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ABSTRACT
        This paper reports on a study of early teacher
training field experience to assess what was happening and the extent
to which the objectives of the field experience were met. Objectives
included a greater understanding of how students think and learn,
improved ability when choosing tutoring strategies, and enhanced
observation skills. Data were gathered from case records written by
88 preservice teachers during the field experiences. During the field
experience, preservice teachers attended a 3-credit hour course on
learning and development and simultaneously participated in a
1-credit field experience course, the second of six field experiences
in the curriculum. Results question the usefulness of tutoring as an
early field experience assignment, even though final evaluations from
preservice teachers and cooperating teachers were overwhelmingly
positive about the field experience. It is suggested that laboratory
activities in the classroom, rather than field tutoring, may better
benefit preservice teachers. The field experience did not address the
realities of teaching as measured by reform literature or the stated
objectives of the course. (Contains 17 references and 10 figures.)
(NAV)

ASSESSING EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCES: DO WE REALLY WANT TO KNOW?

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Introduction

There is general agreement in the literature that early
field experiences should take place in teacher education
programs. Many teacher education institutions have between 100-
300 hours of field experiences excluding student teaching. There
is no consensus as to the purpose and nature of these experiences
or the effect they have on the professional preparation of
teachers (Dinham & Stritter, 1986; Farris, Henniger, Bischoff,
1991; Ishler & Kay, 1981). Still others have questioned the
value of these early field experiences by calling for a radical
departure from current practices (Berliner, 1985; Denton 1986;
Zeichner, 1992).

The existing research to this point has consisted of
describing the type and quantity of early field experiences at
institutions around the country (Ishler & Kay, 1981; Lasley &
Applegate, 1984); cooperating teacher supervision and concern
about preservice teachers (Applegate, 1984; Kagan & Warren,
1991); and student attitudes of early field experiences
(Bischoff, Farris, & Henniger, 1988).

Although most studies to date have attempted to describe the
type and duration of activities carried out at various
institutions, Henry (1983) found that preservice teachers who had
earlier field experiences had fewer problems in later field
experiences. There have also been some studies that have
identified grade level as a factor in early field experiences.
In one study preservice teachers in elementary classrooms had

more interactions between cooperating teachers and students than their secondary counterparts (Killian & McIntyre, 1988). Beyond these studies, little knowledge exists that can guide decisions on the type and amount of field experience that should be included in an early field experience program.

A recent review of current research on early field experience turns up few new reported studies. Even the Handbook of Research on Teacher Education (1990) provides little discussion or direction on the nature and use of early field experiences in preservice teacher education (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). They suggest that there is no theoretical basis for field experiences. Guyton & McIntyre make a case for the use of qualitative research as a more appropriate paradigm for exploring questions related to early field experience. They recommend that "research that accurately and richly describes practice and deals with the outcomes of practice is needed to inform decisions about EFE's" [early field experiences] (p.518).

The study discussed in this paper attempted to assess what was going on in an early field experience for preservice teachers and the extent to which objectives of the field experience were meet. The objectives for preservice teachers' field experience included: a greater understanding of the way students think and learn; improved ability to choose successful strategies in tutoring students; and enhanced ability to objectively observe and record in a classroom setting.

Rather than a structured survey or interview, the data

source for this study consisted of case records written by preservice teachers during their field experience. While reflective thinking was encouraged in subsequent field experiences this one experience focused on observation and written narrative discourse. The field experience described in this study was the second of six field experiences excluding student teaching. This was the first time this field experience was offered in the new program. The specific purpose of this study was to assess the curriculum experienced by preservice teachers enrolled in the field course.

During this semester, preservice teachers took a three credit hour course entitled EDIS 301 Learning and Development. In conjunction with this course, students were also enrolled in a one credit hour course entitled EDIS 388 Field Experience. Faculty anticipated that students could apply what they were learning in the learning and development course to their field experience setting.

The fall field experience course for third year students has two primary objectives. The first is concerned with understanding the practical uses and benefits of tutoring and then mastering the skills associated with this task. The second primary objective is to learn how to observe, record, and analyze information about the child who is tutored.

During the semester EDIS 388 students received instruction in both tutoring and narrative writing. Two one hour sessions dealt specifically with tutorial skills and three one hour

sessions covered observation techniques, case record construction, and record analysis. A number of students also took advantage of optional debriefing and informational sessions Students also received feedback from the instructor on their case records once during the semester. Students enrolled in the field experience were asked to tutor one student over the period of the semester. The minimum course requirement was to spend one hour per week tutoring throughout the semester. Preservice teachers spent an average of 10 hours tutoring. The cooperating teachers were asked to provide preservice teachers with a student from their classrooms that would benefit from a tutorial situation as well as resources, and a place to tutor.

The one to one nature of a tutorial did not readily lend itself to direct observation in the school setting. In order to assess the quality of tutorial experience, it was necessary to utilize other sources of information about the tutorials, such as documents that were produced by preservice students as partial requirement for the EDIS course. The documents utilized in this study were the narrative case record.

<div align="center">Procedures</div>

Participants

The preservice teachers in EDIS 388 consisted of 77 undergraduates enrolled in a new five-year program and 26 postgraduates with four year degrees seeking certification and a masters in education. Participants varied considerably in terms of age, experience, educational background and interest. Of the

103 students enrolled in this course, 12 students were in special
education, 49 students were seeking K-8 certification, 39
students were seeking secondary certification in a content area,
and 3 students were seeking certification in health
education/promotion. After some students dropped out of the
course, a total of 88 case records were available for this study.

Instrument

Given the fact that there were few specific measurable
performances required of the EDIS 388 students, content analysis
was chosen as an effective way to analyze the data from the case
records. The content analysis was guided by the objectives of
the course as a means to understand what went on during the
tutorial sessions. The instrument was the category and coding
system that was generated after a careful reading of the case
records by the researcher (Merriam, 1988).

After reading each record carefully, the researcher
generated ten questions which could be answered utilizing the
record. These questions were later converted to categories which
contained information found in the records. After using the main
categories to divide the content of the records, it became
evident that information would be lost unless sub-categories were
created under each of the ten main categories. These sub-
categories varied in number and kind depending on the nature of
the main category. For example, under category four, entitled
reinforcement, three sub-categories were created: verbal praise,
verbal praise/rewards, and no reinforcement noted. Thus, each

category had its own set of sub-categories which represented varying answers to the question researched (see Chart 1).

With categories and sub-categories chosen, the next step was to select coding units. Because all students entered and dated a weekly record entry, the decision was made to use weekly entries for the coding unit. The coding units and the categories were then ready to be applied to each individual case record.

Each case record was randomly assigned a number and labeled 1-88. Then records were read through individually and coded using the system outlined above. The author was the only person who coded the data. It is acknowledged that the trustworthiness of the study would be increased if another researcher rated the reliability of the data coding procedure.

The protocol for coding each category varied depending on the type of specific information sought. For example, in category eight, each documented problem in response to the question was recorded as a sub-category. In other instances such as category two, the researcher tried to determine whether certain guidelines were followed rather than tallying how many times the student self reported that they followed the guidelines.

After completing the reading and tallying of the 88 case records, the researcher synthesized the 88 pages of coded information into data grouped according to the ten main categories. The information was tallied and descriptive statistics were used to present the results of the content

analysis. The ten separate tallies and percentages were checked by another individual in order to minimize mathematical error.

Results

The results of the information obtained from the content analysis can be found on the pages that follow. It should be noted that the results of this study are descriptive in nature and attempt to provide information for the assessment of the existing field course for third-year students. The discussion section of this paper is used to elaborate on the meaning of the graphs, and to raise questions for further inquiry.

Discussion

The following discussion is based on the ten figures listed earlier in the paper. Readers should refer to these figures for further information. Those seeking more specific information should refer to Appendix A. Any of the comments, suggestions, or questions raised in the discussion originate from the data contained in the case records. The researcher acknowledges that the records are incomplete and do not portray a comprehensive story of the tutorial experiences. The records are seen as an entry point in the assessment process.

Category One - Questions chosen by student

Preservice teachers were asked to answer questions about their tutee. Questions one, two, and five were chosen with greater frequency than any of the other questions (see Figure One and Appendix A). Though these questions varied in content, they all focused on the instructional aspects of the tutoring

assignment. The learning problem of the tutee, the teaching strategy used, and the type of reinforcement used are all topics that relate to the instructional process. A much smaller percent of the preservice teachers chose to answer questions three, four, and six. These questions were concerned with the more personal information regarding the child's attitude towards school, home, and peers.

It is clear that preservice teachers were somewhat limited in their opportunities to obtain personal data about their tutee. Many tutors had little chance to observe their tutee outside the tutorial setting. This may explain why preservice students selected questions dealing more with instructional themes than personal data. However, one could argue that the selection of questions by students can be attributed to random choice, yet, results from other coded categories seem to substantiate the claim that this is not the case (see Figure Nine in Appendix A).

If the case records can be considered a partial picture of what occurred in the tutorial session, it seems that many of the tutors learned very little about their tutees' personal life. Though this does not imply that the tutors were ineffective, it does raise the question if tutor's who establish a personal relationship with their tutee were more effective than those focusing mainly on instructional aspects of tutoring.

Category Two - Use of tutorial guidelines

All preservice teachers enrolled in EDIS 388 were given two class sessions of instruction on some general guidelines in

tutoring. The guidelines included suggestions such as ways to avoid criticizing tutees, starting with easy problems, and using cues rather than lecturing. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the students followed the guidelines in their tutoring. Two percent of the preservice teachers did not follow the guidelines, and in six percent of the cases it was not evident what transpired in the tutorial sessions.

It is not clear what motivated preservice teachers to use the tutoring techniques demonstrated in class. One explanation may be that they had limited experience with tutoring and were in need of some guidelines to follow in their first experience. A second possibility may be that the guidelines presented in the two hours of class discussing this topic impacted their instructional decisions.

Category Three - Dominant teaching strategy

The dominant tutoring strategy utilized by preservice teachers was what the researcher termed drill and practice. Seventy-seven percent (77%) used this strategy more than any other when working with his or her tutee. A smaller percent (18%) used what the researcher termed coaching. Those involved with the practice gave advice, modeled and generally guided students through assignments. Five percent of the preservice teachers used questions as their main tutoring strategy. They used probing as a means of getting the tutee to explain meaning rather than simply regurgitate a memorized body of knowledge.

There may not be any one reason for the large number of

students utilizing the drill and practice strategy. It is
certainly possible that many tasks selected by preservice
teachers may have lent themselves to the use of drill and
practice. Another possible reason may be that this strategy was
the one that was modeled for them in many of their years of
schooling.

Besides the question of whether the drill and practice
strategy was the most appropriate for the tutoring tasks, a more
important question to ask is: Was the type of drill and practice
activity appropriate for the task and designed to be of higher
interest than regular classroom instruction? Many practitioners
nd a plethora of educational theories support the need to vary
remedial activities so that they are interesting to the tutee. A
thorough examination of the case records would only answer part
of this question. The missing information could only be gleaned
from interviewing and observing the tutor/tutee interaction
within the context of the classroom environment.

Category Four - Type of reinforcement

During the tutorial training of the EDIS 388 students,
specific attention was paid to the use of reinforcement.
Students were encouraged to try both verbal praise and to use
reward systems during their tutorials.

Case records indicated that 72 percent of the tutors used
verbal praise as their sole method of reinforcement. A smaller
percent (19%) used a combination of verbal praise and rewards
system. These preservice teachers yoked these two methods and

used a variety of reward systems ranging from point systems to college sweat shirts. The remaining nine percent did not note the use of reinforcement in their record.

This category does not address the quality of reinforcement used. Still, an overwhelming 91 percent of the students did use some form of reinforcement. Though this does not suggest tutoring effectiveness, it does point to the fact that preservice teachers followed the advice given in class regarding reinforcement.

The most interesting finding was that only 19 percent of the tutors used a reward system even though they were strongly encouraged to do so by university instructors. As with other findings, there are certainly many possible reasons for this result. They include such things as students' beliefs about the use of extrinsic rewards, the age level of the tutees, and the tutor's knowledge about the tutee. The last reason mentioned seems to be partially substantiated by the data in categories one and nine. It is extremely difficult to design a reward system for students when you have little personal knowledge about what motivates them.

Category Five - Dominant tutoring subject

Classroom students were tutored at grade levels between kindergarten and 12th grade. Accompanying this variety of levels was a diversity of tasks the tutors were asked to perform. As could be expected, reading was the most frequent tutoring task (28%), followed by math (19%). Spelling, writing and history

were 13, 7, and 7 percent respectively. The rest of the 13 different areas were in the 1-6 percent range (see Figure Five in Appendix A).

Many of the tutors were asked to teach or review specific skills with their tutees. Far fewer were involved with teaching concepts. Although it is difficult to assess the quality or success of the tutorials from the case records, it would be a valuable question to pursue in another study.

At this point in their education and training, third-year students have had little exposure to teaching methods. Tutors were left to their own past experience and any help they were able to obtain from the cooperating instructor. An important question would be whether the quality of the tutorial experience could be enhanced if additional instruction in teaching methodology were received by tutees before entering a tutoring situation.

<u>Category Six - Degree of supervision</u>

One of the roles of the cooperating teachers was to provide professional supervision to the preservice teacher. Though not spelled out in great detail, cooperating teachers were expected to give direction, necessary materials, and information to tutors. From the analysis of the records it would appear that this did not happen with great frequency.

Almost one third (31 %) of the preservice teachers received no input from cooperating teacher regarding tutoring objectives or materials. Another 20% of the tutors received constant

direction from the cooperating teacher. The other 37 tutors ranged in degrees from sharing an equal role to doing either more or less than their cooperating teachers in determining the objective of the tutorial. Fifty-seven students had some input from their cooperating teacher. These numbers suggest the degree of supervision varied widely.

The lack of supervision could certainly effect the quality of the experience. This raises questions about the usefulness of an experience where preservice teachers are left to fend for themselves. Serious consideration must be given to more thorough monitoring preservice teachers.

Category Seven - Degree of collegiality

The tutors had three different avenues regarding communication with their cooperating teachers. These students could call their supervisors by telephone, speak to them in school, and/or communicate through the use of tutorial sheets submitted weekly. The degree of collegiality or the extent to which there was two way communication between tutors and cooperating teachers was recorded from the first two communication avenues. As noted earlier, (Figure Seven Appendix A), 54 preservice teachers had a discussion with their cooperating teacher on less than half of the occasions they tutored. Another 34 preservice teachers varied in the amount of collegial relations documented, between half and all of the sessions that they tutored.

Considering that teachers are extremely busy and have few

breaks during the day, these findings can be interpreted as surprising in that all but six tutors had some face to face conversation about tutees with the cooperating teacher. Several questions may be raised concerning these data. Was the presence of a preservice teacher an inconvenience for the cooperating teachers? Does the nature of the assignment make it impossible to be successful given the realities of school?

Category Eight - Problems mentioned

Problems will arise in schools regardless of how many years experience one has accrued in schools. In Category Eight attempts were made to list and tally all the problems that were recorded in the case records.

The majority (51 preservice teachers) recorded no problems during the tutorial session. Of the other preservice teachers that did mention problems, the three most common were the tutee being absent the day they were to tutor, being asked to tutor more than one tutee at one time, and difficulty in finding a suitable place to tutor (see Figure Eight Appendix A). Of these three problems, all seem to relate to better communication between the tutor and the cooperating teacher. It is most disturbing that more problems were not identified. This may suggest preservice teachers did not have a very realistic experience in the schools.

Category Nine - Degree of personal interaction

This category dealt with the degree to which students recorded personal information on their tutees (see Figure Nine).

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, the EDIS 388 course had two primary foci. One dealt with instruction and the other with learning about an individual student through observation and narrative recording. The results of the analysis show that 64 preservice teachers mentioned personal information in half or less than half of the sessions.

There were 11 tutors that did not mention any personal information about the students. As previously mentioned in the discussion of category one, student records were more heavily weighted on describing instructional interaction than personal interaction. The students that did not mention personal information about their tutee, did not achieve the stated purpose of the course. Indeed, they may have jeopardized the quality of the tutorial relationship by focusing solely on the instructional task. If becoming acquainted with a tutee on a more personal basis is considered an important goal of the course, then students need to be given more encouragement by University professors and given a broader context in which to accomplish this stated goal.

Category Ten - Tutee's gender and school level

The makeup of the tutee population consisted of 55 males and 33 females. There was a fairly even balance of male and female students in middle schools and high schools, with a greater proportion of males in the elementary schools (see Figure 10 Appendix A). These data may not be of great significance regarding the EDIS 388 course. However, it is interesting that

50 percent more males were selected for tutoring in the
elementary schools. Maybe the belief that males develop slower
in the elementary years is born out in these data. Other
questions not answerable from the records concerning the
population of tutees include: How many students (K-12) were
classified as exceptional students? What percent of students (K-
12) were selected because of learning problems? What percent of
students were gifted?

Summary

It is extremely difficult to give readers a sense of the
depth and richness of the experience that preservice teachers had
with their tutees. The nature of descriptive recording does not
lend itself to capturing the reflective or social nature of the
tutorial experience. Such aspects of their experiences can only
be obtained if the nature of the recording assignment is changed
or if in-depth interviews were used.

The results of this study raise questions about the
usefulness of tutoring as an early field experience assignment.
Preservice teachers were asked to record in an objective fashion
the dialogue and interaction that took place between themselves,
their tutee and the cooperating teacher. Although this approach
may have given the preservice teachers practice in observing and
writing antidotal records, little about the experience of
preservice teachers can be viewed as positive given the
objectives for the course.

The field experience as currently planned and experienced by preservice teachers, did not address the realities of teaching as measured by reform literature relating to teacher education field experiences (Denton, 1986; Zeichner, 1992) or the stated objectives of the course. Preservice teachers in this study received a very narrow view of school; they did not focus on issues and problems in schools; they worked in isolation from peers and the cooperating teacher and they did not get to know their tutees as individuals; they rarely experimented with different instructional strategies.

Rather than extending the number and type of field experiences, serious consideration should be given to reducing field experiences (Berliner, 1985). If students need experience with tutoring or understanding learning differences, laboratory activities based at the University may be more appropriate for accomplishing this goal.

Final evaluations from preservice teachers and cooperating teachers were overwhelmingly positive about this field experience. This finding was not substantiated by the data in the case records. Could it be that the process is more important to them than any tangible outcomes that can be assessed?

Further discussion and research is needed regarding early field experience for preservice teachers. This study offers one approach to addressing the field from a course perspective. The impact of all the courses in the program need to comprise future studies.

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APPENDIX A

Frequency of Questions Coded
(Students chose 3 of 6)
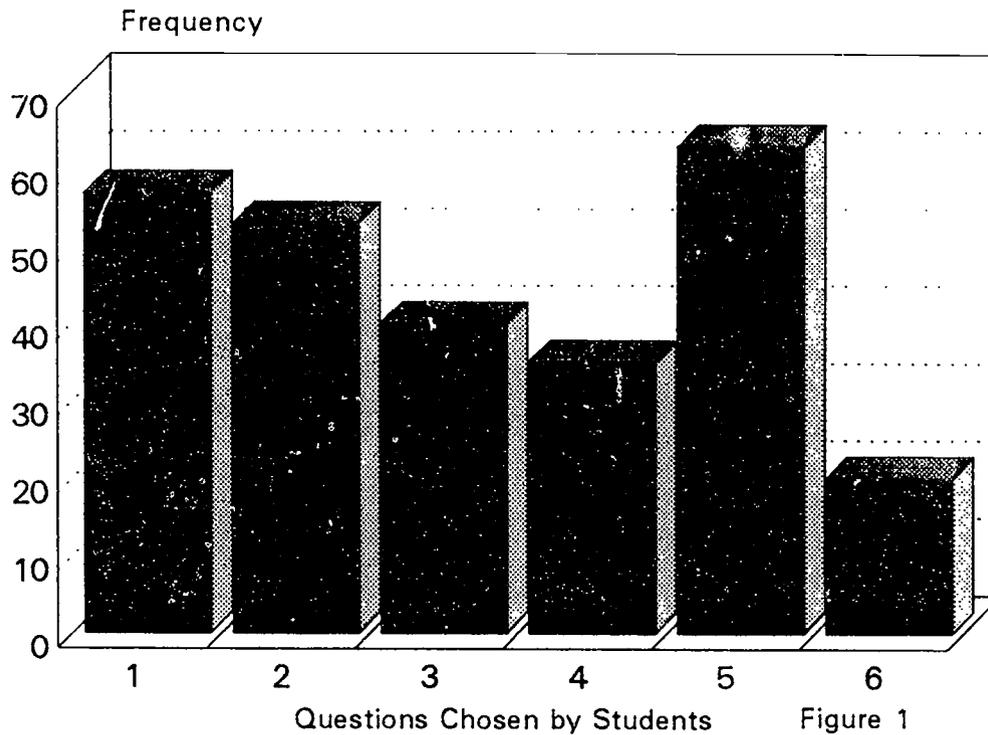

Figure 1

Percent of Students Using Guidelines

Did Not Use
2%

Not Recorded
6%

Used Guidelines
92%

Figure 2

23

Dominant Tutoring Strategy Used

Coaching
18%

Questioning
5%

Drill/Practice
77%
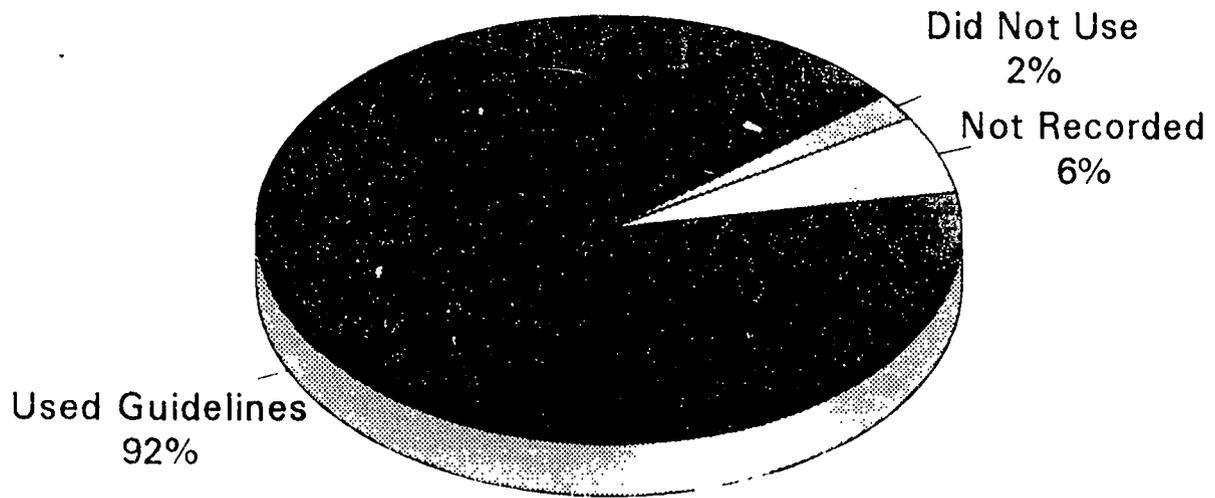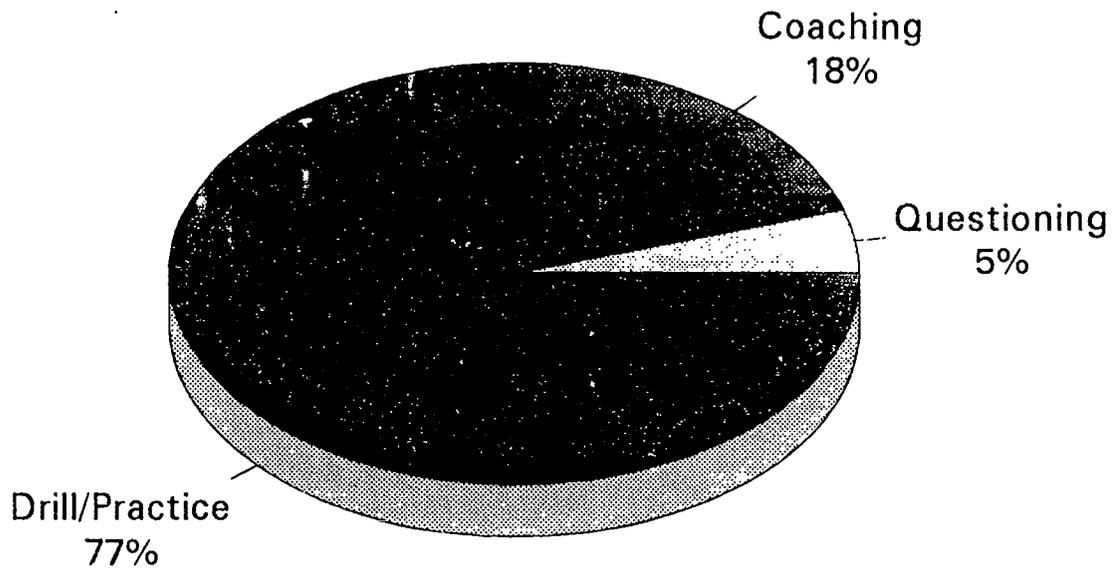
Figure 3

Dominant Reinforcement Method

Praise/Reward
19%

None Recorded
9%

Only Verbal Praise
72%
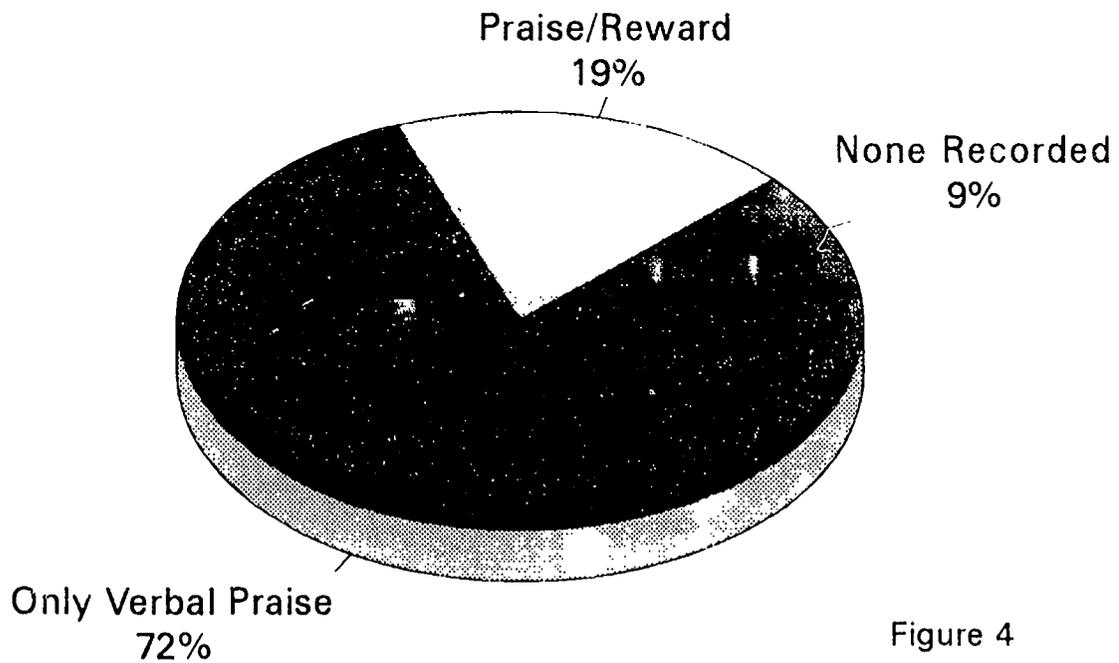
Figure 4

SUBJECT AREA IN WHICH TUTEES WERE TUTORED

Subject area	Frequency	Rel. Frequency	%
Reading	25	.28	28
Math	17	.19	19
Spelling	12	.13	13
Writing	6	.07	7
History	6	.07	7
English	5	.06	6
Study Skills	3	.04	4
Physical Ed./Health	3	.04	4
Latin	2	.03	3
Spanish	2	.03	3
French	2	.03	3
Handwriting	1	.01	1
U.S. Government	1	.01	1

N=88

Figure 5

Initiation of Planning
(Tutorial Sessions)

Planning responsibility

Student only

Instructor only

Equal mix

Student > Instructor

Instructor > Student

| 0   5   10   15   20   25   30   35

Figure 6   Number of students
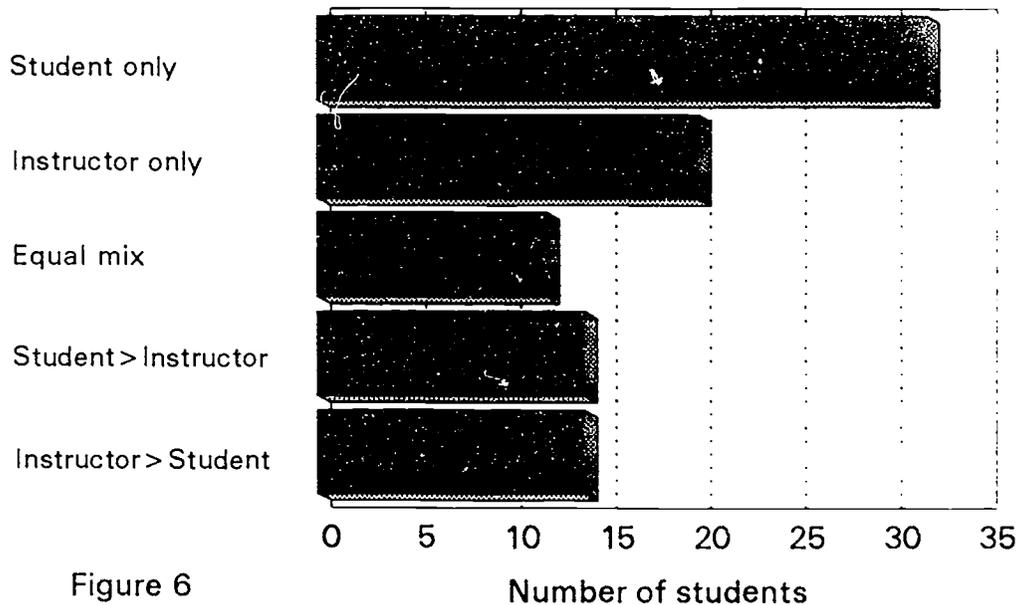
Collegial Relations
Between tutors and instructors

Number of Students

35

30

25

20

15

10

5

0

0   25   50   75   100

Percent of Collegiality   Figure 7

26
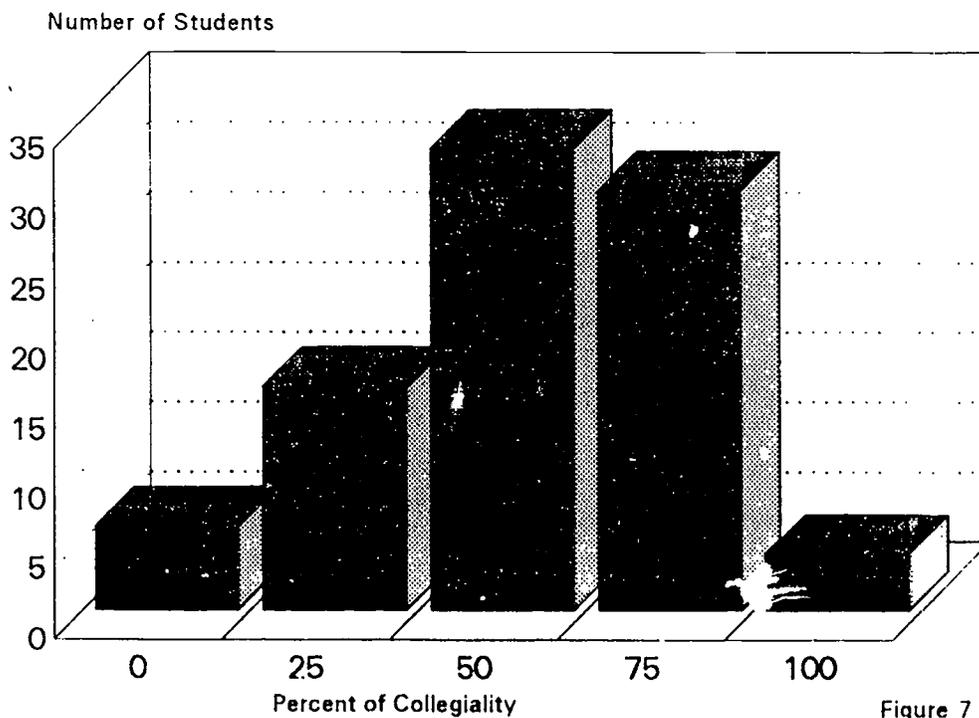
PROBLEMS MENTIONED BY TUTORS

Problem	Number
No problem mentioned	51
Asked to tutor more than one student	10
Tutee frequently absent	6
Finding a suitable place to tutor	5
Lack of time to work with student	4
Change of tutee class schedule made it hard to meet	4
Clinical instructor not clear on tutors assignment	3
Tutor had problems making contact with classroom teacher	2
Tutee very shy and hard to work with	2
Late start tutoring	1
Tutee moved from area	1
Tutee was missing out on important classes	1
Transportation problems for UVA tutor	1
Tutee got physical with tutor	1
Clinical instructor asked tutor to teach class rather than tutor	1
Tutee forgot to show up at tutoring session	1

N=88

Figure 8

Personal Data Recorded About Tutee By Tutor

Number of students

Figure 9

Percent of sessions with recorded data

100% = Data recorded in all sessions

Tutee Gender and School Level

Figure 10

Male
Female

Elementary   Middle   High School