

TUTORING: AN INTEGRAL PART OF A LEARNING/ READING/WRITING CENTER

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The following information was obtained by surveying over two dozen center directors, tutor trainers/supervisors, and authors from more than a dozen states. This is just a sampling of their responses to the statement: "TUTORING IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF A LEARNING /READING /WRITING CENTER."

Dr. Karan Hancock, Coordinator of CRLA's International Tutor Certification Program and author/editor of three tutor texts, responded in this manner concerning a definition of tutoring:

Tutoring is, by definition, a one-to-one or small group activity where a person who is knowledgeable and has expertise in a specific content area or discipline provides tutelage, help, or clarification to one or more who do not. This definition must be expanded for today's college/university purposes. The open admission policy of many institutions unblocks the road to post-secondary study; however, many students begin to travel on this road only to face different types of roadblocks — many find they must take several detours along the way.

Bob Mittan, Director of the Writing Center at Casper College in Casper, Wyoming, has these comments concerning both a definition of tutoring and its place in a center:

Of course tutoring is an integral part of a learning, reading, and/or writing center. I believe that all of the activities that happen in places that call themselves by these names is,

in effect, a kind of tutoring. For instance, I have presented workshops — to as many as 125 students at a time — that I consider a kind of tutorial. I have also worked individually with students sometimes just once, other times over long periods of time — in what can only be described as tutorial situations. And I have worked in the more “traditional,” discipline-specific types of interactions with students that are commonly called tutorials. What all these activities have in common is that always, regardless of location, size of group, or specific topic, the focus of the interaction was on THE LEARNER and THE LEARNING, not on the teacher or the subject. Since I believe such a view is at the foundation of most, if not all, learning/reading/writing centers, at least the good ones, I would then argue that tutoring is the very foundation of what these centers do. And yes, it takes many shapes.

Dr. Kathy Carpenter, Director of the Learning Center, University of Nebraska at Kearney, lists five reasons why tutoring is an integral part of a Learning Center:

1. A well-trained corps of tutors enables a center to provide center assistance to many more students than could possibly be helped by only the faculty employed in the center.
2. Students feel less threatened when seeking help from another student as opposed to seeking help from a faculty member.
3. Students are more at ease during the tutoring process when the tutor is an upper-level student rather than a faculty member.
4. Tutoring in the content area is much more effective when provided by upper-level students who have already excelled in classes for which they are providing assistance. They have a grasp of the content matter as presented by specific

instructors, providing insights that a learning center faculty member would not be able to provide.

5. Positive relationships between content area faculty and the learning center are fostered by well-trained tutors who work closely with the content area professors while assisting their tutees.

Gladys R. Shaw, Director, Tutoring and Learning Center, University of Texas at El Paso, views tutoring in the following manner:

Peer tutoring is an integral part of a learning center because it provides individualized, one-to-one assistance that is cooperative, immediate and non-threatening. Good tutors are also excellent role models of successful learning who can motivate the students they tutor to become better scholars. A serendipitous effect of having peer tutors in a learning center is having access to their ideas that frequently provide fresh, innovative solutions to operational problems. For me, as a learning center director, tutor-trainer, and tutor coordinator, tutors provide an infinite source of energy, ideas, knowledge, motivation, help, laughter — all the things that are so vital for committed, growing, helping professionals and an effective learning environment.

Tom Dayton, Reading Instructor and former Coordinator of the Reading Center at American River College, Sacramento, California, expresses the relationship between a center and tutoring as:

The Reading Center at American River College could not function without the support of our trained peer tutors. In an individualized program, there is no way that an instructor could be available for students in an appreciable amount of time. My tutors are my

eyes and ears, and through their tutor logs (journals), they keep me posted on the status of students between formal conferences.

Carolyn S. Smith, Coordinator, Academic Skills, University of Southern Indiana, sees a very close relationship between tutoring and services at learning center:

Our program IS tutoring. In this time of high-tech computer-assisted programs, our students rely on the one-on-one interaction of tutoring. Although they also use our software, interactive videos, and videotapes, it is the reinforcement of the tutor, (the “warm body”) as a sounding board, providing the checks and balances that students turn to for help with the important matters. We have heard about impersonal lifestyles for thirty years or more, and we all resent being identified by our Social Security and “pin” numbers, but the problem has compounded over the years. This isolation, lack of human contact, and loss of identity may be the reason that students cling to the interaction epitomized by tutoring. Regardless of the reasons, tutoring is the backbone of our program.

Karin Winnard, former Coordinator of Tutorial Programs at Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California, also views tutoring as the backbone of a center:

Tutoring is the backbone to any and every learning center. It can provide a safe environment/situation for someone to actually start learning and thinking. The basis of tutoring in my opinion, deals with first establishing trust between the people involved and then working to strengthen the student’s self esteem (when applicable). When the student’s (tutee) level of self-esteem is at a certain level, my belief is that the learning and the desire to think will take place.

Tutoring is human and interpersonal bonding, which provokes learning in these centers. It cannot be replaced by fancy gadgets, computers, or high-glossed words. Tutoring

is basic coaching and believing that anything is possible. Of course, it is the tutee who we must help to believe in him/herself first.

Nico Cameron at Eastern New Mexico University in Portales cannot envision a center without tutors:

As for the possibility of a Learning Center existing without tutors . . .this thought is so foreign, it hurts my brain to think about it. Who would there be to explain difficult concepts? How to remember lists of complicated concepts? Who would share a mnemonic? Who would explain what a mnemonic is? Who would talk with students enough to be able to access their prior knowledge to create understandable metaphors of difficult concepts? Who would be there to help students relax enough and gain enough confidence that they could understand new material? Who would give students positive affirmations of their learning? Learning centers and writing centers without tutors? It just ain't a concept I can savvy.

Betty J. Myers, Tutorial Coordinator/Program Assistant, Writing, Learning, Tutoring, Assessment Center at Glendale Community College in Glendale, California, sees centers supported and strengthened by tutoring:

Learning centers with all of the various functions including reading labs, pre-college English classes, writing labs/centers, assessment/placement activities, computer assisted instruction labs, independent study mini-courses and supplemental instruction labs are supported and strengthened by tutorial services. Tutorial activities aid in creating a collaborative/cooperative learning environment. A wholesome team-work atmosphere with critical thinking and various learning styles blending together supporting students with a wide variety of skills and concerns is evident when these services are woven together in an integral network and Total Quality Management exists.

Dr. Donna Wood, Professor and Program Chair, Developmental Reading at the State Technical Institute at Memphis, Tennessee, comments on the new addition of tutoring to her school's Multimedia Skill Center:

The peer tutoring component which was added . . .to our school's Multimedia Skill Center has been a major addition and attraction to our student services. Attendance and contact hours resulted in new highs for the semester . . .and we attribute these numbers directly to the addition of the peer-tutoring program. Although our peer tutoring program is relatively new, it has been enthusiastically welcomed by the tutors (we call them learning assistants) and by the students. Enhanced self-esteem and, of course, improved grades are the premier results of this new service. Word is spreading across campus, and many faculty members heartily endorse our services and promote it by recommending it to their students.

Dorothy P. Fuller, Manager, Learning Resource Department, University of Alaska Anchorage, sees tutors providing the needed "human factor":

Students are humans; they need human contact, human support, and human encouragement. Non-human tutoring through alternative media such as computer programs, videos, and workbooks is very useful and accommodates a multitude of learning styles, but it does not supplant human contact and collaboration in the learning process. Although such tutoring systems may be sufficient for confident, self-directed learners with a strong metacognitive skill base who can successfully monitor their own learning, the majority of students using learning centers do not fall into this category. They may have had little experience or coaching in successfully monitoring their own learning, and they may have more self-doubt than confidence in their ability to perform at the college level. Tutors

provide valuable, face-to-face human coaching and encouragement, along with instruction on concepts and tasks.

What is the purpose of this survey and report? The purpose is very simple: to provide support and back-up concerning the importance of tutoring for those who are involved in tutoring programs. The evidence obtained from this limited survey clearly concludes that, based upon the experience of those who direct and supervise centers around the country: tutoring is truly an integral part of any learning or reading or writing center.

Before concluding, there are two more comments to share. First, Dr. Karan Hancock has this to say concerning tutoring and centers:

For the underprepared student, the non-traditional, the returning students, the overly anxious and worried student, as well as the “traditional,” and/or veteran student the services provided by learning centers, reading centers, writing centers are invaluable. Aside from the obvious services that are offered by specific centers, tutoring should also be an integral component of the services offered for the following reasons:

- Tutoring provides the “traditional” or veteran student an opportunity to polish and hone existing skills as well as providing the opportunity to “try on” new or different ideas, styles, and concepts.
- Tutoring gives the underprepared student an opportunity to develop weak skills into stronger, more appropriate and adequate ones for college/university success.

For the returning student, this opportunity may expand to helping the student “catch-up” on how techniques may have changed since the last time she/he was in school — for example: how to document a paper. Tutoring provides information without embarrassment to the student.

- For the overly anxious and worried student, tutoring can provide techniques for success that are not obtainable from the traditional university classroom setting or instructor. These techniques may range from techniques for taking better notes, how to read different kinds of texts, how to draft a paper to how to take charge of a test and its accompanying anxiety.
- Tutoring in a learning/reading/writing center is important because trained tutors provide an extra link to the knowledge that all students need to succeed — that link may be specific content area knowledge or study skill knowledge. The centers providing this extra link and opportunity for ALL students are, thus, providing the students with the power to then become more independent and successful and societal participants.

The closing comment for this report is from Karin Winnard.

Trained tutors and paraprofessional programs are not the wave of the future. They are the tools and necessities of today.