From Teaching to Tutoring:
Listening to My Inner Teacher

Brandy Dieterle
University of Central Flordia

Prior to being a graduate communication center consultant, I taught first-year composition for two years. As a teacher, I focus heavily on using various forms of communication as tools for learning, modeling effective communication strategies in the classroom, and learning collaboratively. Because I had up to 25 students in a given class, taking this approach enabled me to support student learning on a larger scale. When in the classroom, I was not teaching a single student at any given time. Instead, my class activities had to target the group as a whole while allowing room for individual development. This often meant that the class activities were a bit more generalized in scope so that each student could find an entry point to the material. However, another important facet of my teaching that lies outside of the group dynamic of the classroom involved conferencing with students in one-to-one meetings. Yet, this was often the most challenging part of my teaching as I struggled with engaging students on an individual level in a face-to-face situation. This is where tutoring comes in, because while serving as a graduate consultant I often found myself in one-to-one tutoring consultations. Tutoring gave me valuable insight on how to navigate one-to-one meetings with students on improving their communicative techniques. Further, teaching prior to tutoring heavily shaped the role I viewed myself as having as a tutor: the tutor is not the evaluator of the communicative text or the student's skillset in composing such texts. Instead, the tutor

serves as a guide for facilitating student awareness and, consequently, student development, of their own communicative practices.

Lev Vygotsky (1978) presented the idea of the zone of proximal development, which considers where students are in their development, and where they are capable of going with support. As a teacher, I scaffold and structure the class in an effort to provide support for moving students from where they are presently to where they are capable of being. However, inevitably some students struggle in a larger classroom setting and need additional support, and this is where I saw myself as a tutor fitting in. Tutoring helps to fill the gap in a student's skillset on an individual level with the hope of the student better succeeding in the course. In other words, tutors work within the zone of proximal development to support student learning. To accomplish this as a tutor myself, I adapted 3 practices from my teaching in order to better support students in my tutoring. As I learned more about communication center theory, I was able to further refine these practices based upon findings from existing research (e.g., Bird, 2012).

1. Start by skimming student texts and identifying areas I believe are in need of improvement. This is in addition to asking the student the areas they feel they are struggling. Asking students about the areas they feel they are struggling is crucial for helping the students to

feel like their concerns are being heard, but it is also very important for making an effort to pinpoint the gaps in their knowledge.

2. Teach students how to find and use resources to help them when they are struggling, such as navigating the resources the communication center provides or style guides. I have often heard that students are aware that resources are available, but they are unsure of how to get the information they need from the resources. By taking the time to teach a student how to use a resource, the tutor is equipping that student with crucial knowledge for being able to navigate a particular resource and question in the future.

3.   Don't give students the answer. Use questions or directive statements to engage students in a conversation to help them come to a conclusion through collaboration. For example, instead of telling a student how she should reorganize her essay, ask the student to identify the main ideas being addressed in each paragraph, and then ask the student to think about how to arrange those ideas to best convey information to a reader. This gives students strategies for navigating an issue, like organization, on their own in the future by working alongside them to improve their communication skills.

After having taught for two years, tutoring students as a graduate consultant helped my own personal growth and development so that I would be able to better support students in one-to-one settings. Learning how to navigate one-to-one and small group consultations as a graduate consultant has helped me be more reflective about my own teaching practices. This is especially important for me as an individual because I tend to be quiet and soft-spoken by nature, and through tutoring I was able to see how changes, both in my role and surroundings, could heavily shape my ability to connect with students, and in turn provide them with the support needed to succeed. As a result, in my teaching, I now incorporate more conferences with students to work on building connections and relationships with my students in a setting more like a one-to-one consultation than a classroom.

References

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