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### Multiple Roles Taken in Teaching

At the beginning of the tutoring program, I was quite confident of what I am supposed to do with the tutees. I had tutored many college students during my years as an undergraduate student, and I had taught a reasonable number of adults individually or in small groups. Since it was tutoring for writing classes, I felt even more comfortable because I was quite well-known for a writing teacher when I used to teach students. However, during the course and during the progress of tutoring, a lot of the ideas and concepts I had have been reshaped.

Having those moments of first encounters with several tutees and gradually getting to know them, I realized that the first meeting is very important between the tutor and the tutee. Now that I think back of the first meetings I had with my tutees, I notice that the way I position them now differs from the way I positioned them before.

Bill was the first tutee I met among those initial meetings I had with my tutees, and also was my credit-tutee. He was very confident and self-motivated, which was very impressive. He confessed to me that he felt comfortable speaking in English, but cannot deliver the same meaning when it comes to writing in English. He knew exactly what he would like to improve, and he was willing to take the tutoring sessions as a chance to become a better writer. I was quite motivated by his attitude, and believed that he would quickly

improve since he has a strong desire to do so. He told me that he would do anything to be a better writer, which was a strong inspiration to me. However, the first impression did not remain the same. After I had chances to know him better, and spent certain amount of time to tutor him for a grammar project of another course, I realized that my tutee Bill is a less-motivated writer.

My first encounter with Sally was also interesting because I got a quite different impression from her compared to Bill. Sally seemed to be a very insecure writer. Even though what I had discovered from Sally was a very moving essay, she had a lot of uncertainty when we talked about her writing. During the first meeting, these are some expressions she constantly used: “Do you think this is good?”, “I don’t know.”, and “I’m not sure if this is okay.” From her writing, I could see that she has the basic idea of how to write, and she knows how to express her opinion coherently in written context. Still, she remained uncertain of what she had written down on the piece of paper. While finishing up the first session, I had to be honest in order to encourage and motivate her. I told her that she has a good sense in language and writing, and all she need right now is confidence. Sally thanked me and said that the comment I gave her was something she really wanted to hear. This first impression I had about Sally has not changed, but she improved more and more in each session.

The last tutee I met was Tanya, whom I met once and regret not offering more help. If I knew that our initial meeting would be the last meeting, I might have approached differently. The first impression I had for Tanya was formed through e-mails. Tanya asked me once via e-mail if she could send me her essay so that I could check grammatical errors. I suggested her to schedule an appointment and never heard anything back from her. About a month later, Tanya e-mailed me again, asking me to proofread her essay. She also mentioned that the deadline is in two days, which meant she wants me to edit her essay immediately. I nicely told her that I am here to help her develop her own skills so that she could eventually

proofread her own writing, not to fill up her essay with my words; I suggested her again to schedule an appointment. I could not easily take away the first impression I had, finding her behavior slightly impolite. However, this impression also changed because she was the most nervous and scared writer among the few tutees I have met. I understood why Tanya did not schedule a meeting; she was anxious to meet someone and talk about her own writing face-to-face. I could not spend much time building a close relationship with her since she had a deadline to meet, but I wish I had more chances to help her with her writing and her confidence.

From the few tutees I met and the short period of time I was able to observe how they improve, I realized that the first encounter is important but the first impression does not always remain the same. The first impression might work as an opportunity to foster the development, but at the same time, mistaken first impression might slow down the development.

Bill was a less-motivated writer. I first did not recognize this side of his characteristic for a while because he is a great communicator. Bill shows a high level of proficiency in speaking and he even told me several times that he enjoys talking to people. He often told me that he has trouble writing in English and would do anything possible to improve his language proficiency, but in fact, he was quite lazy to do all of that work. After listening to several of his excuses of why he couldn't finish his draft and going over a grammar tutoring project with him, I finally realized my misjudgment.

Bill is in the College of Engineering, and he is very much like an engineer. This might be a stereotype and a quick generalization, but Bill was similar to those engineers I have seen before. He did not enjoy reading and did not have fun writing. He would like to get the final conclusion or result out as soon as possible without going through the entire written

text. He enjoyed having right or wrong, black and white answers, instead of discussing all the way through to reach a general idea of the topic. These were probably the reasons why Bill preferred the grammar lessons over the writing sessions. For those moments when we went over few grammar points to improve some of his awkward sentences, he could not wait to get the “right answer”. He might struggle, but he could easily get the feeling of accomplishment through grammatical concepts. To an engineer longing for right or wrong answers, writing is not easy and does not provide strong motivation because he cannot find any “actual answers”.

Bill showed me how important it is to position students in the institution. As an international student in high school, he told me that the teachers did not really expect a lot from him. This also contributed to make him becoming less motivated. He did not feel the need to work hard because he was not expected to perform well. Since he was not positioned as an excellent student during high school, he began having those habits of not pushing himself to the extreme. Bill would like to finish his assignment in the level of average and would wrap up his essay when he reaches the number of words required. Most of the time, his essay does not meet that number, so he begins to add up sentences to reach the minimum number. He was satisfied when he received 80% for his essay, which was great, but I knew he could have done a lot better than that. In that matter, I also believe that my mistaken first impression positioned him to a higher level of proficiency than he was actually able to accomplish. Thanks to that positioning I had made, though, Bill told me that he enjoyed the challenge, and I could see that he improved much more as a writer.

While tutoring Bill, I learned several lessons. I first understood how reading proficiency and writing proficiency are strongly associated with each other, and I also learned that how the teacher or institution position students could make a huge difference. Expecting more than the student could actually achieve might discourage the student, but sometimes motivate the student, too.

Unlike Bill, Sally had no trouble reading or writing in text. The only issue I had with her was her insecurity. Until we reached about the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> tutoring session, Sally could not resist herself asking me the same question: “Is it good or bad?” To Sally, how other people view her writing – either good or bad – was more important than how she thinks of her own writing.

Encouraging Sally, but at the same time also giving constructive comments to help her was not easy. I had to keep the balance between those two goals I wanted to achieve. I did not want to be harsh or strict that could possibly make Sally feel more insecure, but I did not want her to stop improving simply because I was trying to be nice. Taking advices from the discussion board after writing my reflection for each session really helped me to solve this problem. Instead of evaluating her writing based on my standard as a writer, I tried to listen more to her opinions. As a casual tutee, Sally did not have a regular schedule to meet me. Instead, she contacted me whenever she felt like needing some help. She must have had a reason when she asked for an appointment, but whenever I asked her if something troubled her, she would say, “I wanted to ask if you think this is good or not.” I started my answers with compliments in a reader’s view, and then asked her to comment on each paragraph. I tried to use more Wh- questions in order to be more focused and specific, and soon Sally began viewing her paper objectively.

Unlike other unconfident writers I met before, Sally was not a lazy writer or a less-motivated writer. I will never be able to prove this, but I assume she must have enjoyed writing and is quite confident in her writing when it is written in her L1. After having a tutoring session, Sally would often completely change her topic because she came up with a better idea while talking to me. When this happens – and this happened quite often – she would finish her new essay in one or two days and ask me again to talk about it. Mostly I would be surprised by her hard work, and next astonished by the nicely organized essay she

would show me. Sally seemed to enjoy writing down her ideas and thoughts; I can see her face brightening up when she suddenly has a new idea. I was also glad to realize how much inspiration I could be to her by simply discussing the topic with her. As a writer rather than a speaker, verbally discussing ideas must have helped Sally to organize thoughts and create new ideas; I was very pleased when Sally told me she gets more ideas when she talks to me.

When I first met Sally and read her essay, I couldn't understand why she would need a writing tutor. I was not even sure if I am in the position to help her. However, after observing her and helping her for three months, I discover so many changes from her. Now she does not judge writing by the standard of good or bad. She would ask me more specific questions for help, and she understands how verbal communication can help her writing. As her tutor, I learned all of these valuable lessons throughout the tutoring sessions we had.

Tutoring requires a personal relationship and individualized teaching skills. Meeting completely different tutees and learning how to foster them supported me to develop more as a better teacher. Now that I reached the termination of our tutoring sessions, I notice one huge change; my tutees do not feel much needs to get my help anymore. I am very pleased to realize this because no matter how much improvement they have actually made, my tutees are feeling confident as writers to apply their own skills and feel certain about their writing without an approval from other sources.

As a tutor, I feel more confident and secure than I was before. Unlike the certainty I had in the beginning, my tutees challenged me very often and I felt lost several times. After teaching a group of children for a while, I lost my sense of being a friend and a teacher at the same time; I wanted to be supportive, not directive, but keeping the balance was not easy. Especially with Sally, encouraging her confidence and helping her out to improve her writing was difficult to balance. Also with Bill, not directly giving the "answer", but guiding him to

reach the idea or concept by himself was tough since it seemed to be against both of our natures. Bill was not a text-friendly person but he had to be, and I was a directive person but was often suggested not to be. Keeping balance between two contradictory roles was one of my biggest challenges.

I had a great opportunity to think of a tutor's role and a teacher's role. As a teacher, I used to lead the class most of the time and needed to pose certain authority to guide the entire group of young students. Of course, I do project a friendly and sensitive side as a teacher too, but when it is time for giving lectures or giving instructions, I had to be precise and direct. The role I had as a tutor was quite different, because there were no obvious boundaries between the teacher as a leader and the teacher as a supporter. I tried to take this as an opportunity for me to solve the issues I have been having as a teacher. The individual relationship helped me to realize the amount of impact I might have on the tutee and helped me to reflect on to my next action. If my approach was not suitable, my tutee would show a noticeable reaction, which could decide the next step I might take. This even contributed to become more considerate and sensitive in my personal life.

Through the entire semester of tutoring, I reshaped my beliefs and instructional skills. I learned the importance of the initial encounter and how the first positioning of the students could affect the entire lessons of teaching. I know how to communicate and support students with different issues and different personalities. I understand more of the teacher's role, which is not simply the role of being responsible for the lesson. As a person and as a teacher, I now have greater insights of how to view students, effectively teach students, and build relationships with students. As a person supporting students to develop their own potentials, I believe I need to take multiple roles. I am not simply a teacher; I am a tutor, a listener, a friend, a facilitator, and I can be so much more.