language that this program requires you to have.” One was a completely non-verbal student. So the programs do assume that you’re able to understand basic language and be able to respond appropriately to that language. We told them to try to seek other therapies and then come back.

Is the institution for profit or non-profit?
Non-profit.

Are there regulations or legal guidelines that tutoring clinics must follow?
The one legal thing that I can think of is that whenever we use the words “Lindamood-Bell”, we have to put a little disclaimer on there saying that we are not endorsed by Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes. Beyond that, no. Only the things that would regulate what a non-profit would be regulated by. But as far as training or continuing education, no. That can be kind of scary if you think about it. We try really hard to go to national and international conferences to continuously update out
training and our resources but you could just set up a clinic, go to your
two day training and that’s the end of it. The reason that we do all those
things on an instruction side is that we are always concerned about the
fidelity of the program. Parents, even at $20 a session, they’re still paying
a lot for their child to come here and I want them to get them the best
progress. It’s those outside trainings that are necessary. From a
marketing standpoint, it’s necessary because it sets you just a little bit
ahead of clinics that don’t do that type of training.

What are the teacher-to-student ratios? Are small group sessions ever
used?
I- You mentioned that everything is one-to-one. Do you ever do small
group?

J- No. I really believe it’s because we are modeled after a Lindamood-
Bell clinic and they do not do small group instruction. We have thought
about doing that, but with me being concerned about the progress and
the fidelity and knowing that you can be diagnosed with autism and
ADD and so can Billy, but you are definitely not the same student. As
you’re thinking about how to use this in the classroom, the Lindamood-
Bell programs include a section in each of their manuals about what it
would look like to do this in a group. We have had instructors leave here
and go into classrooms and use pieces of the program very successfully.
It just has to be flexibility in thinking. I think regardless of program, what
makes the biggest impact is if you can feel something. With LiPS, you
feel it with your mouth. With symbol imagery (Seeing Stars), you’re
writing in the air. With math, you’re touching cubes or a number line. If
you have some type of physical part of the program, that multi-sensory.
Everybody throws that term out there, but sometimes it gets confusing as
to how you actually implement a multi-sensory environment, but these
programs DO just that.

What are the time frames (ex: 90 minute sessions, 3 times a week) for
tutoring sessions and how are these determined?
I- So you have an intensive program and a not so intensive program?

J- Yes.

I- And these are based on the assessments you do at the very
beginning?

J- Yes.

I- So a child would come to you for four hours a day?
J - Well, yes, generally four hours a day. In that four hours, they are getting four fifty-minute sessions. So they work for fifty minutes then get a ten minute break and the schedule continues. They are generally here between 120 and 160 sessions. Again, it's all based on the academic assessments. Some students in the past have only been recommended to stay for 80 sessions because they have most of the processing skills in line, they just need a little bit of work here and there. So that takes about eight to ten weeks to complete depending on the student. It's generally during the school day. We don't do a lot of that intensive work after school because their brains are worn out from being in school all day long. Generally we see our intensive students from between eight and noon on a daily basis. The research is out there to show that the daily stimulation is what's needed to sort of reguide those neural pathways.

I- It's frustrating that can't happen in a public school.

J - It's hard to convince people that you need to spend a little money to save a little money. Down the road, this child would not be in special education if they could get this service now. They are identifying children as young as kindergarten now for special education services. It would be great if they would get them in kindergarten and then by third grade they would be in the gen. ed. classroom full time with no aides for those students who just have a reading problem. Now for those students who have a deeper lying developmental disability, they would still need that help. There's a whole group of students that just need a little bit more.

I- Do you have a hard time convincing parents to do that intensive program?

J - A lot of times the parents are here because they've tried other things or they're tired of their child failing. They're here because their child comes home and cries every night when they do their homework, or they're sick and don't want to go to school. Those are the ones that could have found us three years ago and been here tomorrow if they could have. There are some that require some convincing. I have found that it is the ones where their student is borderline. There just barely not making it so it hasn't totally fallen apart for them. But it will and it's usually a year later that we'll get a call from them. The hardest part about convincing a family to come to the center is the schedule. A lot of parents do not want to take their child out of school for that eight to twelve time period. I think the reason that is is because the school systems in this area have made it very difficult for parents to seek outside therapies. They threaten with truancy and, “We’ll take you to court if
you take your child there.” Realistically, the parent is just trying to do the best for the child. We are just trying to do the best for the child and the school wants to do the best for the child as well. I think it’s hard to swallow that maybe the best environment may not always be in that seven hour a day school setting.

I don’t understand that philosophy. How can you say it’s a bad thing for a child to get those services, learn to read, then come back to the public school and not need as intense or ANY services at all? I don’t understand I guess. Give me the magic answer.

J - I can’t. Working here over the years, I’ve come to accept that it is what it is and I have to accept it. It’s ultimately a parent’s choice. A parent can choose to keep their child in school and then come here in the summer, that’s always an option. A parent can choose to homeschool their child and take them out of that school for ten weeks. Or a parent can choose to fight and say, “This is your problem and I’m going to try to figure it out.” They battle with the school. Ultimately, the reason I’ve stopped thinking about it so hard is because there is no magic answer. We could say it’s money. We could say it’s because their feelings get hurt because they think we are insulting their skills, which is in no way the case. The reason I’m here is because I could not teach in a classroom. At the end of the day, the one that suffers from those battles is the child. What’s really frustrating is when a student comes here and goes back to school (and we see students when they go back to help them bridge the skills they’ve learned here with what they’re doing in school) and a teacher treats a child differently because they’ve come and received therapy here or somewhere else. They allow those emotions to affect how they treat the child. That’s when I decided that we do the best that we can and we can only encourage a parent to do what they feel is right at the end of the day. If that means that they don’t come here, then we just hope that we see them in the future. It would just be nice if the schools would just recognize that. A lot of parents don’t know how to fight that battle. We have parents anywhere from this is the first place they’ve come and the child hasn’t been recognized by the school as having a reading disability or any type of learning disability to their 13 years old on the Autism spectrum and they’ve been through therapies after therapies and the parents are very used to fighting those battles. We just try to educate our parents as much as we can. I think there are some centers out there that would consider my position as middle management as a sales position. I’m not really a very good salesman. I’m not that way. The best I can do is tell you, based on the academic assessment, what I feel would be best for your students. Then you get to go.
I- Aside from the intensive, what is the other option?

J - The Academic Independence Management Program and that’s one that is done in two or three sessions a week.

I- So more of what people would typically think of “tutoring”.

J- Yes and I think that’s why we get lumped into the tutoring center. Really what we’re doing during that intense session is really not tutoring at all. It’s really intense instruction to remediate the difficulty. That is usually one that I don’t provide as an option if a child really needs the intensive. I make sure the parents are aware of that. Again, I’m not a good salesman. If I was a good salesman I’d say, “Come anytime you want. I don’t care if it’s one hour a week or three hours a week.” I feel it would be a waste of their time and resources and a waste of our time and our resources. What keeps us going is when we see that progress. When we have a student that’s stalled out, the morale goes down, the whole effectiveness of the center goes down.

What is the average cost for tutoring sessions?
I- I was looking at your website last night and it said something about cost being based off of parent income. Is that for everybody?

J - Yes. At the very highest end, at the very lowest end, it’s based on parent income. I don’t deal a lot on the financial end but our executive director gave me some information. What I do know is that we encourage everyone to fill out a financial assistance request form, whether you make $350,000 a year or $25,000 a year. We have a very generous scale, I feel, anywhere from $20 a session to $70 a session. In comparison, even at that very top end, a Lindamood-Bell session is currently going for $80 plus a session. And they’re for profit so that’s the rate that everyone pays. It’s based on the income. It’s based on the number of children in the family. So you get an automatic reduction for the number of children you have living in your household. Any other incomes you might have, like child support, is included in that family income. Last fiscal year, which ended July 1st, 2011, the average family paid $33.79 a session. We really, really try to make our services affordable to every student. We’re constantly seeking out grants to help us make up that difference between what the families are bringing in and what it actually costs to have a session.
I- One thing I’ve been thinking about with payments concerning tutoring is that a family is also paying for prep time. So you’re paying for the hour of tutoring but also the 30 minutes it takes to prep for that hour session.

J- Right. Part of the service that our center provides is not only that session. That session fee does go toward prep time. Every week we also have a two-hour staff meeting where we discuss students and where we refresh our skills. It’s updates, as well. We have quarterly meetings a quarter of the way through each intensive. It’s weekly reports that we provide to parents. We have very informal, “This is how your child is doing” reports and that does take time which does end up costing the center money. It’s one of those things with any non-profit, it’s like why can’t it just be free? Unfortunately, there’s no one out there that does that. I have to keep it in perspective. It would be hard for me to afford $33 an hour and I’m definitely middle income. And then there’s this whole group, this whole class of students that are at the lowest socio-economic status, under the poverty line that need this service.

I think one of the great things about our center is the intensive nature of our programs. I feel it’s so powerful because we get to see that student for four hours a day for a period of eight to ten weeks. They need someone on top of them the whole time not just getting the reading in there, but also getting all the behaviors out of there. If a behavior is saying, “I can’t” or “I don’t” right way, okay then we have to change that because once you say that, your block is up. We work with them to say things like, “I need help.” That opens the door to so many things. Then you have to work with them after you ask what they need help on and they say, “I don’t know.” Alright, so now we have to work on how you ask a question. In this particular center, there’s a lot that goes on besides just reading. In the Lindamood-Bell manuals there are names in there like Buzz and Sophie. They’re the perfect students. So Nancy (Bell) will say something and Buzz responds perfectly. I’ve only met one Buzz in my entire life. So it just tells you that there is way more going on. Some come from homes that try to support them as best they can and then they bring those issues with them as well.

How is success measured? What assessments are used?
Parents get weekly informal reports that are more anecdotal things like, “Billy knows all of his vowel sounds. They’re fairly stable this week.” For us, fairly stable means 85% accurate with self-corrects. We don’t ever look for perfection because it’s just not possible. Everybody has bad and good days and we recognize that. We put things like, “He was able to get 40 out of 50 math problems correct” and other quantitative things.
The assessments that we use are based on a battery of assessments that Lindamood-Bell formulated many years ago. They continue to use a battery of assessments. We pick and choose. We use one measure from the Woodcock-Johnson, a lot from the Kaufman, the CTOPP, the LAC. The Verbal Absurdity Test from the DTLA which is no longer normed but we continue to use it because we feel that it is a good look at a student’s logical rational reasoning skills and how well they’re able to connect to language. We do a basic phonics test that is not normed either. Our battery is put together not to diagnose a learning disability. I think that’s one area that parents can be confused about. They feel like when they come here, we’re going to do this assessment and they’ll come away with some type of diagnosis. Realistically, as with every assessment, it is a snapshot in time of that child’s academic functioning. It’s comprised to look deeper than just a basic reading test or a basic comprehension test. For example, when we do comprehension testing we do the Kaufman and we do a listening comprehension, a silent reading comprehension, we do the GORT for oral reading comprehension, so we’re really trying to get at every way a child understands information to figure out where the weakness lies and how we can help remediate that.

I- How do you determine if a child has been successful in, for example, the 80 hour program?

J- We do a post-assessment. We have a lot of form B’s for those tests and we administer the form B’s. We basically readminister the same type of battery again. During the pre-assessment, we basically have tested in every area. In the post-assessment, we usually only do the areas that we’ve worked. But, there have been times where maybe we’ve worked on comprehension but we throw in math. Our brain can only do so many cognitive processes at a time so when you relieved some of the stress for certain tasks, other tasks can improve as well. So we use that to determine not only what type of progress was made but also how much continuing support will be needed.

How is student growth reported to parents? (answered in previous question-see “how is success measured” question)

Do families sign a contract? If so what is included?
We have a first day packet. That first day packet makes them aware of certain things. We have a parent commitment notice; these are the things we expect from you, being on time, the basics. Part of that includes the things they can do that would cause us to say, “Please don’t come again.” Things like not paying your fees, being chronically
late. That was set up first financially, obviously. Secondly, the things that are listed on that contract are there because those things affect progress and if a student is twenty minutes late to a session every day, it’s obviously going to affect how much we can get done during that session. So that type of thing they do sign. They do sign a notice of…it’s NOIC, a notice saying that this is what your fee will be and I agree to pay it. Other than that, there’s nothing that they sign.

Is there any training or support offered to parents?
At this time, the updates provide some type of support to parents. During those updates, I discuss where we are in the program, where we are going, and this is how you can support your child at home. We have been recently discussing, before a child even starts their intensive doing that type of conversation, this is what you can expect from an intensive program. This is what you can say at home to support the learning. For example, with the comprehension program, using the word “picture” as much as you can will help stimulate the brain and only support what we’re doing here. In regards to actually training them on the specific program, we don’t do that for time reasons. There have been some parents who want to be shown how to do this. We’ll do that, but we still run into the fact that they come from such different backgrounds. Realistically, just like with the school system, they want to drop them off, pick them up and have us take care of all of that.

I- Do you ever go into IEP meetings or conferences with teachers?

J- We have in the past. It’s not something we do very often and it’s really only when the parents ask us to. Mainly because parents can be confused about our role. And what I mean by that is that I’m not an advocate for your child. I know a little bit of law, but if you want an advocate I have a resource for you. I can tell you where to go. If I were to go into an IEP meeting, I would speak about what we’re doing at the center and what type of progress is being made. A lot of times what I find is that parents need an advocate. It’s not that I’m not on their side. I’m on the child’s side actually. They need someone there that’s going to support them in regards to the law, what a good IEP has, and how progress should be measured. Our role here is not that. Not that we haven’t considered getting into that because so many parents need it, but right now our focus has to be on maintaining the quality of our programs. That’s why our parents come to see us.

I- As far as the children receiving intensive instruction, has there been a backlash from the schools toward Advance Academy because of the part where they are pulled out of the instructional day?
J - No. We have never heard directly from a school system. The things that we have heard: people get very upset that we are not trained, licensed teachers. I did not go to school for four years to be a teacher. I went for three and a half and then got a different major. Not a lot of our employees are. They feel that makes us less credible than whoever else is out there, and there's no one out there in the city of Fort Wayne who does exactly what we do. The second thing that schools get upset about is that parents pay for our services. I have heard from a parent directly from their teacher, and of course it’s hearsay because who knows how things get skewed, about a particular student that was in a self-contained classroom. She came here and we made progress with her and the teacher told the parent, “Well, they’ll tell you anything they want as long as they get paid.” It hurt my feelings extremely after being in the trenches with this child for so long, but I think there are probably people out there that feel that because parents pay for our services, we inflate the progress that students make. Otherwise, they threaten the parents with truancy.

I- After talking to many centers, the overwhelming thing that I have noticed is that centers really are on the side of the school and they are not battling the schools, which I think is an assumption in the public school system.

J - We’re really not. We’re really here for the students and making sure that they are making progress. We all benefit from that child making progress. What I find, in my own personal experience, is that once a child gets into the continuing part of it, we have a lot of communication with the teachers. I’m e-mailing teachers and asking what’s going on in class and what I can help them with. The individual classroom teachers, in general I have found, supports the child receiving support. I think it’s at a system-wide level...we’ve heard from a system here in (our city) that it was a blanket statement, “A child will not be let out of school regardless of therapy. I don’t care if they’re going to OT, speech, Advance Academy. They are not to be leaving school for therapies.” That came from the very highest level in the school system. You have principals calling you saying, “Hey, I’ve got this students and they need help”, then they don’t end up coming because the superintendent cracked down on the principal. It’s politics, it’s money, what in the past decades have muddied the waters of education.
What are the qualifications of tutors? What type of training do they receive?

I - On the website, it seems like the degrees are things like psychology and things that could be geared toward the type of work you’re doing here.

J - Exactly. Everyone has at least a bachelor’s. As far as the qualifications, it’s not so much just having a bachelor’s degree. We’ve been told our hiring process is crazy; it’s three to four steps. At our initial meeting, they take tests to determine if they have the same type of learning disabilities or difficulties that our children have. They have to score at a certain rate on those tests in order to be invited back to the modeling phase which is where they come in and I demonstrate pieces of the program and they have to demonstrate them back in small groups. I’m looking to see how quickly can you pick things up? What is your language like? Then we have an individual interview phase. Then before they can accept the position, they have to come in and sit in on some sessions. It’s one thing to be excited that you just got a job through an interview. It’s another to get into that room and know what you’re dealing with. Some people call it crazy involved, but to us that means that we can say that we have qualified instructors. They all have degrees and they’ve all gone through this rigorous process.

In regards to training, it’s changed a little bit. In the past, they would have only been trained in one program and they would have spent 40 hours training in that one program. So they would have been here 8-5 learning LiPS, which is a big departure from even how Lindamood-Bell does it now because they only do their 2-3 day trainings. We’ve changed that partly because the time. When we hire, we’re often hiring for demand so we don’t usually have a lot of time. So now they get about ten hours of training on one program and ten hours of training on another program. They are trained on two which makes them more versatile as instructors. Part of that training process is extensive mentoring where I’m sitting in on a session and I do something and they do something, kind of this back and forth. They’re observed several times, and as a mentor I might jump in and correct their language which is always a training opportunity. Then for extended training, we do have our Friday staff meetings where we discuss students and as we’re discussing we’re bringing up pieces of the program. We also train on specific programs where we cover, recover or newly introduce other parts of the program. So training isn’t just a one time, weekend deal, it’s ongoing support.

I - Will a student have the same tutor for every session?
J - Not for every session. But if they have Mark at 9, then they’ll have Mark everyday at 9. That’s how we like it to be for continuity. It changes every hour but they meet with the same person at the same time everyday. You can bum out if they’re with the same instructor for four hours. We’re working one-on-one and if the relationship isn’t good, we won’t make progress. So we have had students who have asked to be switched from an instructor and because of our staffing that can be available.

Do students ever come during the typical school day?
(answered in previous questions-see “requirements” question and “time frame” question)
95% of our students come here because of our intensive instruction.

If you could incorporate elements that are successful here into a public school, what would they be?
Obviously the programs. The programs can be implemented in a public school setting. Now that Lindamood-Bell is a Race to the Top provider, schools are using it. The other thing that I would say is that it’s not only the program, it’s the way that you do the program. I think that more of the Socratic questioning. Instead of being so worksheet driven, being more discovery based. When a student comes in here, it would be very easy to just hand them a workbook. But it’s not that that changes their brains. It’s the dialogue they have with their instructor. It’s the development of the language. It’s the metacognitive side of our programs. It’s not always about right or wrong. We like them to be right but we also like them to be wrong because that encourages them to re-evaluate their thought processes. That is what is key to us. There aren’t enough critical thinkers in the world. That’s where science is going. That’s where jobs are going to the critical thinking sector. That’s the part of what we do here that I feel would have the biggest impact. If you don’t use our programs, at least use some more Socratic questioning. When you respond to the response, you are also building confidence. Instead of putting all the red X’s on the page, say to them, “Wow! You carried perfectly.” Who cares if they didn’t add, they carried perfectly. “And now let’s check your number line for the adding.” Or for reading, “You read ‘pig’ as ‘dig’. Wow! You got your vowel sound. That used to be really hard for you. Let’s take a look at this first letter.” So really building confidence. I’m not a big believer that self-esteem and confidence are everything, but I have seen how confidence opens the door for learning.
Appendix B: Rise Tutoring Interview
(I=Interviewer, K=Kim)

What are the reading programs used by tutoring clinics?
I-(From website)LiPS, V/V, Seeing Stars, Read Naturally (fluency), Interactive Metronome-Can you explain that?

K-I can. It’s not just for reading. I would say how it could relate to reading is for processing, but mostly we use it here for the kids with Attention Deficit. It keeps them moving. Basically you turn the metronome on and set it to 60 beats per minute. So let’s say we worked on in a lesson that day: /sh/, /th/, and /ch/, those phonemic sounds. So I would have either a grid on the wall or printed out in pretty large font on a paper and you turn on the 60 beats and the child’s going, “sh...th...ch...” (to the beat). It’s just a way to keep them on task. It’s a way to keep the focus. It’s a way to monitor how long you can get without making a mistake. Now that is just how it’s applied, or how we apply it here. You could have a list of sight words you’re doing on the beat. Sometimes we do it for eye fixation because some of the children that come here, it’s not for phonemic awareness, it’s not auditory processing, it’s something as simple, I say it’s a simple situation, of eye fixation on the page. That’s what the main reading problem is. So you’re just trying to get their eyes to go from here to here to here to here (motioning linear), not from here to here to here (motioning randomly up and down). Different from dyslexia with it being scrambled up here (motion to brain), it’s being scrambled on the intake. So we have columns of letters or numbers and the beat is going and you’re just going “/p/.../t/.../f/” or you’re going “1...7...6...2...” and the head holds still, and I as the tutor am across and it’s usually on a paper so my job is to watch the eyes. We get kids here who skip lines. Well that’s obviously going to affect your comprehension. So that’s how the Metronome works, but then we also have a whole series of programs with Interactive Metronome just for attention that use a lot of different processing attention and processing. So it’s a holistic program, kind of situation. But I’m giving you the examples of how it would fit under a reading application.

Optometrist Designed programs...Those really go a lot into the eye tracking, the reversals that you see. They’re just strategies for reversals. They’re for line skipping. Even just something as random as excessive head movement when you’re reading, that kind of thing. That’s how those would fit in.

Auditory processing-We have a lot of things for phonemic awareness. So if this says, “Say bat” “Now say it again but don’t say b-at.” “Say smile. Say it again but don’t say s-mile”
I- So kind of similar to the LiPS a little bit?

K- It is but it’s just one step more focused on just that.

I- It’s interesting to me, too, in dealing with the eyes, it’s not something we do much in a public school setting ever.

K- And not that every kid needs it, so it wouldn’t be the sort of thing you would incorporate into a classroom because only maybe one out of 30 would have that issue. And maybe not even one would; you may not even have a kid. But knowing that that could be an issue and the way I know about that is because I started out in vision therapy. And that’s where I met the partner that I founded this with and what we saw is exactly what I just said. Yes, there are some kids that have visual processing issues but it’s only one piece of the puzzle. And it could be that in combination with several things or it could be just that. I call those the easy kids to remediate because it’s almost like lifting weights. It’s an exercise that you can do and you can strengthen that. As opposed to, let’s say, a language development issues or something that’s much deeper as far as being able to make a change in it.

Are there requirements in order to qualify for tutoring? For example, must a student be functioning two grade levels behind?

I- Would you say that a lot of the kids that come here are already diagnosed with a disability?

K- That’s an interesting question and I think I saw that in here. The one question you had about is there any set requirement for being able to qualify because that made me think about that because we never really had had that. We are not like a (certain) Center where our kids are getting B’s and they want to get A’s. Although sometimes we get kids here who are getting B’s and have an emotional stressed; they’re becoming off balanced because they’re putting so much emotional stress on themselves to get the grades. But I would say, if I looked at our scheduling book where we log all the calls that come in here, probably 60% of our clients, and maybe higher, maybe even 70% are referred here. They might come from a teacher referral, a principal referral, Dr. --- that does the dyslexia or any of the people who work with him, child psychologists (we have a couple who refer to us), and prior clients. We don’t get a lot of just pick up the phone book kind of calls. It’s almost always somebody who knows somebody or has been referred. So if you took out those, I’d say probably 50% of the kids that come here, and that is just off the top of my head, have been somewhere before us and someone has tested them or evaluated them or a teacher, let’s say their
NWEA scores weren’t where they needed to be or their ISTEP, obviously ISTEP, if they didn’t pass one side or the other of the ISTEP or something like that. Something has triggered it. But not always, like an on paper diagnosis. There is a disclaimer at the bottom of our evaluation, and it’s not really a disclaimer, but it’s an informational statement that says “The results of these evaluations are strictly used to guide the tutoring.” We have parents who come in here and want you to call it something and that’s not what we do. We’re about what do you do about it. Not what you call it.

I-Do you ever turn people away?

K- We have actually. If we do the testing and the child comes out at age and grade level in every category, we’ll basically say, “You’re child cognitively processing wise, it appears to us that all the abilities are there so something else is at work.” Now we won’t turn them away so to speak. We’ll say, “We don’t think this is probably what your child needs. You might need someone to give them homework help. You know, get someone to come to your home and do their homework with them. Or a child psychologist.” We’re very sincere. Because of the fact that we have a waiting list we don’t really need to talk people into being in our program, but that doesn’t mean that if a parent says “I really want you to try to work with our kid” we try not to turn anyone away. There is nothing that says you have to have X diagnosis. Now, with Autism, we will take Autism spectrum with severe Autism or severe Bipolar, those children we’ll take on kind of a probationary status. I always tell the parents, “This is because I don’t want you wasting your money in the wrong place. You bring them in and we’ll work with them for a few sessions. Then we’ll give you our take on whether this is the right place.” Sometimes it’s behavioral. Also, Lindamood-Bell is fairly intensive with the LiPS program and the blocks with children with extremely low IQ. It’s very difficult for them to grasp that blocks represent phonemic sounds. Sometimes we’ll just say “We’ll give it a try.” We’ll always give it a try. I hate to turn anyone away. And there are tutors here that specialize or have a lot of background in Autism or in working with low IQ kids. We try to place the kids with the ones who have the expertise.

Is the institution for profit or non-profit?
We are non-profit. Our regular fee is on the website ($35) and covers the 60 minute tutoring session. If someone is on the phone and they say, “I cannot afford that”, or if someone starts in our program on the regular fee...and our regular fee is already one of the lowest in (our city) anyway for professional tutoring. These aren’t volunteers. We have a lot of Master’s degrees working here. These are professional educators.
tutoring your children and they’re skilled in a lot of different areas. We’re already inexpensive and we require two hours a week. There are a lot of companies where there’s a lot more involved money wise because it’s a higher hour ratio per week. Even if you’re in the program and the father is laid off, which we’ve had a lot of in the last two years, you can apply for what we call the Financial Assistance Program. It is a two page form and it’s based on household income and size. You have to have your previous year’s tax return. A good barometer of whether you’ll qualify is whether your child is on free or reduced lunch at school because the tiers that we use to determine the tutoring rate are based on the Federal Poverty Guidelines, which are what establish the free and reduced lunch guidelines. However we do have scenarios where, let’s say the sibling of a child that’s coming here is in Riley with leukemia and there are medical bills. So the parent looks on paper fine. So, it’s done on a case by case basis. There are three people who evaluate and it’s all kept confidential. You’re given it for thirty sessions. So your rate could be reduced from our normal rate to, let’s say, $15. We never give it away free. It’s in our charter. When --- and I started this we said everyone can come up with something. When you don’t pay for something…well I don’t want to go into the philosophical things of that. You’ll sign a contract that says your payments have to be kept current, you have to be supportive, you have to come in for that last five minutes, your child has to do the home assignments, your child has to be on time, and you can’t miss sessions. At the end of those thirty sessions, you can re-apply for that, but we definitely look because we have kids waiting for those slots. If we look and you haven’t taken it seriously, then we don’t want you in there. Now we subsidize that basically by, kind of the overhead that we always put aside every month from the income of the tutoring center. We set aside immediately for the Financial Assistance Program. So we’re self-funded to a degree but then we also get donations. Sometimes we write grants. Over the years we’ve had other sources of funding that come in and it adds to that. It makes it so we can add more people to that. In these last couple years, we’ve been inundated with requests for it. First of all the downtown free dyslexia clinic is no longer, as far as I know. You’ve lost that whole free service coupled with a recession.

Are there regulations or legal guidelines that tutoring clinics must follow? Well, when we started SES we had been here six years. We have always had regulations like confidentiality. We have to have professional liability insurance for everyone who works here. Rise Tutoring is covered by an umbrella policy. We have to have handicap accommodations. But as far as guidelines of what we tutor, no. Curriculum-wise we did not (before SES). In the next session we can get more into how holistic we
are here, but I love that we can look at test results and we can design an individualized program. Nobody is telling us. But when we got into SES that was a huge eye opener for me because we have three bosses, actually four, because it’s funded by No Child Left Behind we have all kinds of federal paperwork. The state is actually the one overseeing the program so all the data has to go to the state. There are so many things that have to be turned into the state. We get paperwork about this thick of rules every year. Now that has nothing to do with our core program here. That is all for what we do in the schools at the SES program. The parent is actually the one choosing us there, though. They’re saying, “I want the free tutoring” and they sign the contract. Then the district has a whole other set of rules. The district is the one that we invoice for these services. So, there are four entities, what an eye-opener. All of them have rules and some supersede the other people’s rules.

What are the teacher-to-student ratios? Are small group sessions ever used?
Here we always do one-on-one. We have tried small group summer reading programs before, but we are so built around the fact that all of our programs are individualized. We made it that we had to have a minimum of eight kids sign up so that we could then divide them into small groups. We didn’t want to have a fifth grader with a phonological processing problem in with a third grader who had a visual tracking issue. It didn’t work. We tried it for two summers and we tried two different approaches and it didn’t work. We have always stayed with one-on-one.

Now, with the SES program we are authorized by the state department of education to go anywhere from one to four. We never see three. Even with three, your progress drastically decreases, so we try for two in a group.

I- Do you feel like one of the reasons private tutoring is successful is because of the one-on-one versus even two or three in a group?

K- I think if you combine one-on-one with pre-testing. I think if you just had a child walk into you cold with no pre-testing, not using a research based program that was chosen for that child…I honestly don’t think it’s so much which program you pick and some learning centers are really like, “Our programs are the one.” It’s not so much which program you pick, it’s that you pick it for the child based on whether it’s a visual or auditory processing, memory, or attention. If you take that one-on-one and combine it with an individualized, targeted program, I think that’s the key. I’d almost say they’re half and half in a way. I think you could
take two children easily; I think you could even take three children, put them in a group and if they all three have the exact same pre-tested glitch in their system and you use the correct program, I think you could get almost as good as results. I totally believe in individualized feedback because some of the providers that we work with do computerized, so they put the children on with headphones and plug them in. Well that’s one-on-one in a way. The computer might say, “No that’s not right”, but it doesn’t say, “No that’s not right. Let’s try it this way” or “Did you notice that you made your mouth go /ch/ instead of /ph/.” A computer can’t do that. Just with the group, your feedback is reduced with a three-to-one. And your time on task which is something we really, really put a lot of extra work in for the SES program is gathering information on how to have high time on task because that’s the biggest problem that we see when we take it out of the one-on-one. But, it’s possible because we have developed a lot of things that are self-guided that are not worksheets but self-guided challenging things for the other child if the one child needs more instruction; something this child can do and be accountable in five minutes from now. There’s a goal to whatever it is he’s doing.

You look at this place and we usually run 65 to 70 kids enrolled here at the learning center. There’s a Tuesday/Thursday tutor in here and there’s a Monday/Wednesday tutor here. We also use the local libraries. We were going to expand maybe get a different facility, but we don’t want to get too much overhead. By using school buildings and libraries you avoid that. Since we’re not for profit, the library will let us be there.

What are the time frames (ex: 90 minute sessions, 3 times a week) for tutoring sessions and how are these determined?

I- Your website states that you have one hour sessions two times a week. You recommend thirty hours of tutoring and then you retest to determine if more is needed. Do you ever recommend more tutoring than that?

K- I would say easily 60%, more than half of the time the kids that come to our program continue. It’s by our recommendation. We are really honest with people because we have people waiting for a spot. The kind of learning center that we are, because we specialize in learning difficulties, those don’t magically go away. That’s why our motto is “Helping children overcome them” because we try to give them the strategies, the tools. Sometimes it’s compensating, sometimes it’s accommodations, sometimes it’s a matter of just getting them over this hump. It’s going to be something they are going to deal with their entire life. We tell parents in the consultation we recommend thirty because that’s a good point in which you will see progress and you don’t want to
stop at fifteen when the child’s just about to get over a hump. And there could be four more humps to cross and you don’t want the child to walk away thinking that the work they put into it wasn’t getting them anywhere because in the future when you suggest help, like getting to school before it starts for those extra math sessions, they’re gonna go, “NO, remember that time that I went to tutoring and it didn’t help me?” You always want the child to see the benefit so at thirty we almost always see a jump in post-test scores. I mean, I could show you post-test results that sometimes just blow me away. Most of the children who have an IEP, where they’ve been identified at school, I’d say almost all of our IEP kids will sign up for a second thirty. If the family can manage the funding and if it’s not too much work on top of the schoolwork. That’s probably the biggest roadblock that we face for continuation. The kids just can’t handle school homework load and coming to tutoring. And we always say to stop because we don’t want them to view tutoring as something like a tidal wave just over their head and they can’t breathe.

I-Do you ever have situations where kids come for more than two times a week or for longer than one hour?

K- Yes, in the summertime especially. We have three students right now who are coming three times a week just because summer is so short and they’re not in school. We’ll do up to two hour sessions. I’m working with a family from (a northern town) in a similar situation because it’s such a long drive. We use the (northern town) library. About four come to mind, (northern) students who we’ve worked with in that sense. (This northern town) is about a halfway point because there’s nothing up there for them to access. It becomes a situation then when we’re really dependent on the parent. Two of those four were homeschooled students. I could take four hours of out of session work with me. It takes me a long time to prep for that session because I have to take enough work for her to do. If you’re only going to do it once a week for two hours, she needs to do it for an hour or half-an-hour every day. We always try to go to the homeschool fair every year. They’re great because they can take Lindamood-Bell and incorporate it into their curriculum. To me, it’s a money loser which is why I think most tutoring clinics wouldn’t do it because you’re only billing for a two hour session and you’re prepping for about eight hours. You’re providing eight hours of instruction and this mom sits in on the whole two hour session. She wants to know how to give feedback and redirect so we are probably one of the few places that would actually agree to do that based on a two-hour tutoring rate fee. I feel like those parents don’t have any other choices.
I-Do you ever come across parents who feel like in today’s modern society, that if you can’t fix their kid in fifteen sessions then, they get frustrated?

K-We do but those are rare actually. I think that’s not because they don’t exist but because of how we market ourselves. First of all, we don’t “market” ourselves. If you look at our expense budget, our marketing is hardly anything. I think it’s our reputation, I should say. We are very holistic, you need to get involved as a parent. In the consultation that they get, we tell them very honestly “We look at these test results and your child is in seventh grade and we are coming up with a fourth grade reading level. We’re coming up with third grade phonological processing. We’re coming up with visual attention problems.” We show them that we can’t get all of this done. In the consultation we’ll usually say, “What one thing do you want us to prioritize for the first thirty sessions?” Reading almost always wins, so to speak, because reading affects every other subject in school. So we may go with reading and the two underlying things that are affecting the reading, such as phonological processing and decoding skills. Those may be the top three things and at the fifteen session mark, we’ve made a fairly big impact. We don’t do formal testing at fifteen sessions but sometimes the tutor will go in and just to a re-test on just those two places just to see. And if we see that we’re making some progress then we might add encoding, spelling to it. The encoding/spelling thing is going on in the first fifteen but we’ll bring more in. You will sometimes at fifteen sessions just have parents, and I hate to say this, but parents who typically come from --- where they’re very results based. You’ll hear such things as, “Well, he’s getting a B- in math and he still has a B- in math.” They just want the icing on the cake. Generally speaking, as the director, I personally call anyone who drops out before the thirty. If the file is turned into me and I didn’t make it to the thirty, I do a personal phone call and just say, “I’m sorry. I just want to ask. How did you feel about the tutoring?” I try to come up with wording that doesn’t cast blame on the tutor or them or the child, but I just want the feedback. In most cases, it’s because they couldn’t handle the way that we give home assignments in our tutoring program. They couldn’t handle the fact that there was accountability here in addition to accountability at the school. They want to drop the kid off and pick the kid up and they didn’t want that part. So I say, “Well, our program isn’t for everyone. There are others.” A lot of tutoring places don’t require outside things. It’s just the way we are. We used to try to be everything for everybody and we’ve come to a decision that we will make it work for everyone in ways such as driving
up to (the northern town) to meet the (northern) people. That kind of “making it work”, we will. But not compromising our core philosophy.

What is the average cost for tutoring sessions? (see “non-profit” question)

How is success measured? What assessments are used?
The pre-assessment is a combination of tests. We use the DTLA, the Detroit Test of Learning Aptitude. We use five components of that. We use two, almost like optometrist based visual tracking and visual attention type tests. They’re paper but they’re very simplistic because we’re just looking for that portion of a reading problem. We use the CELF for language fundamentals. It’s an evaluation not a test, a Clinical Evaluation of Language, so it’s mostly just hitting four high spots in the language area. This is mostly because we are trying to test so many things and we don’t want our testing to go over two and a half hours. We’ve talked about breaking our testing into two sessions but that becomes cumbersome and time consuming. So two and a half hours is about all we’ll go for older children. K-2 will finish the test in two hours with a break at the one hour mark. The older children, it takes about two and half hours to go through all of it. We also use tests that are geared toward the programs we use. We use the LACT, which is the Lindamood-Bell intro test. We use the TAAS and TVAS which are older tests but they just get right to it and are still good. We use the TAAS, which is basically a phonemic segmenting and phonemic awareness program. Those give you the starting point. So those aren’t so much to give the parents a level, they’re more to say here’s where to enter the program. We use the GORT for reading rate, fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. Those tell us where to enter for our Read Naturally program, and to some extent LiPS.

I- So do you re-administer those tests at the end of the thirty sessions?

K- We do, but only the ones that were below age level. For some of the children that come in here, three-fourths of the test was below age level. Then we only do the ones that were below age level AND that we targeted during the tutoring.

How is student growth reported to parents?

I- You had mentioned that parents come in the last five minutes and you go over skills that were incorrect during tutoring and also to praise things they did well. Are there any other types of formal reports given to parents throughout the sessions?
K- They get the copy of the pretesting report. They get a daily, kind of progress report every day. It just tells them what we worked on in a very short version, and tells what they need to work on at home. Sometimes with kids that may have behavior issues or attitude issues, we’ll have three sets of eyes and the tutor makes a smile or a straight across or tears. We can then quickly get across the behavior without discussing it in front of the children. We tell the parents that if they want to discuss anything in depth about the child that they need to call the tutor outside the session. Unless it’s to walk in with the report card and discuss positives. Positive is always welcome. But anything negative where it could be stress inducing, we try to keep outside the session. As far as paper copies, no. On the thirtieth, we redo it and the evaluation sheet has two columns. You have your pre-test scores over here and your post-test results are logged over here. Either the parent stays after on the thirtieth or is contacted by phone, because of not wanting to talk in front of the child. Now with high school kids that can be different. But with high school kids you can get really huge gaps in learning and it can be really harsh for a 10th grader to be sitting there and you say, “Look, you went from fifth grade to seventh grade level.” And you don’t want to go there no matter what the maturity level of the child is. So we try to set up a phone conference or separate meeting. In a lot of the cases they go on so you are re-upping for the next thirty sessions. So all is really needed is an informal meeting. The parents themselves fill out a one page (and this is, I think, just priceless) evaluation of our program at the end. It has seven questions. You rate how you thought your child responded in a variety of ways, emotionally and others. It has suggestions for making our programs better. We ask if they would agree to be a reference for our program. I’m amazed how few people ask for references but I think it’s because a high percentage of people are recommended here from other people. It’s funny because the middle almost always says we need a bigger parking lot.

Do families sign a contract? If so what is included?
I- When you were talking about the financial assistance program, you said parents sign a contract saying that payments must be current, they must be supportive, come in the last five minutes, do home assignments, be on time, can’t miss sessions. Do all parents sign a similar contract?

K- All of those elements are in both contracts, but people who are here with the financial assistance, their contract at the bottoms says, “You will lose your financial assistance if this is not adhered to.” Our regular contract says, “You can be dismissed from our program.” So there’s a bigger risk to those receiving financial assistance if they don’t follow through.
I- So there doesn’t sound like there’s any pay in advance.

K- We have gone to a warning letter if there is a problem with that. The letter states that they need to start prepaying. That is so rare. It doesn’t usually happen. If there is a financial problem, I take it on and call and ask if they need to take a break. The same way you don’t want the tutoring program to be a burden to the child, you don’t want the program to be a burden to the parent. You want it to be perceived as something that’s doable. I’ll ask if they want to apply for the financial assistance program or do they want to take a break. I don’t want it to be a burden because their negativity is going to come across to the child.

Is there any training or support offered to parents?

We don’t and that is something that we have considered getting into, but at this point we do not. The parents in our sessions here are expected to come in to the last five minutes. You can drop off at the beginning and the child can just come in straight from the parking lot, but at the end you need to, if your appointment is from nine to ten, you’re supposed to be here at 9:55. You can sit in the whole session if you like and we actually have had parents who will stay every now to get a feel for how to do it. Because we give home assignments. I tell parents that “Your kid’s going to progress at a quicker pace and we’ll get more done for your money if we do it for an hour and then you go home and do it for an hour on the off day. Then we’ll do it on Thursday and you do it on Friday.” Some parents really love that and embrace it and other parents do not. So we go with whatever flow is there. When you talk about the kids and the parents, when the parent comes in at the end, usually what I’ll do is save the thing that was the most difficult for the child during the session and I will save that and say, “We’re going to redo that at the end”. So that when the parent is here we redo that. We do that mostly so that I can model for the parent how to respond to the child’s errors because to me that is the biggest deal of why, when a parent works with the child at home, things aren’t working right. It’s because the feedback isn’t correct. Also with praise, you can have all the things out and say, “Look, he progressed through this level.” (We have a lot of levels built into the things we do here.) So, “He got through level 3. He got through level 3. He got through this level. He got through that level. Well this was still tricky. This is going to be what you’re going to work on at home.” So the only case in which we don’t get that parent interaction is if we are working in the school. But then once a week, there’s a phone consultation with the parent.

I- With the SES?
K-Not with SES. But also with our core program here, with the parochial schools we can go in. The allow us to do pull-out.

I- Let’s talk about that. I saw that on your website. So mostly private schools?

K- We used to be able to do it in public until everything got so standards based. We would pull from like the DARE program or library time or something like that. Now it’s mostly in parochial. In some public schools we can go an hour before. (A local school district) doesn’t start until 9:05 so we can go in and work with the child from 8-9 at school because it’s not interfering with the standard curriculum. A parent has to drop off early. We don’t offer after school programs at the public schools outside of SES mostly because all of our tutors are tied up here or SES.

I- I love the component of having parents come in so you can model the correct language to use.

K- Yes. Sometimes parents come in and they say, “I can’t believe how well he works for you.” And I say, “It’s because you’re the parent and you have the unconditional love scenario going on. They can behave any way they want with you because tomorrow they’re going to wake up and you’re still going to love them. And when I’m working with them, they’re vying for my approval and affection.” I honestly think the other thing, in modern society, why tutoring works so well now is because people are just running (and as a parent I’m guilty of this myself), people are running in a million different directions. No one ever sits down and just stares at a kid for one hour and completely pays attention in a closed in room with no other stimulus and with the phone not ringing. I mean, it just doesn’t happen in our society. To the kid, it’s like you and I going to the spa and having a one hour massage. You know, that total shut down of all interruption and just having that. That may not carry over so much at school. The biggest complaint I hear from teachers that work here as tutors is all the interruptions in their classroom, all the interruptions in the school. Nobody can actually sit and focus for any period of time because there’s too much going on.

I- Do you feel like the school’s attitude toward private tutoring has changed in the ten years?

K- That’s an interesting question. I would say yes. I think this because they know they can’t do it all. We are adamant that we work with the schools. The first thing that happens after the parent fills out the student
information form, it says “Can we contact the teacher?” Then we send a letter to the teacher and they sign off so we are allowed to go back and forth with information. I’d say about a quarter of the time we’ll get a call or an e-mail from the teacher. We do not have an advocate service here. Several parents have pressured us to do advocacy, but it’s not our niche. I want it to always be, how can we work together?

What are the qualifications of tutors? What type of training do they receive?
For all tutors who work in the core program here or the SES school programs, you have to have a four year college degree and you have to be able to pass a full criminal history background check. For the school program, you need to have that plus a minimum of one year classroom or some type of working in a school experience. Here at the center we require one year experience working with children in some setting but it doesn’t necessarily have to be classroom. We get tutors who are half day guidance counselors, tutors who have degrees in speech therapy, my degree is in psychology, we have special ed., but we don’t require an education degree. Because of the one on one nature, the financial part of it is limiting in that you are really only going to be able to hire part-time employees. The tutoring business right now should be just thanking God because of our economy right now and the way hiring is for teachers. I have eight awesome resumes on my desk right now for a part-time position. That has not always been the case. Up until about two years ago, it was very difficult to find a college degreed, good professional tutor who wanted to work ten hours a week for what a tutoring position pays. Because of the one on one nature, I’m only billing X amount of dollars per session, so there’s a cap on what I can pay that tutor. Plus there’s a cap on what the tutor’s going to make a week. You’re limited on who’s going to take that job. But, I also think there are tutoring companies and clinics who will cut corners because college students are so anxious to get experience. It can be a good fit. But when parents call in, they will ask what the qualifications of your tutors are. Some of them only want a tutor that has an education degree and has the certification by the state of Indiana. So we will assign that child to someone who has those specifications. But let me tell you that of all the tutors that come through here, those are not the tutors that are always the best. It’s more of a natural gift for instruction and being able to relate to a child. However, there is a lot to be said about the training that teachers receive. Education has become much more scientific. One good thing about NCLB is that it has professionalized education with its accountability. We get people who can use terms like phonemic awareness.
Everyone here starts at the same pay, whether you have a Master's or a Doctorate or twenty years or one year of experience. Everyone goes through the same training. Our training, the last time I looked, takes about forty hours. Now that isn't eight to five, sitting down all in one week. We put it over time, mostly because our trainer also tutors so she can't do five eight-hour days. I also don't believe that learning takes place in that way best. You have to be trained in all three LiPS programs, Read Naturally, all of our math programs. The Specialty Tutoring Manual is about this thick and has all of the things that we do for memory, attention, Metronome work, visual-auditory processing, all that we do for the kids. And you're only paid minimum wage for the training. At the interview, I'm always very forthright with them in that they are only getting paid $7.50 an hour. But those three Lindamood trainings that they get are $495 a piece the last time I looked. We've had the school system approach us about doing Lindamood-Bell training and I've said no because the rules as I understand them are that I can only train people that I am going to directly supervise. I am not licensed to go out and do other Lindamood-Bell training. I always tell people that come here if you are willing to go through the forty hours at minimum wage, that is something you can carry with you throughout your life.

We also give individualized training with every client that you take on. We used to try to give all the disability training up front. So if you get an Asperger's kid, do this. If you get an ADHD kid, do this. Well, that was way too much to hold without a warm body, it didn't work. So now, you get your first four clients and then the trainer sits down with you, goes through the pretest results, helps you do all your goals and objectives, helps you do your lesson planning. They then directly talks about that human being who has a disability and tells you how to manage your session. The training is ongoing because it might be eight or nine months down the road when you get your first child with an Auditory Processing Disorder. So we'll wait until then, and the trainer will sit in on that first session and say, “Okay, did you see how you had to have eye contact, how you needed to repeat, how you had to have accountability?” So the training is ongoing and we do two staff developments per year. In fact, we are going to have an IPFW psychology professor coming and give a two hour presentation on memory. Memory is one of the hardest things for all of us here. He's going to specialize it because we wrote down the questions. Things like, “Why does a child sound out a word in sentence one and then six sentences later that exact same word comes up and it's like he never saw it before? Explain that to us.” We sent him some of the programs that we're using and asked him to explain to us why a certain program may not be working. We try to get one in-house staff development and one, like the LDA conference, outside. We've
sent people to Diane Kraft, who specializes in the right/left brain and the balance and connecting them. They then come back and we have a staff meeting and they then present. We can’t afford to send everyone to the workshop but one person goes and then comes back and presents. That is how you really stay interested in your job. We don’t have the umbrella that schools have with money. Now we sometimes get tutors who want nothing to do with that. They want a job where they just show up. At {a certain center}, they have someone who pre-pulls all of the stuff for the tutor. They pull the worksheets and levels so when that tutor walks through the door, all of the stuff has been pulled by probably a minimum wage clerical assistance. They don’t have to do the creative thinking. They don’t have to lie in bed at night, like I do, and think about what I can do to make a certain child get it. That stuff is always going on. I only want someone to work here, though, whose heart is really in it and who doesn’t mind all the individual responsibility here. We’re not just showing up and putting little pegs into a hole in an assembly line.

Do students ever come during the typical school day?
We have done pull-out at the parochial private schools. But it is in one hour sessions twice a week. So it is not like pulling your child out for half days five days a week. We would do it for the entire school year, so we’re looking at 72 hours. So with a program that is set up every day for four hours, they could get done in four weeks what would take us a year. But if you take into consideration that our parents are supposed to be working one to two hours a week at home, you’ve doubled what I just said. I have two comments to make about that. First of all, as a parent I feel like I am the boss of my kid and I don’t like it when I want to take my child out of school to what I think is a valuable experience during the school day and I get a letter from the school telling me that was a bad choice on my part. However, if I feel like that parent has the right to remove their child from the traditional public school setting without repercussions, but I do not in any way think that the school should have to pay for that. The school is offering to school their child in the only manner that is affordable to that school with public school funding. I would support the decision if those parents want to take them out and if the parents can figure out how they are going to make up all of the other classes. I guess you could do summer school. I do also agree that if that child is reading anything more than two years below grade level and you going to put a seventh grade science textbook in front of them, what is the point there? I guess you could provide books on tape and extra modifications to that child. It seems like the school would be better served to say, “Yes, take him out and get his reading level up and then bring him back and put him in summer school.” It’s all about cooperation and we talked about this last time. The people from the
tutoring center need to sit down with the school and say, “How can we make this a win-win?” When you push people to the wall, though, that’s not how it’s going to go. So, from a philosophical viewpoint, I think it should be allowed. I think it would be in the school’s best interest. I wish that the public schools and charter schools that are starting to come would be smart to say that if a parent wants to pay for an individualized program that has been approved (like the IDOE has approved us [for SES]) they could. There should be tutoring centers that could go to the state, get approved, and then the school could place those kids. We tried to work with the people who oversee the special ed in Lutheran schools. I tried to convince them that we should work together. I would write a grant and they should allow us to come in as an outside factor and be their special ed providers because we have amazing programs that we can tailor. I could not convince them that it was a doable thing. Schools would be, in my opinion, with the lack of funding that there is, if you could get just for special ed kids who truly can’t read... In some schools there isn’t even one-on-one literacy help past the third grade. They may give you accommodations like reading to you or fewer spelling words but they don’t actually teach you how to read.

What positive things does your center do that could be incorporated into a public school?
I would say more of a team effort, but the problem becomes that there is so much red tape and how you use the time and how much time is in pull-out. I have been approached and asked to personally go over and give a workshop to the special education teachers on visual or auditory processing. In other words, can you share your experience with them because they are school employees. They don’t want outside employees. But that’s why we so jumped on the SES program because it’s a chance to get into the schools and make a difference. The schools are missing out on the fact that a lot of these parents would pay, they don’t necessarily have to find the funding. There are people who would pay to have their child individually tutored during the school day. There are people like us who could go out and write grants for the kids who can’t afford it. We could get a grant to say we’re going to go into this school system to these kids on free and reduced lunch that are proven on paper to have a learning disability. They have been tested by your school psychologist. It wouldn’t even cost the schools money because we are bringing the money in or the parents are paying for it. It’s just because of all the paperwork. What I see with charter schools is that that may eventually come to pass. If a school becomes more like a business, business people think about how can I do more with my money? In more of a private sector, they are thinking about where they can get someone to pay for this or can we charge a parent? Which is
okay, as long as someone is out there like us trying to get grant money for the kids that can’t afford that because then you’ll have more of a separation between rich and poor.
Appendix C: The Orton-Gillingham Center Interview
(I=Interviewer, S=Sam)

What are the reading programs used by tutoring clinics?
I- On the website, it was very specific in that you are remediating individuals with dyslexia using Orton-Gillingham [hereafter labeled as OG]. Do you have any other programs?

S- No, just OG. OG is really an approach, not a method. So the difference is that OG is very individualized for each individual student. It’s very prescriptive and diagnostic so every session that we have we’re looking at what the student knows and doesn’t know, what they’ve mastered and what they haven’t mastered. Then we design the next lesson based on their performance on the previous lesson. Whereas a method is day one, we’re going to do this. Day two, we’re going to do this no matter how the student has mastered the material. So everything is based on prior knowledge, what the student knows and doesn’t know, and then growing from that.

I don’t like the word tutoring actually. We’re really reading therapy. And there’s such a difference between tutoring and therapy. People look at it as when you come and work with somebody, they think of it as tutoring. What we do here is therapy.

I- So what would a typical session look like?

S- A typical OG session is based around decoding and encoding as a couple of the principles. But it incorporates all aspects of reading. It’s not only decoding and encoding, but it’s fluency, comprehension, vocabulary building. A typical session would be close to an hour in length. Mine are an hour long. They would have components of phonemic awareness if needed. They would include three specific drills. There’s a visual drill, a blending drill, and an auditory drill. There would be a word review section that includes aspects of language that were previously taught including single syllable, multi-syllable phrases and sentences. There are all kinds of things we do in that grouping as far as fluency work. There would be a spelling component, a dictation component. There’s going to be oral reading. There is going to be a section on irregular words. Also a section on writing. So you might have some written expression depending on where the student is in the program.
Are there requirements in order to qualify for tutoring? For example, must a student be functioning two grade levels behind?

I- Do you only work with students who have been diagnosed with dyslexia?

S- Primarily. I specifically try to work with a primary diagnosis of dyslexia. Now, I don’t necessarily have to have a diagnosis from a neurological center to work with somebody. If a school has tested a student and they come up with average intelligence and they have a deficit in the area of reading, most likely it’s dyslexia that the child is dealing with. I’ll look at IQ and standard scores as far as their reading, writing, and spelling and then I’ll make a determination of if I’m going to work with them or not.

I- So would you ever turn a student away?

S- Sure. Well, at my clinic I would because I’m focusing on dyslexia; that’s my specialty. There is such a huge need. I’ve worked with kids that have autism but it’s not my specialty. I mean, can you be dyslexic and have autism? Yes. So of the kids I’ve worked with, some of them have worked out okay. Dyslexia is kids with average intelligence or above so if someone comes in with a low IQ of 55 or 60, I may not choose to work with them because dyslexia is not the primary issue. I have worked with that low of IQ before so it depends on if the parents have an understanding of how big of gains we’re expecting in the process and we’ll talk about that.

Is the institution for profit or non-profit?

For profit.

Are there regulations or legal guidelines that tutoring clinics must follow?

Not that I’m aware of. My teachers have to have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree. They don’t necessarily have to be teachers but it’s helpful because I’ve found that understanding how to write lesson plans and understanding the whole concept of a lesson plan is very helpful. The teachers that I’ve trained typically have a really good rapport with the students, whereas someone that doesn’t have that background may not. So it’s helpful, but it’s not necessary. Especially in this field because it’s unique and very specialized where it’s not promoted in public schools. It’s really unfortunate that a clinic like this needs to exist. But it’s unfortunately absolutely necessary. For many reasons: for educating school districts, for educating college professors to understand this area. I think dyslexia is the number one literacy problem we have. Teacher education has to start at the university level.
What are the teacher-to-student ratios? Are small group sessions ever used?
In my clinic, everything is one-on-one. I have taught small groups and I do at a certain school. They’re not as effective as the one-on-one. Working with someone with dyslexia using this approach, a couple things should be done. It should be one-on-one and it should be done every day. Those are really two key components. Can it be done in a group? Yes. Does it work in a group? Yes. Can it be done in a classroom level? Yes. The whole three-tiered approach to remediating someone who struggles, this should be taught at the classroom level. When I talk about that, it’s really about teaching the structure of the English language. It’s taught from individual sound-symbol relationships, everything in isolation and then built into the syllable structure of the language. Syllable structure meaning there’s only six syllable types at the basic level. Then eventually getting into your advanced prefixes, roots, suffixes, Greek combining forms. So that’s totally opposite of what has been going on in most of our schools. In most of our schools everything has been taught from the whole and then brought down the opposite way. There needs to be a sequence and everything needs to be taught in isolation. It needs to be built into the language and a sequence needs to be followed so you cover everything. And the more important thing is that the students that you are working with are mastering what is taught.

Dyslexia is mild to severe. A lot of people say there are all types of dyslexia and that’s not true. There is just one type of dyslexia, it’s just mild to severe in its diagnosis and how it comes out in each child. A lot of people get confused with error patterns. There are eight different error patterns that somebody with dyslexia might make. They might reverse their b’s and d’s. They might invert letters or delete letters. They might mispronounce words. So a lot of people think that those are the different types of dyslexia. I look at mild where you might need to show something to a student maybe fifty times before they really master it as compared to someone who is really severe who may need to see it 1500 times.

I- You had mentioned that you go into schools?

S- I do. I teach at (a local Montessori) School. I’m their person who works with the kids that have dyslexia and I also coach the teachers. The teachers are using this at the classroom level. Then they’re using it in small groups and I come in and work with the more severe students.

I- So do you think that would work in a public school?
S- It can.

I- Why don’t they do it then?

S- It would be simple. I spent four years on the Fort Wayne school board and I don’t understand why. I guess the reason is because they don’t want to and they don’t have to yet. You know, everyone complains about accountability laws but I’m one that was glad to see No Child Left Behind come out. (A local school district), for example, has 32,000 students. When I was on the school board, over 6,000 were in special education. A huge majority of those kids had average intelligence and just struggled with reading. So they weren’t getting the type of instruction they needed to be successful. It can very easily be done in the classroom. We did it in the classroom. We did it at (a local high school) where the incoming freshmen were all tested. Over 50% of those kids were reading at an elementary level. So they were put into an English class but the teachers taught the OG approach to those students. They were making three to four years growth in one year by taking that class. So there it shows it can work at the classroom level. But the more severe kids you get, eventually you’ll need to work with them one-on-one. But if it was done at the classroom level, as the classroom approach, you would hit a lot of the kids that have milder issues with this because you’d be teaching them the things they needed to be taught and how they need to be taught. It’s got to be very multi-sensory. They need to see it. They need to hear it. They have to trace it. There has to be movement. It has to be all the components at once for them to really internalize it.

C- Have you tried to work with any of the universities in the area to incorporate OG into their teacher training programs?

K- Yes. Actually I was going to teach a course at (a local university). They were very open to the concept of teaching the course. That was through the Masonic Center and the whole practicum was such a lengthy practicum that it makes it difficult for a graduate level student to do that. So it ended up not working out. (A different local university) didn’t even entertain the idea because it was so different from what (the local school district) was doing in the classroom. So they didn’t want to be opposite to what that was. There are a lot of universities where this is being taught around the country. And that’s through the Masonic Centers that really got that going.
What are the time frames (ex: 90 minute sessions, 3 times a week) for tutoring sessions and how are these determined?
I- You said you meet for one hour, but how many times per week?

S- If you look at the history of the OG approach, a typical session is usually 45 minutes to an hour long. I don’t know how they do it in 45. I can barely do it in an hour. So typically we meet two to three times per week. I would say most students meet twice a week. That’s just economics. It’s expensive to do private tutoring. I would say most of my students would stay with us up to two years. It’s year round. We don’t stop during the summer. It’s every week throughout the year.

I- On the website, you had said something about evaluating and then using the same testing to determine academic growth at the end of the school year.

S- Yes, so what I do is test each student coming in using standardized tests whenever they come in. I have students come in throughout the year. Nine months to a year time frame is a good time frame to retest students. You should use the same standardized testing but different forms. That gives you a good basis for what type of growth they’re making. Each session, again, you’re seeing the growth as far as what type of growth they’re making individually. It takes awhile. What we’re using, it’s five different levels of language that we’re working through. It really takes time to make it through the second level. Once you make it through the second level then you’re going to see pretty significant jumps on the standardized testing. So if you test before that time, you’ve only covered a couple of the syllable types and you’re not going to see the gains you would if you wait a certain length of time. It’s good to do the pretest/posttest thing every year so you see what types of gains you’re making. It holds you accountable; it holds everybody accountable that this approach is working. I work closely with the (city) Neurological Center. They test a lot of the kids, pretests and posttests. They’ll test the kids every six months. They feel if you’re making a month’s growth for a month’s worth of tutoring, that’s really good. Most of my students make at least two months per month, if not more. It’s really good to make sure that you’re seeing those types of gains.

I- It seems like in today’s society, everyone wants a quick fix. And I know that parents come in and their kids have severe learning deficits. Do you have a hard time convincing parents that this is going to take time?

S- Not really because once students get through the first month or so, then they see what’s happening and they start to see the changes. The
students are the best champions for the cause because they tell the parents what’s happening, and the parents start to see it. It’s hard work and I tell the parents that this isn’t a summer tutoring job. If you’re bringing your child here for the summer and just for the summer, I’m not going to work with them. If you’re planning on remediating your child’s deficits then this is the place to come. Otherwise, you can go waste your money somewhere else.

**What is the average cost for tutoring sessions?**
Here at my clinic, it’s $40 an hour which is very reasonable considering our knowledge and experience.

I- Definitely and coupled with the fact that you are working with such an extreme group of students. Some places work with students who just need an extra boost or homework help.

S- You’ll have parents ask if they can bring their homework in. Absolutely not. Every hour is laid out to the nth degree as far as what we’re going to do and how we’re going to do it. One of Anna Gillingham’s sayings was, “Go as fast as you can but as slow as you have to.” You want to do as much as you can in that time frame and not overload the student. It’s very specific to their deficits in reading, writing, spelling, written expression, organizational skills, time and space issues. Typically with my students, sometimes math is a real strong point and sometimes it’s not. But we don’t do any math here.

I- So it’s a true reading clinic.

S- Right. What I find is that their math scores go up usually higher than the reading scores. So when (the city) Neuro is re-evaluating the kids, typically their math scores go way up as well. You’re really retraining how kids’ minds are working. If you would do fMRI’s before and after, you would see the blood flow in the brain has changed. There are eye doctors that are big on eye tracking. That’s silly; there’s nothing wrong with the eyes, there’s nothing wrong with the ears. Dyslexia is what happens within the brain, the processing and internalizing of the information. Of course if they have a major issue with the eyes, they can wear glasses…or if there is a major tracking problem. But when someone is saying tracking is going to help remediate something, that’s just silly.

**How is success measured? What assessments are used?**
I- You had mentioned that each session is diagnostic and prescriptive. Is that just because of your extensive experience with OG and you can
kind of feel where the kids are or do you administer some type of actual assessment?

S- When you’re doing all the drill work and you’re doing the reading and the spelling, you are assessing very specific components. So if I’m doing a visual drill and it’s certain letters that we’re working on, are they making errors when they’re reading them. Are they making errors when they spell these words and what type of errors are they making? You’re looking at what’s happening during the session with the material that you’re using. So you’re trying to get them to mastery. If you just think of your basic consonants and vowels, we’re going to start out with the short vowels and the closed syllable pattern. So if you’re going through a visual drill and you were doing those 26 letters, did they make any errors as they’re looking at the letters and saying the sounds? Did they make any errors when I gave them the sound and they had to produce the letter? Did they make any errors when they were reading individual words and then words in context? What kinds of errors do they make? So you’re looking at every specific thing they do in regards to that aspect of it.

Now the standardized testing you can only do so often. The major standardized testing that we use are the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test, Test of Written Spelling, the GORT 4, the CTOPP, and the Tower.

How is student growth reported to parents?

I- You had also mentioned on the website that parents are provided with regular reports and feedback. Is that just verbal when they come in or do they actually get something written?

S- Each student gets a notebook and whenever they learn new material, it’s put in the notebook. Major concepts are put in the notebook. So when the parents come in, we talk about what was taught that day and what they may need to review. There’s not a lot of homework in this because, number one, you’d have to train the parents. When you’re reading with a student, it should be very specific. In our reading, we eliminate any guessing, which Reading Recovery has just done nightmarish things to our kids. Some of the things that they would always do was say, “Look at the picture”, “Start to use all these context clues”, “Skip over the word and what do you think it is?”, or “Look at the beginning of the word and then guess what it is.” Whereas with us, there’s no guessing here. Everything is controlled. We use a lot of very specific controlled readers. The big argument was that that was not good literature. Well, no it’s not, you’re right. But it’s what this child
needs in order to learn to read. And once they can read, then they can read good literature. You can’t put the cart before the horse.

**Do families sign a contract? If so what is included?**
I don’t have any contracts. My philosophy is, if I’m not doing a great job then you can go somewhere else. I’m not going to hold you back from doing that. I don’t lose very many people.

I- It seems like the program would sell itself.

S- From a business aspect, you have to watch that people are paying and stay on top of that. I’ve been bit a few times for pretty good amounts because I’ve let people continue tutoring and not keep up with the payments.

I- How long has The O-G Center been in existence?
S- Since July of 2006.

I- How do you get clients? Is it all word of mouth?

S- I do have a website. Most of my clients are by word of mouth. You have different doctors that will recommend places. Neurological centers are where a lot of kids get tested and they’ll recommend certain places around town. I think word of mouth is a big thing as far as parents talking about the success of their kids. I get a lot of referrals from teachers that have kids in their classroom that know they need extra help. There’s just no way they can do it the way things are going right now.

**Is there any training or support offered to parents?**
I don’t have any type of formalized training for parents and I don’t offer any support groups. But I do spend a lot of time talking to them on the phone, when they come in, when they come out about what’s happening.

I- Because you’ve had a child that has gone through this as well.

S- Yes, he’s in college now. I do think there’s a place for some type of support group, but I haven’t had time.

I- Would you consider yourself as a place that offers advocacy services? I know on the website it said something about going to IEP meetings.
S- Right. I will go to IEP meetings. I will write IEP’s how they’re supposed to be written. Whether they’re accepted or not depends on how much the parents want to fight the school system. I’ve been to mediations before. I’ve been in court before. I’ll do whatever. It’s not my favorite thing to do but when a school system is not teaching something or supporting something it’s pretty difficult for them to change and understand your perspective that it’s what these kids need. It’s frustrating. The next thing I will do is open a school. I want to open a school specifically for children with dyslexia. I’ve been to Kildonan and some of the big schools on the east coast. They really take it on. The unfortunate thing is that it’s so expensive. You’re looking at a private school.

I- Do you think you could open a charter school?

S- That’s a possibility now.

I- Do you ever work with adults?

S- Yes. Not too often, but I have. Financially for the adults, it’s usually a lot tougher. Everyone wants to say that poverty is the number one issue, but I think that a lot of dyslexics end up in poverty and a lot in jail. Unfortunately we only see the ones that are very successful. Poverty and dyslexia go hand in hand. When I was on the board, one frustrating thing the educators or the newspapers would say was that it was the parents fault. It’s not the parent’s fault. It’s the educational systems fault. When a child comes to kindergarten and they can’t read, it’s our job to teach them. I’d say because you taught the parents as well and they can’t read either. You didn’t teach the parents how to read, how are the parents going to be responsible for teaching these kids how to read? And there are, of course as you know, major issues as far as discipline where the parents need to be involved. And even here, they need to be consistent. I don’t have them do things at home. So on the educational end I’m not holding them accountable and my kids do great. So that says something about the role of parents. But they do have to get them here consistently. In some big urban schools the kids don’t even show up or they have a really bad attitude.

What are the qualifications of tutors? What type of training do they receive?

I- So you don’t have anyone here without a bachelor’s degree though it doesn’t have to be in education. What type of training do they receive once they’re hired?
To learn the OG approach, it typically takes about 45 hours of classroom work. So there’s quite a bit of training to be done initially to learn the approach. Then the real key is not only to go through the course (and some are shorter, some are only 30 hours), but the real key with this approach is to work somewhere where you can be supervised with somebody who can tell you if you’re doing the approach correctly or not. My background comes from that type of training. We had 45 hours of initial training. We had a 100 hour practicum and then I’ve gone on to do advanced level training which is an additional 45 hours of classroom work, additional practicums, teacher training courses to be able to train teachers. I think the training has been very thorough and comprehensive.

Do students ever come during the typical school day? There are certain students who really need intensive all day instruction. Here we don’t take them out of school. Sometimes we see them before school. I’ve had kids here at 7 o’clock in the morning. Typically it’s after school. Or we get a lot of kids that are homeschooled. Here’s an issue where they didn’t fit in so the parents finally just took them out. Homeschoolers you can do different times during the day.

If you could incorporate elements that are successful here into a public school, what would they be? Well, in the general classroom, the gen. ed. room, every teacher would be teaching the structure of the language. Similar to what we do but at the classroom level. So everything would be taught in isolation. Everything would then be built into the syllable structure. There would be controlled readers. Spelling would be taught the same. You’re teaching the structure of the language. Then if the teachers see that some of these kids aren’t grasping it like the other kids, then those kids are put into small group with a little more specialized, intensive instruction. Then when small group is not enough, you’ve got to go to one-on-one. So the whole concept of the OG approach needs to be brought in at the classroom level and then filtered down eventually into special education. And it would be successful. You wouldn’t have the need for all the state academic testing. That would just go away because you’d have a 90% success rate in your school at least, or more. Then you have to understand that not all teachers can teach this because they themselves may be dealing with dyslexia. Or they may not be able to grasp these concepts. So you may need to move them to a different area or remove them altogether. When I train teachers, you know the ones who will be successful and the ones who are going to really struggle with it. It’s just a whole foreign concept to them and very difficult. So there’s a lot of components and it can work. If it were
taught at the classroom level, you would make huge strides. A lot of times we’re just talking about the basic aspect of the language, but by the time you’re at the third or fourth grade you could really be teaching prefixes, roots, suffixes, and the Greek combining forms. The language always gets criticized for being so unusual or not very well organized, but it really is. Eighty-seven percent of our language is phonetically correct. Everybody wants to focus on the tough irregular words. So if we teach the structure the way that this approach teaches it at the classroom level, then bring it down into small groups, and then individual we could meet most of the needs of even the dyslexic population with public education. If my child had a special education teacher that was trained I probably wouldn’t be here.
Appendix D: The Duncan Center Interview
(I-Interviewer, C=Carol)

What are the reading programs used by tutoring clinics?
We don’t use something specific, like Orton-Gillingham or Lindamood-Bell. There is an extensive research and development program through (headquarters) and we update those based on state standards across the board. We start with an assessment, which is a skills assessment. In reading, we’re really looking at what phonics skills they have, how many sight words they have, what their oral fluency is, what their oral comprehension is, what their word meanings are, and what their comprehension skills are. Wherever they fall is where we start. Then we have materials that teach those skills, so they are skill driven. At the end of so many hours, we retest to see can they perform those skills, and we benchmark them forward. And actually, we benchmark them forward after every hour. We look to see how did they do, do we need to do it again, do we need to do some preliminary skills so they get that, or do we jump ahead or just move ahead? I don’t want to say it’s labor intensive in that way but after every hour, we look to see what is the next lesson? We have a long-term goal of them being at or above grade level, but then we have medium goals and then short term goals, such as what they need to do this hour.

I- So are those programs designed at Duncan Center Headquarters?
C- No, we design them here.

Are there requirements in order to qualify for tutoring? For example, must a student be functioning two grade levels behind? Will you take any student?
We won’t take any student. There is some common sense involved in it. I would say the greatest qualifier would be a parent’s realistic goal. For example, years ago we had a mom that came to The Duncan Center and said, “I have a boy in third grade, special ed., low ability level. All I want you to do is help him practice these fifty words. If he can just remember these fifty words, I’ll be happy.” My eyebrows (on the inside) just went up. I mean, really, you’re going to pay us just to practice those fifty words? After two or three more dip in conversations, we agreed together just to give it a try. Not only did he remember those fifty words, but he learned 100 more. So when he went back to school, the mother and I met with the teacher within the first two weeks of school, and she almost burst into tears. It was that overwhelming to her that this student could do that.
Most learning centers, including The Duncan Center, work with what I call “typical kids”. You could have come to Duncan. I would come to Duncan. I would say less than 10% and maybe even less than 5% of our children are labeled. So kids come to us for remediation. Yes, they’re behind. Who knows how it happened? It could be 100 different things. But that fifth grade teacher can’t, within the classroom, bring that one kiddo to where they need to be. They have to teach the fifth grade standards. The opposite end of the spectrum is what do you do with that sixth grade student who is ready for algebra? So yes, we do that as well. And then the group in the middle, I call them the “discombobulated”. They really have the skills, they just can’t get themselves together to apply it with any consistency.

I- You also do SAT prep and things like that?

C- The gamut would be: we teach children how to read, which for our purposes we’ll call “beginning reading”. It’s not about age, it’s about what they know. For us, they would need to mostly know their letter recognition. Then that would stem and move toward to what I would call “academic reading”. That could be any age. It could be a college student or an elementary student or anything in between. That could spin into what I’ll call “writing”. You really read well and you have good vocabulary, but we want to work on the process of getting your thoughts on paper, and some capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and maybe some vocabulary would be in there as well. Or you could take that reader and move them into study skills: organization, time management, learning style, note-taking, test-prep, listening skills. Maybe it’s working on your rate of reading. You read well, but maybe you don’t read well quickly. We also have K-12 math, algebra, homework support help. And then that can move to SAT, ACT help and we do do homework support as well.

I- So the students can bring their homework?

C- It is all dependent upon what a parent’s goal is. There are some parents who say, “I’m not going to pay you to help them with their homework. I’ll help them with their homework.” And there is the other side where parents go, “Oh my gosh, you’ve got to help them with their homework because I don’t know how…I’ve forgotten.” And the ever popular, “They won’t let me.”

I- So you do work with adults, it sounds like with the college students?

C- We do.
Is the institution for profit or non-profit?  
This is for profit.

Are there regulations or legal guidelines that tutoring clinics must follow?  
There are no state or federal guidelines. Let’s just talk about the word tutoring in general. You’re a certified teacher; you can tutor. Your neighbor, who is not a certified teacher, but caring and wonderful can tutor as well. I see that, maybe, moving down the road and because we don’t work in the school building, there is no perceived need for regulation.

I- Does The Duncan Center itself have any regulations or guidelines?  

C- To teach reading, you have to be a certified teacher. You have to hold a state license. We would take a (local state) license. You have to be more than just a nice person to teach reading. And reading is the foundation for everything, so I think it takes skills as well as care and compassion. There are learning centers that don’t have certified teachers, so the question a parent should ask is, “Are your tutors certified, not Duncan certified?” Our instructors, not to be confused with a classroom teacher, are not only state certified but then they have to be Duncan certified, as well. There are a series of, I guess I’ll call them classes, that they need to go through with a test at the end to see if they really have it.

I- So is that the training that you provide after someone is hired?  

C- Yes.

I- So there’s more than one class?  

C- Yes, multiple.

I- Do you teach those?  

C- There are three or four of us that could and do teach those classes. Sometimes we’ll break it up depending upon our own strengths.

I- About how many hours do you think that takes to complete?  

C- I am thinking about twenty.
What are the teacher-to-student ratios? Are small group sessions ever used?
The maximum student-teacher ratio would be 3-to-1. Small group we would use as a camp, so no individualized, no initial testing, never reading. We may isolate some math skills. We might do a fraction/decimal camp. It might be for a week for a couple hours, five days a week or four days a week. I think the benefit is that it gives the kids a little something and it also gives them a foot in to the center. Do they like it? What are they thinking beyond that?

I - So mostly individualized and no more than three?

C - It is always individualized and there will never be more than three students to one teacher. So if I’m the instructor, for example, I may be working with a third grade reader, a sixth grade writer, and a fourth grade math student. So there is no temptation for me to ever group instruct. It also allows, and I think this is a huge benefit of (our center) truthfully, we don’t do anything you don’t do as a classroom teacher. There are no skills that we teach that you don’t teach in the classroom. Here’s the but: But we don’t have to go on until that student can show mastery, where you do. You need to go on.

What are the time frames (ex: 90 minute sessions, 3 times a week) for tutoring sessions and how are these determined?
The kids come typically an hour at a time. They may come two hours at a time, and as many times a week as the parent decides based on their time, their finances, and their goals. I could make all the suggestions in the world. And I do suggest, but the parent makes that final decision.

I - So it sounds like it’s very much parent centered.

C - It is a team effort.

I - It is true that parents know their children better than anyone.

C - Absolutely. I call it “mother’s gut”. And I’m not leaving dads out. I think that a mother’s gut kind of tells that this is what is going on. So we try to keep it focused so that the kids can make the greatest success in the shortest period of time.

What is the average cost for tutoring sessions?
Forty dollars per hour. It has been that since 2005.

How is success measured? What assessments are used?
I- So you touched on this earlier. Will you explain it a little more? So you are assessing informally after each session?

C- I don’t want to call their work an assessment. It is an informal, “Did you understand when I taught you or do we need to do that again?” Some things are a little more formally assessed than that. Phonics, for example, we would use a combination of real and make-believe words to see if they understand short vowel a. So if I give a third grade kiddo the word “cat”, well of course they can say that word. But I don’t know if they just know the word or if they really know the sounds and can they apply that to the word “catastrophic”. So if I would give them “lat”, could they say that?

Then we do formal testing and we use California Achievement for right now. We benchmark skill but we’re not using the same test. So there are options. I could give them an A form and a B form, for example. This time of the year, we are giving kids the next grade level so we can be giving kids what they need to be prepared for that level.

I- Do you use that test when they first come in as well?

C- That’s one of them. Most of the others you would not have heard of before. Well, you would probably know the Gray Oral. We use that for oral reading. We use the CREVT, the Comprehensive Receptive and Expressive Vocabulary Test. We use an older one you may know, its name is escaping me right now. It’s common. When looking at children’s listening vocabulary as well as expressive vocabulary, if we’re teaching and using words that are over their head then you don’t to talk down to them but you do have to modulate your words and use synonyms to help explain what you’re teaching.

I- So let’s say you have a child come in here and is given the assessments. Then will the tutor/ the teacher design the program or do they sit down with you and do that?

C- We design that together with the parents. The cool thing about instruction at The Duncan Center from the instructor’s perspective is all they have to do (no small thing) is teach. They don’t have to move into the next lesson. They don’t have to design. They don’t have to pick and choose the materials; they’re right there for them. All they have to do is open the book and teach.
How is student growth reported to parents?
I- You mentioned that student growth is reported to parents every four to six weeks and they get some type of documentation with the growth?

C- Correct.

I- So at that time do you sit down and decide another plan of action?

C- Yes.

I- I had seen something on one of the e-mails I received after I contacted the Duncan South site that said something about the center making a guarantee that your child will increase one grade level in twelve weeks?

C- If they come three hours a week. We do have an informal guarantee. Corporate has a guarantee but the centers don’t have to do that, but I would never deny anyone that guarantee. It’s in reading and math only. So we would benchmark the first assessment, and let’s say in vocabulary your fifth grader was at a fourth grade, second month. Then they would need to be at a fifth grade, second month at the end of forty hours.

Do families sign a contract? If so what is included?
Never ever. We don’t want a contract either. The Duncan Center has been around for a really long time. We know how long it takes children to learn, practice, and master skills, but every child is different. So I’m not going to say that we need to do something again even if we don’t really need to. The goal is for them not to be coming. I’m happy to see you come to Duncan, but I’m also happy to see you leave. Not only do I not want a parent to have a contract, I don’t want one either. I’m not going to hold your child back if they’re ready to go. At the same time, (and this is my analogy) I don’t want them to leave with the cake half baked. It looks brown on the top and it’s pulled away from the side, but you put the toothpick in and it’s still runny because you’ll be back.

I- That’s a great analogy. So do you ever have to sit down with parents and try to communicate that?

C- I try but, again, I don’t get to make that decision. I’m never going to guilt a parent. They stop for a lot of reasons. The first one being money, the second one being time. Well, how do you argue that? I’m not going to make a parent feel guilty ever, but I am going to say, “This is
where they are right now. I wish you well and I would love to have you back sometime.

I- You had mentioned earlier going into the school with the little boy who read 150 sight words. What kind of communication do you have with schools?

C- It’s changed over the years. I started at The Duncan Center 20 years ago. I’d say with every elementary student, I would meet with the teacher on an average once every 12 weeks. Teachers don’t have time for that now. I would love to still do that. Often, I do go and meet with the teacher. That way they have a face to go with the name. And then maybe we’ll e-mail or maybe I’ll call and you’ll give me six minutes of your very valuable time. They may go, “This prediction is really killing them. Can you work on that?” You bet, absolutely we can. It is our strongest desire to support that student with their classroom teacher. We are not the teacher. We want that child to be successful in their teacher’s classroom. It is our attitude to have a team effort.

I- That is great because it doesn’t seem to be like that everywhere.

C- I can’t speak to that, but I can say that it is very different among school districts. Some are thrilled to work and have a partner because they can’t do it. Some are, and this is just my perception, I would guess more fearful of “What are you going to find out?” because teachers are under horrible scrutiny right now. Instead of feeling supported by their system, it’s more under the thumb or under the gun. That has never been our position and it never will be.

Is there any training or support offered to parents?

We parent conference results every four to six weeks. I expect the parents to be involved and I tell them that from the get-go. I want and expect to meet with them so they can see the progress or lack of because we have to keep making decisions. They are the decision maker, not me. I want them to know. They get everything in writing so depending upon how the student tested, let’s say they need to work on main idea, drawing conclusions, and facts and details. So how much of that can they accomplish successfully, consistently, independently which is why we don’t have three kids in third grade who are reading at the same time because I want to turn my back to them (although our back is never literally to them). When I come to a parent and say, “Your child can do this,” it’s because they have done it multiple times by themselves. So we double score everything. So a kiddo may have
gotten a 100, but I know I can’t move on just because they got a 100 and I helped them on that.

**What are the qualifications of tutors? What type of training do they receive?**
Answered in a question above; see regulations/legal guidelines question

**Do students ever come during the typical school day?**
We ask and encourage parents to do their initial assessment during the school day. I never want to come back to a parent and say, “Look how bad this is” because they’ve already gone through 7 ½ hours of school and done two hours worth of homework and then came in and took a two hour test. But that’s really a one time deal. I would have a difficult time, personally, supporting a child leaving their primary day of instruction for remediation.

I- Do you see homeschooled students?

C- We do.

I- Is that usually during the instructional day?

C- Not necessarily. Many of our instructors teach in a traditional classroom so our instruction during the school year is after school, Monday through Thursday and Saturday mornings. Would we ever see a student during the day? It would depend upon the situation, but again, I would have a really hard time pulling a student from their regular classroom for instruction.

If you could incorporate elements that are successful here into a public school, what would they be?
Before I answer that question, I will tell you that in some large cities, Title 1 money has been used to “build” a Duncan Center inside the school. Duncan hires their regular teachers and “Duncanizes” them and remediates math and/or reading. Locally, that’s not the case. If a classroom teacher were well nurtured, I think the classroom teacher would already build confidence. If the system were different, there could be mastery learning. I think those are two strengths of a learning center, particularly Duncan. Like I said, there is not a teacher that couldn’t call me and say, “I’m curious about The Duncan Center and what you do. Can I come for a visit?” You bet! Love to have you! At some time, hopefully you will be our partner. We’re not coming to you saying, “Oh look, you better be doing this and this and this.” We’re coming to you saying, “This is what we see. Is that what you see...We’re
working on this. Does that match your standards?...What’s coming up for him?...Okay, if I realign do you want me to review that or preview that?”

Confidence is huge. They don’t have to compete against anyone here ever. They only compete against themselves. Something that was hard last time, it’s easier this time. Next time it will be even better. Then, can you apply it in a multiple skill assessment? It’s different when you’re teaching just the skill. Then they really do have to apply it to everything. Whether it’s textbook reading, you have to find the facts and details. Whether it’s literature, you have to find facts and details...a poster...a letter...a poem...

I- It seems like it’s tough in a regular classroom to specifically pinpoint problems.

C- Absolutely. Even if you could pinpoint...NWEA does a pretty good job of pinpointing, but I don’t know that every teacher gets that information. And I don’t know that even if you got it, what could you do about it with 23 other kids. And I don’t care if you had 18 or 12. How do you individualize? That’s what we do. We individualize skills. The skills in reading are the skills in reading, but not every kiddo needs to learn facts and details. They may need more critical thinking, deduction, inferencing, conclusions, etc.
Appendix E: Recruitment E-mail To Participants

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Carrie Quaintance and I am a graduate student at IPFW getting my Master’s degree in special education. I am writing my Master’s thesis on tutoring clinics, how they operate, and what positive characteristics that could be implemented in a public school setting. I am very interested in speaking with someone at your center and would greatly appreciate the opportunity to learn more about the services you offer.

If you would be interested in helping me by answering some questions, I can be reached by e-mail or phone. I look forward to hearing from you!

Thank you so much for your time,

Carrie Quaintance

(phone number/e-mail address)
Appendix F: IRB Approval

To: JANE LEATHERMAN  
   NF 250L
From: RICHARD MATTES, Chair  
      Social Science IRB
Date: 04/15/2011
Committee Action: Approval
IRB Action Date: 04/24/2011
IRB Protocol #: 1103010590
Study Title: Behind the Clinic Door: Characteristics of Tutoring Centers Offering Remedial Reading Instruction
Expiration Date: 04/11/2012

Following review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the above-referenced protocol has been approved. This approval permits you to recruit subjects up to the number indicated on the application form and to conduct the research as it is approved. The IRB-stamped and dated consent, assent, and/or information form(s) approved for this protocol are enclosed. Please make copies from these document(s) both for subjects to sign should they choose to enroll in your study and for subjects to keep for their records. Information forms should not be signed. Researchers should keep all consent/assent forms for a period no less than three (3) years following closure of the protocol.

Revisions/Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, please submit the requested changes to the IRB using the appropriate form. IRB approval must be obtained before implementing any changes unless the change is to remove an immediate hazard to subjects in which case the IRB should be immediately informed following the change.

Continuing Review: It is the Principal Investigator’s responsibility to obtain continuing review and approval for this protocol prior to the expiration date noted above. Please allow sufficient time for continued review and approval. No research activity of any sort may continue beyond the expiration date. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the approval’s expiration on the expiration date. Data collected following the expiration date is unapproved research and cannot be used for research purposes including reporting or publishing as research data.

Unanticipated Problems/Adverse Events: Researchers must report unanticipated problems and/or adverse events to the IRB. If the problem/adverse event is serious, or is expected but occurs with unexpected severity or frequency, or if the problem/event is unanticipated, it must be reported to the IRB within 48 hours of learning of the event and a written report submitted within five (5) business days. All other problems/events should be reported at the time of Continuing Review.

We wish you good luck with your work. Please retain copy of this letter for your records.
Carrie A. Quaintance

**Education**
Bachelor of Science, Elementary Education  
Minor: Special Education  
Indiana University, Fort Wayne, IN  
Major GPA: 3.9/4.0  
Cumulative GPA: 3.9/4.0  
Dean’s and Semester Honor’s List 2001-2005

**Awards**
Physician’s Health Plan’s People Helping People Award, 2005

**Second Grade Teacher, August 2011- Present**  
*James R. Watson Elementary, DeKalb Central United School District*  
o Focused reading instruction on advanced decoding and specific comprehension strategies  
o Utilized technology daily in teaching with a focus on student involvement

**Third Grade Teacher, August 2010- May 2011**  
*James R. Watson Elementary, DeKalb Central United School District*  
o Modified math instruction for all grade level special education students  
o Incorporated ISTEP preparation including review of key concepts and test-taking skills for first-time ISTEP test takers  
o Implemented guided reading groups and writing instruction with a focus on strategic conferring

**Mild Disabilities Teacher/Interventionist, August 2007- May 2010**  
*Kindergarten-Grade 5, Country Meadow Elementary, DeKalb Central United School District*  
o Adapted Indiana state standards to align with the needs of the special education population  
o Used intensive research based programs to remediate struggling learners  
o Continually assessed and modified instruction based on student performance  
o Worked as a team with general education teachers, parents, and administrators to develop IEP’s  
o Developed and implemented behavior intervention plans

**Language Disorders Teacher, September 2006-May 2007**  
*PreK – High School; DeKalb Central United School District*  
o Delivered intensive language therapy as outlined in IEP’s for students with language disorders  
o Serviced students in general education through severe disabilities  
o Collaborated with speech therapists and classroom teachers to ensure students received proper instruction

**Long-Term Substitute, August 2005-April 2006**  
*Grade 3 & 4, Perry Hill Elementary, Ft. Wayne, IN; Northwest Allen Schools*  
o Modified instruction for a student with Limited English Proficiency  
o Focused writing instruction on 6+1 Traits for beginning writers
Carrie A. Quaintance

College Field Experience
Grade 4 & Special Education, Perry Hill Elem., Ft. Wayne, IN; Northwest Allen County Schools
Grade 4, Huntertown Elementary School, Huntertown, IN; Northwest Allen County Schools
Grade 2, Cedarville Elementary School, Leo-Cedarville, IN; East Allen County Schools
  o Implemented ESL social skills instruction
  o Identified and worked with students needing modified instruction
  o Created and managed student learning centers

Trainings
  o Lindamood-Bell Seeing Stars and Visualizing & Verbalizing, 2008
  o Do the Math Training, 2008
  o Lindamood-Bell LiPS Training, 2007
  o Orton-Gillingham Training, 2007
  o Literacy Collaborative Training, 2006 and 2010

Related Activities
Substitute, April 2006-June 2006 and October 2005-January 2006
  Northwest Allen County Schools
Tutor, 2005-2009
  o Remedial and enrichment tutoring in reading, writing, math, and science for students in second, fifth and sixth grades

Therapist in an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Intervention Program, 2003-2004
  Southwest Allen County School Corporation, Ft. Wayne, IN
  o Integrated behavior management techniques with language and social skills instruction for a Pre-K child with Autism
  o Conducted and evaluated daily assessments to determine instruction
  o Trained therapists in ABA techniques