The Tutoring Philosophy

- of -

Alex F.

Much of my tutoring praxis is directly derived from my recent experiences teaching college composition and other writing-intensive courses in the humanities. In many of these courses I required students to meet with me individually to discuss their ideas, essay drafts, and specific strategies for revision and these three fundamental components comprise the base on which I have built my tutoring praxis. Translating my methods of engagement from an instructor-to-student context into the peer-to-peer situation has been a rewarding challenge thus far, and one which I will continue to re-vision and refine for the duration of my tutoring life at the Ott Memorial Writing Center.

Honestly, it is pretty difficult for me to have a bad time talking with a student about their writing, and sometimes just talking with a student about their work can be hugely beneficial. Even those students who are most insecure about their ideas, or their ability to convey those ideas in writing, are wonderful to meet and talk with. However (unsurprisingly), my own enjoyment is a pretty low priority when compared with the student’s ideas, goals, and the potential benefits to be derived from the tutoring session. With this in mind, I know that establishing a candid, equitable rapport with a student is a crucial first step in a situation of peer tutoring. I know, too, that for the dialogue that ensues to be beneficial, the student must feel comfortable sharing their ideas, even if this involves a certain amount of struggling to express them. The onus is on me to generate a situation free of judgement, impatience, or overt limitation so that any student, no matter what they are having difficulty with, can be made comfortable sharing and expressing their ideas, both written and spoken. Fortunately, hearing and reading about the wide variety of ideas and knowledge fields that students are engaging with has always been a keen source of pleasure for me. This makes it quite easy, and most often quite enjoyable, to establish an easy and open dialogue with the student regardless of the topic or the assignment they are working on.

Extending the student’s learning beyond the isolated session is a crucial feature of one-on-one engagement that I am looking forward to cultivating. Because so much of my own studenting and teaching experiences have been based in the classroom setting (a situation in which everyone involved rightfully anticipates many weeks of regularly scheduled meetings) my default is to take for granted that I will see a student over and over again. In the tutoring situation I am now a part of this is distinctly not the case. This difference requires that I set aside at least a few minutes near the end of every session to discuss specific goals, concepts, or tasks with the student. Sometimes this may simply involve re-articulating with the student certain ideas or concepts that we engaged with during the session in terms which that particular student can intuit and hopefully retain. Other times this may involve the student and myself setting specific goals (i.e. writing down specific tasks to accomplish for a specific piece of writing). It is particularly helpful for me to keep in mind that the better a student can articulate the “new” concepts to herself, the more readily the ideas and praxis we shared in the thirty or sixty minutes will transfer into the student’s writing contexts in the future. Having this in mind, and making sure to set aside a few minutes at the end of the meeting, will facilitate student learning beyond the individual tutoring session in significant ways. Thus far tutoring has been hugely beneficial for my own thinking, teaching and writing. And if I had to speculate, I’d say that I have helped quite a few students develop their writing, helping them express and make the meaning they may have struggled with otherwise, a privilege that is equally (if not more so) rewarding for me.