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Tutoring Philosophy

Through tutoring observations, independent tutoring sessions, discussions, and readings, I know what it means to be a writing tutor and what I need to do to have productive sessions. My philosophy about tutoring is that no aspect of tutoring is concrete, and a good tutor must be adaptive. First, there is no one type of student, one type of tutor, or one best strategy for tutoring. What works for me might not work for someone else, and I should not force other tutors to agree with my philosophy. Additionally, because tutors must be able to adapt to many situations, it is important to remember that the tutee is the most important person in the session to consider when choosing what strategies to use. Even though it may feel like I have it all figured out, not every session is going to go ideally, and I should not feel guilty about this because no tutor can adapt perfectly to every situation.

Because all tutors and tutees are different, there is no one best strategy for tutoring. I have found that many articles will give advice about tutoring, and many articles will say the opposite of that. One of the first articles I read was "Authoring Processes," and in this article, the writing process is laid out in four stages: planning, drafting, revising, and editing/proofreading (85). When I first read this, I blindly accepted that these were the important steps in writing and that it was my goal as a tutor to help students in whichever stage they were in. However, later in the course, I read "Should Writer's Use They Own English?" which opposed the previous article's claim about the fourth stage in the writing process. Young argues that we should not conform to

the norm and speak and write in standard American English, but instead we should "be open to the mix of them [different dialects] in oral and written communication" (111). He claims that we should not strictly enforce grammar rules because nobody speaks and writes correctly all the time, and sometimes the "*intent* make [the] sentence clear and understandable, not rules from the grammar police-man" (Young 112-113). This article clashes with "Authoring Processes" because it essentially says that the editing/proofreading stage in the writing process should not be included because it discounts the voice of the writer. Neither one of these articles is right or wrong because there is no concrete way to write just like there is no concrete way to tutor. Because there are many conflicting articles about tutoring, and none of these are better than others, it proves that there is no one best way to tutor since everyone is different.

Since everything about tutoring is situational, I use and will continue to use these two articles in two different situations. When students come in with academic writing such research papers or resumes, I will help them edit and proofread their papers for grammar and spelling errors because in these cases, standard grammar rules are important. If students come to the writing center with pieces of creative writing, I will ignore grammar rules and just read to make sure the writing makes sense and fits the conventions for that genre. There are also sublevels of these two methods of tutoring. For example, the amount of editing I do on an academic paper is also situational. I originally thought that tutors were not allowed to directly edit a student's paper, but as I was observing a tutor, I noticed that she was going through a paper and making word suggestions and correcting mistakes. When I asked her why she did that instead of focusing on higher order concerns (big picture problems). She said that in "high-stakes" papers, she takes more of a directive approach and focuses on both higher and lower order concerns. I take that into consideration during each tutoring session because I know now that there are not only two

methods of tutoring (focusing on higher order concerns and focusing on lower order concerns) but different levels within these which I have to adapt to. Good tutors must take all the conflicting guidelines that they learn and apply the strategies that work the best in each specific situation.

Because tutors must be able to adapt to different situations, it is import remember that the tutee's needs and preferences are the most important things to consider when deciding which tutoring strategies to use. Fitzgerald and Ianetta say, "the identities that tutors and writers share or that differentiate them affect their work together in a number of ways" ("Tutor and Writer Identities" 114). When choosing strategies to employ in a tutoring session, it is most important to assess how the tutee learns and works best. Fitzgerald and Ianetta give many strategies for working with different types of learners—visual learners, kinesthetic learners, and auditory learners ("Tutor and Writer Identities" 117). After tutoring independently for a while, I found that I have certain preferences about how to tutor, but the tutee's preferences can override mine. During my first tutoring session, I read a student's paper aloud because I watched many tutors use this strategy, and it was suggested during class discussion. When I read her paper aloud, I had trouble focusing on what I was reading, and I often had to stop and reread sentences because I understand papers better when I read in my head. After this experience, I began asking students if they would prefer if I read their papers aloud or to myself. So far, I have never had someone say, "I want you to read my paper aloud," so I have just been reading in my head, which helps me focus. However, if a student does end up wanting me to read aloud because she knows that she is an auditory learner, I will read aloud even though it is not my preference. If it will not significantly impact the tutoring session, it is more important for tutors to adapt to the students' preferences than their own.

Another part of the tutee's identity that tutors must adapt to is physical and learning disabilities. This is especially important for tutors to be aware of because "at least fifteen percent of the population is disabled" ("Tutor and Writer Identities" 127-128). These students have different needs in the writing center, and tutors must use different strategies to meet those needs. I like to start a session by giving the student the freedom to choose how the session goes. I usually start by asking students "what would you like to work on today?" to give them the opportunity to say what they want to do and how they want to do it. I also give them the opportunity to choose where they sit so that they can be where they feel the most comfortable. I do not ask specific questions—such as "do you have a learning disability?"—because I do not want to pressure the student. By using open-ended questions, I allow tutees to let me know what they think is important for me to know, and I can adapt to these students' needs accordingly.

Tutors must be aware of and adapt to many things while tutoring—differences in students' identities, different tutoring strategies, physical and learning disabilities, ESL students' difficulties with English, multimodal projects, and more. No tutor can be expected to get this right every time, but I still feel somewhat guilty when I know that I could have done better. Although I have heard many times that tutors should try to use a nondirective approach and help the student find and correct his or her own mistakes, when faced with some difficult situations, I find myself telling students what I think or marking corrections on their papers. During one session, I tutored an ESL student who wanted me to look over his paper for grammar errors. When I tried to discuss the problems that I saw instead of just fixing them, he had a difficult time articulating responses and usually just said "yeah" or nodded. I started just marking errors and writing the corrections above them. When reflecting on sessions like this one, I feel guilty that I did wrong by students for not helping them improve and only helping them improve their papers

or projects. With a survey for writing consultants, Nicklay found that consultants "most often felt guilt for being directive in sessions focused upon lower order concerns...[even if] directivity was an appropriate method to use in those very same sessions" (479). This is usually how I feel after these sessions, but I know it is irrational because I did not tell the students what to write or alter the meaning of their papers. Also, as I mentioned above, when tutoring a student with a "high-stakes" paper, a directive approach is acceptable. This is not the only type of guilt I feel after a session. Occasionally I feel slightly guilty because I feel that there are some things I should have said or done differently. During one of my sessions, I did not get a specific answer from the student about what she wanted to work on, and we ended up bouncing around on topics during the session and did not get much done. I should have started by telling her that we only had a short amount of time and that she needed to pick one or two things that we could accomplish, but I did not. I will remember this for future sessions and try to do this every time. Tutors are going to make mistakes, but they can learn from them and improve for future sessions. Tutors have to juggle many things, and it is okay for a session not go to perfectly.

If there is one thing to take away from my tutoring philosophy, it is that tutors must be adaptive. Especially with writing, there are so many different types of writers and genres, and there cannot be one set of guidelines for the perfect tutoring session. The best way to become a good writing tutor is through experience. Some sessions will go poorly, and some will be productive, and tutors will learn through both of these experiences. Good writing tutors are able to do three things: adapt to the situation, adapt to the student, and accept that every session will not be perfect.

Works Cited

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