

THE COLLEGE TUTORING EXPERIENCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This is an interpretative case study of a tutoring center at a large urban university to determine the worth of a college tutoring experience, particularly from outstanding tutors' perspectives.

Maxwell (1994) recommended that more research on the effects of tutoring on the tutors was needed. A large base of tutors in this program examine the complex nature of tutoring and how the program affected them in various ways: their attitudes toward learning, their own academic motivation and progress, the results of interaction with other ethnic groups, and their future career decisions and preparation.

Findings relate to the processes of tutoring and the benefits of tutoring to both tutors and tutees. Researched areas that affect tutoring practice are diversity, techniques to assist underprepared students, mentoring, motivation, and tutor training.

Introduction

In America tutoring has been part of college academia since our first university, Harvard, opened in 1630. Because most instruction and books were in Latin, students needed to be tutored in Latin before they could begin their studies (Boylan and White, 1994; Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). College campuses today employ tutoring to improve retention rates and to assist diversified student populations. Tutoring programs are an integral part of larger developmental education or learning assistance programs on college and university campuses. Tutoring is especially used to assist students in mathematics, English composition, and large lecture courses in the freshman and sophomore years.

Literature Review

While tutoring has been generally accepted and employed extensively on college campuses to improve students' academic success, most institutions have assumed its benefits without utilizing research or theoretical frameworks. The field has not been widely researched except for writing center literature (Hartman, 1990; Graesser & Person, 1994; Maxwell, 1994).

Most of the literature about college tutoring includes narratives such as tutoring program descriptions, tutoring techniques, tutor training methods, and case studies (Hughes, 1994; Maxwell, 1994), but few studies have investigated tutoring's educational benefits (Graesser

& Person, 1994). Most qualitative studies of tutoring are found in the writing center literature where there are many case studies of tutors recounting their experiences with students (Hughes, 1994; Maxwell, 1994; Zelenak, Cockriel, Crump, & Hocks, 1993).

A portion of the current tutoring literature examines college tutoring programs and their effects on students' academic performance and success. Generally quantitative studies look at course grades, grade point averages, and persistence in college. Boylan, Bonham, & Bliss (1994) identified "tutoring with training" as having a significant impact on student academic success. Further research has studied the specific effects of tutor training strategies (Metcalf, 1996-1997; Rabow, Chin & Fahimian, 1999; Sheets, 1994). Specific techniques to improve the tutor performance are discussed by Casazza & Silverman (1996), Fishbein, Eckart, Lauver, Van Leeuwen, & Langmeyer (1990), Matthews (1993), Silverman & Juhasz (1993), and Winwood (1994).

Historical Studies of College Tutoring

Historically, images of tutoring range from the elitist view of those who can pay for private education to the stigma attached to those who need remediation (Maxwell, 1994). Tutoring traces its roots to ancient Greek and Roman schools, to European education in the Middle Ages, and particularly to the United Kingdom, where it reached a peak in the early 1800s (Moust & Schmidt, 1994). College tutoring programs have been in existence in the United States since 1630, when our first university, Harvard, tutored incoming students in Latin, the language of instruction until the American Revolution (Boylan & White, 1994; Brubacher & Rudy, 1976).

During the 19th Century, waves of underprepared students enrolled in colleges. These ranged from middle class merchants, tradesmen, engineers, farmers, and scientists to women, African Americans, and men seeking training in technical institutions. Individual tutoring was used to help substantial numbers of these students who were not prepared to do college work. In fact, many colleges were tutoring more people than they enrolled in their courses (Boylan & White, 1994).

In the 20th Century, community colleges welcomed more students, veterans went to college after World War II, and multicultural students enrolled through equal opportunity programs in the 1960s (Baker & Painter, 1983; Boylan & White, 1994; Maxwell, 1994). Tutoring has been an integral part of efforts to retain these students.

Although tutoring can carry the stigma of being remedial, today we recognize that most college students need some academic support (Maxwell, 1994). Almost all colleges in the United States now offer individual tutoring and half offer group tutoring (Maxwell, 1994).

Group tutoring has been used to counteract the large failure and low grade rates found in the lecture system widely used in higher education for the past 30 years. A few successful models have emerged such as Supplemental Instruction (Martin & Arendale, 1990), the Mathematics Workshop Model (Garland, 1993), and Peer-Led Team Learning

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(Gosser, 2001). These models reduce the stigma of tutoring as remedial by making participation open to all students and by having a closer attachment to the professor. Supplemental Instruction, for example, targets "high-risk" large lecture courses where 40% of the grades are Ds, Fs, or Ws and engages students in weekly review sessions in order to improve grades and pass rates (Martin & Arendale, 1990).

Relation of Theory to Tutoring Practice

Tutoring supports the theory that knowledge is socially constructed and fits well into the epistemology of connected knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Claxton, 1991; Garrett, 1993; Hartman, 1990; Palmer, 1987). Belenky et al. (1986) envision a connected class where there is evolving thought and room for uncertainty. Teachers try to discern the truth from the students' point of view, rather than from their own authority. Students then learn to develop their own authentic voices. Brookfield has been a leader in pedagogical reform to help faculty incorporate discussion techniques into their teaching (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999). A tutoring setting could also follow his model.

The concept of scaffolding (Bruner, 1986; Sutton, 1998) describes the processes of tutoring. Based on Vygotsky's theory (1978) of "the zone of proximal development," in scaffolding tutors support their student until they are comfortable with the concept then remove the scaffold when mastery is achieved and start again with more difficult concepts. This method has been shown to be effective with underprepared students, the predominant population of urban university learning centers (Sutton, 1998).

Educational researchers have frequently advocated educational settings that engage students in active learning or problem solving (Graesser & Person, 1994). Active learning advocates writing and reciting rather than the more passive strategies of reading and listening. Students in tutoring centers actively engage in solving problems and discussing concepts or compositions with their tutors. Tutoring is an active learning process with tutors functioning as facilitators and role models.

The Study

Maxwell (1994) recommended that more research on the effects of tutoring on the tutors was needed. The complex nature of tutoring lends itself well to a qualitative research study. A large base of tutors in one program could explain how the program affected them in various ways: their attitudes toward learning, their own academic motivation and progress, the results of interaction with other ethnic groups, and their future career decisions and preparation. This need formed the basis for this qualitative study.

This is an interpretative case study of a college-level tutoring center at a large midwestern urban university, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The Tutoring and Academic Resource Center's tutoring program was the unit of design for the study. The setting was used to closely examine what takes place in a college tutoring program. The tutoring center employs 60 tutors who work with an average of 800 students each semester. There is rich

data from the experiences of students who come to the center and the tutors who help them learn.

This study examines the experiences of tutors and their tutees with an emphasis on outstanding tutors' perspectives of the experience. They interpret how tutoring has helped to change students' attitudes, increased their motivation, earn better grades, stay in the course, remain in school, and graduate. The study asks how the tutoring experience affected the tutors and their tutees in the areas of academic success, motivation, and a connection to campus life.

The following major questions were used to guide this study:

1. What are the processes of tutoring that affect learning outcomes? What are the qualities of a good tutor? What tutor techniques work best?
2. How does the experience of tutoring affect the tutors? What are the benefits of tutoring to the tutors?
3. What is the relation between tutoring and students' learning? To what extent do tutors believe that the tutoring experience is affecting students' academic success?
4. What is the worth of the college tutoring experience to tutors and tutees? To what extent are tutors and students satisfied with their tutoring experience?

Participants

Tutors in this setting are college students who have passed the course they tutor with an "A" or a "B" or have equivalent academic credentials and junior standing or above. Outstanding tutors represented the majority of the 39 tutors in this study. To earn an outstanding award, tutors must earn an excellent rating by staff and by students on their performance evaluations. The tutors targeted for the study comprised three groups: Group One, 14 tutors who tutored in Fall Semester 1998 including: 11 tutors who earned outstanding tutor awards and 3 other tutors who were being strongly considered for the award; Group Two, 12 tutors who had earned outstanding tutor awards and were tutoring from Spring 1997 through Spring 1998; and Group Three, 13 additional tutors in focus groups conducted in November 1998.

Of the 39 tutor participants, 6 tutors were either African American, Latino, or Southeast Asian, and 5 tutors were international students from India, Israel, and Sierra Leone. The average age of the selected tutors was 27.3. They tutored courses in English, math, anatomy and physiology, physics, sociology, social sciences, geography, history, Africology, statistics, accounting, logic, Spanish, and computer science. Groups One and Two had completed 10 hours of tutor training. Group Three had received at least 5 hours of training.

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Research Design

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The population of tutored students from Fall 1995 through Fall 1998 totaled 838 students who were tutored in an average of 144 courses at the freshman and sophomore level. Of this population, 61% were female, 39% were male; 42% were freshmen, 30% were sophomores, 14% were juniors, 8% were seniors, 1% graduate students; 1% special students, (4% not given); 35% were under age 20, 40% were 20-25, 24% were over 25, (1% not given); 55.5% were students of color, and 41.5% were white, (3% not given). Evaluations from these students were used in this study, in addition, the Fall of 1998, 5 students of outstanding tutors were observed in tutoring sessions and subsequently interviewed about their experience.

Research Design

This qualitative study used three major methods: tutor interviews, tutor focus groups, and student evaluations and interviews to determine the worth of a college tutoring experience. Data was collected primarily through individual interviews with tutors, as well as tutor focus groups, individual student interviews, participant observation, and student evaluations.

In individual interviews and tutor focus groups, tutors and students had the opportunity to talk about their perspectives of the tutoring experience with an emphasis on both tutors' and students' growth.

Student evaluations of their tutors and the tutoring program were the primary documents examined as part of this study. Tutees evaluate their tutors and the program each semester to give an overall perception of the satisfaction with the program and their tutors. These documents provided additional student perspectives about selected tutors with which to triangulate the interviews. Semester reports based on student applications and attendance data were also reviewed to give a scope of the program and its participants.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data was analyzed following these steps: a) one segment of data is compared with another to determine similarities and differences, b) data with a similar dimension are grouped together, c) this dimension is tentatively given a name, becoming a category, d) patterns are sought in the data, e) patterns are analyzed to develop an interpretation and meaning from the data, and f) patterns are arranged in relationship with each other (Merriam, 1998).

Audiotapes of focus groups and of individual interviews were transcribed. Interview transcripts and focus group transcripts were coded to find emergent categories by asking questions such as "What does this represent? How does it compare to another bit of information?" In order to identify the properties of each category, conditions that underlie each category and the context in which it was embedded were analyzed.

Central patterns from these categories were then developed: career development, diversity, helping students, tutor techniques, tutor qualities, student characteristics, student improvement, tutor techniques, tutoring vs. teaching, and the tutoring experience.

The next step was to choose pertinent quotes and data that supported these categories for the written portion of the study. These then were put into the categories and analyzed for recurrent themes. Finally they were grouped together as a basis for the written document of the results. The results were written in a logical pattern from why students became tutors, the qualities that make a good tutor, what tutors noticed when their students came to tutoring, establishing relationships, specific tutoring techniques, types of tutoring, unique aspects of tutoring, and benefits of tutoring to the tutors and to the students.

Results

Five themes emerged from the data that form a basis for conclusions about the effectiveness of the tutoring experience. These themes fell into the following categories: a) qualities of a good tutor, b) the processes of tutoring, c) the benefits of tutoring to the tutors, d) the benefits of tutoring for the tutees, and e) the worth of the tutoring experience.

Qualities of a Good Tutor

The best tutors displayed the following characteristics and actions which engaged their students: a) caring about the students; b) showing sensitivity, c) building rapport; d) demonstrating flexibility; and e) serving as role models. These characteristics fit closely with Rabow et al.'s (1999) recommendations that tutors: a) develop an attitude of unconditional acceptance of tutees; b) show enthusiasm, interest, and empathy; c) be patient, observant, and ask questions; d) establish rapport and make a connection; and e) build trust and show respect. Tutors emphasized the importance of showing concern, respect, and treating their tutees as equals. They saw themselves as student advocates who were sensitive to their tutees' needs, nurturing, and flexible in their approaches to tutoring.

One tutor said, "I think that the ultimate high is just knowing you changed somebody's life because you were there to help them through this one little course. Because of that you can get into the next math class, get into the major, and graduate from college."

Tutoring Processes and Techniques

The study found several processes used by tutors to affect students' learning: a) motivating students, b) setting expectations, c) building self confidence, d) developing rapport, e) making a connection to campus, and f) mentoring. Tutors set high expectations of their students in order to motivate them. They used praise tutees to build confidence. The tutors "knew the ropes" and could help their tutees not only with course content but also with planning their college careers. Another tutor said, "In the long run you hope to instill skills that take you throughout life—working hard, being disciplined, setting expectations and goals for yourself."

Tutors assisted each other and developed a spirit of camaraderie. Students seemed to catch the energy of the tutoring center and realized that they were not alone in their efforts. "The hardest thing about being an undergraduate student is you feel like a cog in a wheel . . .

There's a sense of isolation said. "This tutoring center

Tutors saw themselves as advocates for their tutees because they listened to their needs on a basic level, and they listened to them as an advocate. "I believe that I can help them. The more

Tutors discovered an understanding among students, they discovered that in some cases, they discovered that at a concrete level, and

Tutors had to use a variety of means of identifying teaching. Training was a group discussion, and a "toolbox" of techniques

In addition to helping many of their students at college. Training added for time management study skills helped students apply to other courses

Many tutees needed organization. The need helped students with their across. Media such as suggested to supplement lecture by professors. tutees to read and compare

Tutors were more patient in motivating students. Many students were very much interested in a subject with about meteorology that requirement.

Tutors adjusted their teaching to a direct approach and showed patience in order to

There's a sense of isolation that you feel because you don't know everybody here," one tutor said. "This tutoring center serves as a way of getting students anchored."

Tutors saw themselves as peers to the student participants. Tutees could develop a trust in their tutors because they were in the same peer group, they were available on an individual basis, and they listened and took time to develop rapport. One tutor saw herself as a student advocate. "I believe that's how most of the good tutors are," she said. "They really want to help them. The money side of it is secondary."

Tutors discovered and tried to fill gaps in students' learning. While noting a wide variety among students, they still were surprised at the low level of student preparation. In many cases, they discovered that students needed basic skills development, their learning stage was at a concrete level, and they needed repetition for concepts to sink in.

Tutors had to use a variety of approaches to help students understand. Questioning was the means of identifying the students' problems. Discussion and coaching were modes of teaching. Training was provided to help tutors ask questions effectively, engage students in a group discussion, and to communicate effectively. One tutor used the metaphor of applying a "toolbox" of techniques.

In addition to helping bridge gaps in understanding course content, tutors discovered that many of their students, particularly freshmen, needed guidance in approaches to studying in college. Training addressed improving study techniques, so tutors had a cadre of approaches for time management, organization, reading textbooks, note taking, and test taking. These study skills helped students adjust to the rigor of studying in college and could often be applied to other courses.

Many tutees needed assistance in comprehending their textbooks or improving their organization. The need to read and comprehend textbooks stood out in this study. Tutors helped students with textbook reading techniques but often used other means to get the point across. Media such as basic skills computer tutorials, videotapes, and CD-ROMs were suggested to supplement the course. Sometimes texts weren't emphasized as much as the lecture by professors, but more often tutors found that the textbooks were difficult for their tutees to read and comprehend.

Tutors were more positive about their success with content and study skills than in motivating students. Many thought that students had a pre-set motivational level—some students were very motivated and some weren't; however, tutors were able to generate interest in a subject which was often their major. One tutor, for example, was so enthused about meteorology that some of his students enrolled in another course beyond their requirement.

Tutors adjusted their techniques to fit the types of students they tutored. Adult students liked a direct approach and could relate material to life experiences. International students needed patience in order to communicate in English and understand cultural differences. More

The Benefits of Tutoring to the Students

While the main reason students came to tutoring was to do better academically, there were other benefits as well. While this study does not correlate tutoring with grade improvement, tutors and students did believe that tutoring raised their grades in many cases. Students liked having a variety of types of tutoring available: walk-in sessions, scheduled appointments, and weekly sessions throughout the semester. While the walk-in service seemed to be more homework-based, appointments were helpful with compositions, and the weekly individual or group sessions aimed to improve the students' overall mastery of the subject matter over the course of the semester. All types of services met students' needs.

In weekly sessions, tutors and tutees developed a positive working relationship. Students benefitted because they had someone to turn to in a non-threatening environment who could answer their questions. When comparing tutoring to teaching, one tutor said, "The distance between chairs is a lot less than the distance between board and desk."

Tutoring was a safe environment for students where a "dumb" question didn't affect their grade. Tutors could provide a deeper interpretation of the course concepts, and students could discuss and actively participate. "They come for feedback, consolation, and encouragement from the tutor," a tutor stated.

Tutors saw the experience as a very personal interaction, allowing flexibility to discover the needs of the students rather than using a set approach. Tutors supported their tutees, and, as mentors, offered an optimistic viewpoint about academic success. A math tutor, said, "I rate my performance on how my students are doing in the class...on how they feel about it. So many students in the past have had bad math experiences, so I really try to overcome that with the students. Maybe for the first time in their life they can say, 'Hey, this is math, and I'm enjoying it.' And that is actually one of my major goals: for them not to be afraid of it anymore."

The opportunity for students to participate in a multicultural setting was a strong benefit of tutoring for both tutors and tutees. The interaction of students from different ethnicities and cultures allowed for a better understanding of each other. Group tutoring, in particular, provided more interaction among people of different races and ethnicities. Because many students were referred from programs which support students of color, 55% of the participants were not Caucasian. Tutoring allowed students to get to know one another who may not have otherwise taken the opportunity. This diverse setting, where people came together to master a similar goal through discussion, had a positive impact on both tutees and tutors. One tutor felt, for example, that tutoring had changed her to be more open-minded about people from different ethnicities.

Tutoring gave the tutors a chance to develop their communication techniques, especially formulating questions and articulating concepts clearly. Students were given a chance to speak, to ask questions, and participate in the construction of their learning. A tutor believed that one of the real strengths of the tutoring setting was that the environment allowed

dialogue. She saw it as a "real boot camp" providing a "rigorous opportunity to test their ability to communicate information."

Implications

This study has implications in the areas of a) diversity, b) underprepared students, c) fostering independent learning, d) motivation, e) mentoring and f) tutor training.

As students prepare for the diverse world of work, having the experience of meeting students of multicultural backgrounds was very enriching for participants. Diversity in this setting also included returning adult students, foreign students, and students with disabilities. The increased social interaction between people of different backgrounds increases empathy for differences and adds to the worth of the tutoring experience. One tutor said, "You get to experience somebody from a different background. Especially at this university, because it is mostly a commuter campus, there's not a whole lot of interaction between students."

Second, the theme of underprepared students emerges as a problem that may apply to other settings. An urban campus has to deal with the issue of the level of preparation of its incoming student population. While tutors were not in a position to see an overall trend, they did recognize a difference between their educational preparation and the preparation of their tutees.

Tutors can provide the scaffolding needed to bridge gaps in learning from weak preparation or an absence from school by adult students. The value of tutoring is increased because individualized attention assists these students to succeed academically. An individualized approach such as tutoring not only supports students where they are in their learning, but nurtures them to level the playing field. If these students succeed, then retention is improved.

Tutoring program directors want to attract students to use the services, but can face reluctance by students who do not want to be identified with a "remedial" program even though they could benefit from the service as one student stated. Offering tutoring to all students in a course can offset the remedial connotation, encourage a positive environment, and make tutoring a more integral part of the university.

Third, although students gained a foundation in subjects from tutoring, tutoring did not always foster independent learning. Some students with disabilities, for example, needed tutoring throughout college as part of their accommodation. Although students gained self-confidence, they did not necessarily prefer to learn independently. They liked the connection of learning together. Because freshman and sophomore courses are mostly large lecture courses for general education requirements, students liked the small group or one-on-one interaction that tutoring offered. Tutoring was an effective method of learning in its own right. Eighty-five percent ranked their satisfaction with tutoring at the highest level.

Tutoring helps those in freshman and sophomore courses because of the predominance of large lecture classes during these years. It offsets the top down, objectivist dissemination of

information (Palmer, provided).

Fourth, tutors were all in the course. Anxiety tutoring. In some cases was a general education students' motivation in the subject, they had to take another course suggests that tutors who students progress toward

Fifth, the increased cost of the tutoring experience expected to be. Student planning, and campus develop their self-concept tutoring setting may students commute. Academic content rather than the

Last, since "tutoring learning assistance are now being made the primary participant at least 10 hours of training tutoring. These topics using motivational techniques

Much of what is done are not succeeding at the retention efforts at tutoring has received programs adds value

In addition to formal campuses including service learning and campuses, tutoring programs retention initiatives.

information (Palmer, 1987). Both tutors and tutees liked the discussion mode that tutoring provided.

Fourth, tutors were able to make a difference for some students in motivation and interest in the course. Anxiety about a subject, such as math, seemed to diminish as a result of tutoring. In some cases, it was a challenge for tutors to interest students in a subject which was a general education requirement. Some tutors did not observe a change in the level of students' motivation as a result of tutoring. However, since tutors were generally majoring in the subject, they had an enthusiasm that did influence some students to like the course, take another course in the subject, or even consider the subject as a major. This study suggests that tutors were intrinsically motivated (Reeve, 1996) and could be trained to help students progress toward taking personal responsibility for their own learning.

Fifth, the increased communication and interaction between tutors and tutees were benefits of the tutoring experience. Tutors found themselves in more of a mentoring role than they expected to be. Students often asked them questions about future courses, their major, career planning, and campus life. Many students, particularly the traditional students, needed to develop their self-confidence and also needed general advice about aspects of college. The tutoring setting may be a good location for mentoring on an urban campus where many students commute. Adult students, however, were more focused on getting help with course content rather than the social aspect of tutoring.

Last, since "tutoring with training" was found to be a significant variable in successful learning assistance and developmental educational programs (Boylan et al., 1994), efforts are now being made to improve tutor training in college learning assistance centers. Since the primary participants in the current study were outstanding tutors who had received at least 10 hours of training, their insights help to inform theory and improve the practice of tutoring. These topics of helping underprepared students, fostering independent learning, using motivational techniques, and mentoring deserve attention in training programs.

Conclusion

Much of what is done in tutoring programs has been taken for granted. Since many students are not succeeding academically in college, tutoring is one way to solve the problem. Given the retention efforts and increased emphasis on teaching and learning in higher education, tutoring has received increased attention. This study suggests that the existence of tutoring programs adds value to the college experience for both students and tutors.

In addition to formal tutoring programs, tutoring is also part of many initiatives on college campuses including the Freshman Year Experience movement, learning communities, service learning and mentoring. By understanding what value tutoring has on today's college campuses, tutoring programs can be improved and integrated more with courses and campus retention initiatives.

In conclusion, this qualitative study shows the college tutoring experience to be a positive one. Tutoring plays an integral role in the development of college students as they strive to reach their academic goals, and tutoring programs have value on a college campus. More needs to be done to help students achieve academically than the traditional "sink or swim" lecture approach in which up to 40% of the students earn below a "C" or fail the course. A band-aid approach will not work; both bottom up and top down strategies are needed for the transfer of learning to succeed.

From the program assistant directing student traffic like an air traffic controller, to the tutor with his toolbox of techniques, to the student with "light bulbs going off in his head," metaphors abound for the tutoring experience. As one tutor said, "It's like a journey. You walk them down the path and show them what they need to look for during this process: where it starts, where it ends, and what they have to do along the way."

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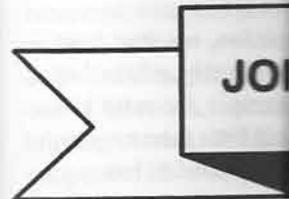
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THE SILENT

By Jadwiga Piper, National-Louis University

Much research has been done on the benefits of tutoring. And, in fact, so many studies have shown those benefits. However, the "silent" benefits of the job in future careers they have

Earlier this year, I asked students in a learning center had on their minds because of their excellent writing experience. All three are relative newcomers to the National-Louis Language (ESL) course

National-Louis University has two undergraduate on-campus programs. The university has two European locations

NLU's Chicago campus is a prime location, the university is surrounded by businesses and often considered by students to attract qualified students. The cost is very low; most peer tutoring is until graduation and is often attributed to many factors. Contact with faculty, and tutors are the reasons

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JOIN THE CONVERSATION

THE SILENT BENEFITS OF TUTORING

By Jadwiga Piper, National-Louis University

Much research has been conducted on the cognitive benefits tutors gain as a result of tutoring. And, in fact, some students want to be tutors mainly so they can take advantage of those benefits. However, in our informal conversations, tutors have been telling me of the "silent" benefits of the job: the personal and professional growth, even significant changes in future careers they have made as a result of working in the learning center.

Earlier this year, I asked three peer tutors to tell me what impact (if any) working in a learning center had on them. The three tutors were asked to participate in this discussion because of their excellence in their work, seniority in the department, and amount of experience. All three are in their early/mid 20's; they are non-native speakers of English and relative newcomers to the United States. In fact, they finished their English as a Second Language (ESL) coursework only within the last two to three years.

Background

National-Louis University (NLU) is a four-year institution, serving students in undergraduate on-campus and degree completion programs, graduate, and doctoral programs. The university serves approximately 15,000 students annually in its 13 U.S. and two European locations.

NLU's Chicago campus is located in the city's downtown. Because of the campus's central location, the university departments are in constant (and often losing) competition with the surrounding businesses for work-study candidates. The outside employers pay more and are often considered by students more prestigious places to work. Thus, it is very difficult to attract qualified students to become tutors. Fortunately, the attrition rate of hired tutors is very low; most peer tutors continue to work in the Center for Academic Development (CAD) until graduation and often after getting another, higher paying job. This success may be attributed to many factors, but training and mentoring on the part of the department, close contact with faculty, and recognition of presented opportunities on the part of the student tutors are the reasons focused on here.

Introduction

The tutors listed many professional growth factors, which, in their opinion, resulted from working in the learning center. Some of these factors they could identify directly; others they described and I labeled based on their description. In one case, for example, the tutor had such a traditional definition of the term "leader" that he excluded himself from the category; however, once we clarified our definitions, he agreed that the category applied to him.

It is also important to mention that all of these tutors were hired based upon faculty referrals and high GPA among other qualifications. It was the tutor coordinator who pursued them to take the position rather than their specifically wanting to be tutors. They all agreed to take the job, but none of them had any tutoring experience or knew what tutoring was prior to taking the job.

Personal and Professional Development

During our discussion, the tutors listed many benefits of working in the learning center. They were very aware of the cognitive skills they gained as a result of tutoring; they mentioned a sense of belonging, the ability to work with people of different cultures and age groups, newly discovered resourcefulness and creativity in problem solving. However, they concentrated on self-confidence as the main benefit of working in the CAD. This confidence came from many sources and manifested itself in many different ways. But above all, the tutors knew they had gained it and were able to monitor it and use it to modify their current and future professions. Self-confidence will play an important role in their professional and personal futures.

The first source of self-confidence the tutors identified was a faculty's recommendation for a tutoring position. They had not seen themselves in such roles and were rather surprised by others' perceptions of their skills and abilities. Some of them continue being mentored by the content area faculty, making them stronger tutors and students. This close relationship with faculty also helped the tutors to think of faculty in a more approachable way. Although they do not think of faculty as their peers, the tutors were able to see them less as all-knowing holders of knowledge and power and more as approachable mentors and real-life models. This skill, when transferred to other aspects of their lives, will have a significant effect on their futures. It may help them to shift the focus from possible disparity in "power" between themselves and their administrator and "allow" them to question authority.

Tutors also identified their students' successes in tutoring as another source of confidence. Unanimously they agreed that it is the students' successes that motivate them to keep returning to tutoring year after year. They agreed that failures were difficult but manageable because of the successes. And, they also were able to separate themselves; they did not consider their students' failures as their own personal disappointments. Although very nurturing and caring about their students, they were disappointed when the students did not do their share during and following a tutoring session. These three tutors have always been excellent students. Most likely they have never personally experienced difficulties learning;

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working closely with students who may struggle in their learning has helped them to be compassionate and non-judgmental.

Self-confidence is often necessary to conduct a productive tutoring session. For example, one of the tutors told me how her regular student kept receiving cell phone calls during the tutoring session. When she confronted him about his behavior, at first he did not want to cooperate. He was fully aware of his inappropriate behavior because his teachers also did not allow cell phone calls, but I suspect he took the tutor for an easy target. She continued to pursue the subject, and the student eventually stopped accepting cell calls during tutoring sessions. This was handled between the tutor and the student without the coordinator's intervention. I think it took the boldness that can come from self-confidence for the tutor to address this issue repeatedly, especially since the student did not want to cooperate.

One of the tutors changed her major based on her experience in the CAD. Working here allowed her the practical experience she needed to rethink her major. Originally majoring in elementary education, she changed her program to one that will allow her to teach English in a college setting. She said she realized that she was capable of pursuing the masters and doctoral degrees necessary to accomplish her goal, and that she realized that she is confident enough in her abilities to compete for the degrees and the future positions with the native-born students. This example is probably the most tangible (though not the most important) "silent" benefit of tutoring mentioned here. This tutor is also very serious about the cognitive benefits of tutoring since they will directly benefit her future career.

Another tutor, in addition to working in the CAD, was also working in a suburban high school as a tutor and mentor and was volunteering in an adult literacy program. One of the "perks" of holding these positions, according to him, is the practice of speaking to groups. When conducting group tutoring sessions on NLU's campus, he was in a familiar environment among people he knew. However, tutoring an ever-changing group of adults, many of whom are considerably older than him, took some practice. He recently reported to me with a smile that he no longer feared speaking to groups.

Conclusion

Much of the professional literature discusses what students get out of tutoring, how tutoring helps. Although I have no doubt that these three tutors had the potential to become who they are today, working in the learning center accelerated the process. The training, mentoring, and experience they gained here were invaluable tools for them in reaching their current level of professionalism. This confidence will benefit them in making educated life-long decisions.

Jadwiga Piper, is the interim director of the Center for Academic Development and coordinator of the Chicago Campus CAD at National-Louis University in Chicago, Illinois.

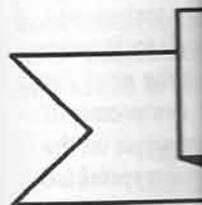
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The Learning Assistance Review is a publication of the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA). It is published twice a year, in the fall and spring.

The journal seeks to expand and disseminate knowledge about learning centers and to foster communication among learning center professionals. Its audience includes learning center administrators, teaching staff, and tutors as well as other faculty and administrators across the curriculum who are interested in improving the learning skills of postsecondary students.

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Reviewed By Jane

Light, R. J. (2001).
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BOOK REVIEWS

MAKING THE MOST OF COLLEGE: STUDENTS SPEAK THEIR MINDS

Reviewed By Jane Runkel Frederick, Higher Education Consultant

Light, R. J. (2001). Making the most of college: Students speak their minds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

This is a must read book for current and prospective college students, faculty, administrators, and trustees. Light, a statistician, could have researched this book by using the tried and true method of questionnaires and surveys, but thankfully he did not. Rather, he and others interviewed hundreds of students to get a more in depth and meaningful picture of what happens on college campuses. The result is a very readable and richly detailed account of student insights into two broad questions:

- ▶ What choices do students make to get the most out of college?
- ▶ What are some effective ways for faculty and campus leaders to take the information gleaned from the interviews and put it into practice?

The book is divided into nine chapters which are interspersed with student quotes and comments that more or less support and explain Light's major findings. Some of the findings would confirm what most academics have been thinking while others will surprise some in the higher education community.

Light predicted students would report that the most important and memorable academic learning experiences were in the classroom. To his surprise, this was not the case. Interview after interview suggested that important and memorable learning was more likely to occur outside of the classroom in the areas of residential life, extracurricular activities (especially the fine arts), and employment. He found students used these areas to develop and showcase their skills, learn leadership, and "give back" to the community in ways that allowed the students to connect theory with practice and build their self-esteem by developing mastery of a topic or skill. Overall, the student interviewees stressed the value of getting deeply involved in one or two activities in addition to their academic courses.

It became clear from the interviews that other activities outside of the classroom also profoundly affected student performance. Students related examples of study techniques, working in small groups, time management, and collaboration on homework to increase student success and satisfaction with college. There was some discussion of the need for students to ask for and access assistance as needed. Students mentioned symptoms of academic difficulty and identified interventions to assist student success. Comments on the critical role faculty, mentors, and advisors play in a student's academic career were sprinkled throughout the book. Students often talked about the challenging interactions they had with these adults which forced them to connect their personal passions with their academic work (connecting their interests with learning and their course choices), decisions about residential life, and their activities.

When asked about classroom choice, students had several preferences. Students discussed the need for and value of quick feedback. These comments appeared when students showed preference for highly structured classes, where exams and quizzes and other means of quick feedback were possible. I was interested to note that students mentioned foreign language courses as one set of courses that offered this desired structure. Courses that offered strong writing components were also stressed. It was clear from the student responses that students value the ability to write well. Students want courses that offer them opportunities to write and receive feedback so that they can improve their skills. Specific suggestions about seeking assistance with writing were also shared by some of the students.

Students also valued tutorials, seminars, and one-on-one supervised classes and seminars in which students could create their own projects and implement them under faculty supervision. Overall, students indicated a desire for small classes with plenty of student-faculty engagement. These classes were often described as having fifteen or fewer students. Light indicated students who took more intimate classes tended to have higher grade point averages than those who chose the larger classes. Students did seem to understand that not all classes could be offered in such ways, and they did offer some examples of how faculty teaching large classes could engage students and offer quick feedback.

The most interesting finding of the book related to campus diversity. While Light was able to find evidence that the impact of racial and ethnic diversity on campus was positive, it was only so IF certain preconditions within the environment were met. It seemed students valued learning from others, yet it did not always come naturally. Students pointed out that the culture of the campus and the tone and attitude of learning within the higher education community had to be laid out in such a way that students understood the inclusive nature of their learning environment. Just because diversity exists on campus does not mean the campus community will learn from it. Students need to be encouraged to take full advantage of the campus diversity in their daily life and in structured events.

Students will easily be able to relate these findings to their own academic careers. Faculty and campus leaders will need to find ways to encourage students to apply the information, as well as find ways to translate student suggestions into practice, at all levels of their institutions.

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In particular, learning center professionals and developmental education faculty will find this book useful as they defend their programs and budgets, and more importantly, as they think about curriculum and course development, their interactions with students, and possible use of students in their programs. Some areas for consideration are:

- ▶ Highly structured courses
- ▶ Intimate course size
- ▶ Strong student-faculty engagement
- ▶ Strong writing components
- ▶ Opportunities to strengthen writing skills
- ▶ Quick feedback
- ▶ Teaching of student success techniques
- ▶ Small group work
- ▶ Homework collaboration
- ▶ Out of class student involvement (mentoring or tutoring)

Light is superb in his organization and reporting of student insights and suggestions. It is incumbent upon the reader to work with the materials presented and put them into some usable form. At the very least, this book is about how the higher education community assists students to have successful college careers.

Jane Runkel Frederick, is a Higher Education Consultant in Milwaukee, Wisconsin specializing in academic advising issues.

TIME TO KNOW THEM: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF WRITING AND LEARNING AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

Reviewed By John Stovall, National-Louis University

Sternglass, M. (1997). Time to know them: A longitudinal study of writing and learning at the college level. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

In Time to Know Them, Marilyn S. Sternglass has written a book remarkable for its ambition and accomplishment. Decrying the limits of short-term research and citing the need to examine complex influences on students over time, she designed a longitudinal study, employing an ethnographical approach, of students' growth in writing.

Sternglass' ambitious (and worthy) goal was straightforward: track a sizable group of students, mostly basic writers, and the ways they learned and wrote from their first semester, introductory writing courses to their graduations. Sternglass, noted author of other important works, such as The Presence of Thought: Introspective Accounts of Reading and Writing (1988), accomplishes this. Time to Know Them reports what happened to students as writers and learners, but, more importantly, reports how they grew as they become educated and had to reposition themselves in relationship to society and their own cultures—the mediation of learning and life.

Sternglass studied students who were in her first semester freshman writing classes at the City College of the City University of New York. Starting with 53 initial subjects in 1989, she finished her study in 1995, compiling an enormous amount of data on the nine students who remained with the project over the course of six years. Her nine students, many of whom started in basic writing courses, are indicative (even if not representative) of the kinds of students we see at similar open admissions schools. They came from a variety of economic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds.

As with any longitudinal study, the high attrition rate of the original group and the reasons for it—including stopping out, transfers, and loss of contact—limited Sternglass' data gathering and eventually the scope of her goal. However, this is not to imply any paucity of information. Indeed, just the opposite is true. Sternglass provides a wealth of information and interpretation about her students' journey through academe. Her research methodology included interviews at various stages of the students' college experience, a collection of papers and assignments including grades and teachers' comments from her students' courses, and observations of the actual classes the students were enrolled in. Her book is filled also with excerpts of her subjects' writing—not only essays from their writing courses, but a variety of assignments from courses in the students' majors, general education requirements, and elective fields.

Among the many areas that explore how social factors (such as composition courses) such as the assessment of inclusion of content form of barrier examination analyzing instructional sequence of successful a time span long enough these issues, however whose lives were aff

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Among the many areas she investigated are how her students' writing enabled their learning, how social factors (such as race, gender, class, ideology) affected their writing, and how composition courses and pedagogy influenced writing. In the latter, she examines issues such as the assessment of writing which focuses too heavily upon surface features instead of inclusion of content. She reports also the negative impact that institutional testing—in the form of barrier exams with their inherent flaws—can have upon students' progress. In analyzing instructional settings, Sternglass considers the shortcomings of the standard sequence of successive one term writing courses, as opposed to instruction occurring over a time span long enough to allow for continued growth. As important as her discussions of these issues, however, is her insight into the confluence of these practices and the students whose lives were affected in real ways by them.

For each issue she raises, Sternglass provides a thorough, in-depth review of the relevant studies that ground her research. This alone would be enough to make the book required reading for any aspiring writing teacher—as well as anyone else who teaches writing in either the classroom or writing center—but of even more importance are the case studies she provides of four of her students. Analyzing her subjects and the ways they know (based upon categories developed by Belenky et al.), she details the growth of Linda, an African American student and basic writer who switches majors from nursing to psychology; Ricardo, a Puerto Rican student for whom English was a second language, who graduated with a degree in communications; Joan, an African American student with physical and learning disabilities; and Jacob, a Korean student with a good academic background who switched majors three times. From Sternglass' presentations of their lives and struggles, we gain a sense of the students as humans—not just as subjects in a study.

Overall, her findings, albeit of only nine students, are nonetheless important. Some of her many findings are new; some reinforce what many have observed in their own classes. For example, she found that growth in writing ability is neither linear nor neatly patterned. Over time, her students grew toward analytical thinking and writing. She found also that students' ability to interact with reading texts was enhanced through their ability to articulate the ideas from their reading. At later stages, students were able to draw upon other disciplines and critically question their own assumptions. Interestingly enough, most of her subjects felt that essay tests and papers—*instead* of multiple choice and short answer tests—gave them the best opportunity to display what they had learned.

Importantly, students are often more persistent and resilient than might be expected. Despite many obstacles and challenges, students grow. Sternglass concludes that more resources (including financial) need to be provided for students—especially developmental students. She cites the increased difficulties that students have with their course work when they have to work longer hours or additional jobs to meet rising tuition and other school expenses.

Since its initial publication, among the honors Time to Know Them has received are the Modern Language Association's Shaughnessy Award and Conference of College Composition and Communication's Best Book award. Although Marilyn Sternglass' initial ambition in this book is perhaps only partially realized, Time to Know Them is an important

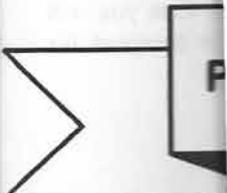
accomplishment in the study of students' writing—as important today as it was four years ago.

John Stovall, is an Associate Professor in the English Department at National-Louis University in Chicago, Illinois.

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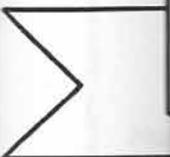
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As an official publication of the National College Learning Center Association, The Learning Assistance Review seeks to expand and disseminate knowledge about learning centers and to foster communication among learning center professionals. Its audience includes learning center administrators, teaching staff and tutors, as well as other faculty and administrators across the curriculum who are interested in improving the learning skills of post-secondary students.

The journal publishes scholarly articles and reviews that address issues of interest to a broad range of learning center professionals. Primary consideration will be given to articles about program design and evaluation, classroom-based research, the application of theory and research to practice, innovative teaching strategies, student assessment, and other topics that bridge gaps within our diverse discipline.

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What Does NCLCA Do?

- ▶ Promotes professional standards in the areas of administration and management, program and curriculum design, evaluation, and research;
- ▶ Acts on learning assistance issues at local, regional, and national levels;
- ▶ Assists in the creation of new, and enhancement of existing, learning centers and programs;
- ▶ Provides opportunities for professional development, networking, and idea exchange through conferences, workshops, institutes, and publications; and
- ▶ Offers forums for celebrating and respecting the profession.

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