

TRAINING TUTORS THROUGH TUTOR ROLE ANALYSES

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RATIONALE

A great tutor is able to identify the needs of her tutees, to interact skillfully and knowledgeably with a wide variety of tutees, and to assume roles that meet the individual needs of tutees in ways that compliment the instructors' teaching styles. Tutor training sessions often seek to improve a tutor's diagnostic skills, to develop interpersonal skills, and to expand the tutor's knowledge base. Less attention has been given to helping a tutor to understand how she can best fit into the overall process of education. A tutor who can appreciate and conceptualize how she acts as a mediator between educational resources (such as the teacher, the textbook, study guides, supplemental materials, learning software, and other campus resources) and the student's learning characteristics (learning preferences, background knowledge, level of motivation, attitude, and learning differences) is likely to be an outstanding educator. Tutors who have learned how to adjust their style of tutoring to meet the needs of different students and situations have probably tapped into unconsciously understood "scripts" that they have adapted to tutoring sessions. The ability to be flexible — to be able to shift from role, or one style of interaction, to another — is undoubtedly a key to helping tutees who are struggling to learn material that may have already been taught in the classroom.

New tutors often assume that their primary role as a tutor will be to "teach" students. They often tutor students in much the same manner that they themselves were taught in the classroom. No doubt, there are times when a tutor will explain something and demonstrate it

to a tutee as is typically done in the classroom setting. However, a more advanced tutor realizes that her role is different than the instructor's. Her primary activity should not generally involve reteaching the material. The goal is to help the students to learn how to learn. Advanced tutors see that they function in an intermediary position between the classroom teacher and the tutees, supporting the goals and methods of the teacher while serving the individual learning needs of the tutees. Tutoring is a complex job. A good tutor training session can simplify the complexity to a manageable level.

Explaining a variety of tutoring roles is fairly simple as long when the explanations center on roles that a tutor already understands. Tutoring roles may be best understood when tutors make active comparisons between clear-cut occupational roles and characteristic behaviors and scripts used during a tutoring session. Learning by analogy is reinforced when concrete examples of characteristics of tutees, problems that they have encountered working with tutees, types of instructors, or situations in which they enacted one role or another are shared. Thus, this training method works well with tutors who have various levels of experience and skills. In addition to helping a tutor to be reflective about what she is doing, a training session focusing on tutoring roles is also creative, engaging, and intellectually stimulating. Teaching a tutor how to be more flexible as she draws upon her knowledge and teaching skills is the ultimate goal of a training session focusing on tutoring roles. Viewing tutoring through this lens may also help a tutor to learn how to improve her skills at diagnosis, to better communicate her expectations, and to better evaluate the effectiveness of the tutoring sessions.

CONDUCTING THE TRAINING SESSION

Icebreaker

The first phase of the training session should be an icebreaker. For the purposes of a session on role analyses, the icebreaker should not only introduce the tutors to each other and make them feel more relaxed, but should also help tutors to start thinking about occupational roles. For example, split tutors into small groups, asking each person to think of an occupation that they would like to pursue upon graduation. Then ask each person to demonstrate (either through non-verbal behavior or questions) how a person having that kind of job acts. The rest of the group should try to guess what occupation each person has in mind. Ask the best actors from each group to perform for the entire group.

Definitions

The second phase of the training session focuses on establishing common definitions. Begin this phase by asking the groups to define tutoring. It may be helpful to incorporate some textbook definitions of tutoring into the discussion. Ultimately, there is no need for everyone to agree upon a single best definition; it is useful to establish some of the criteria that should be used to evaluate the definition. Bringing up the different characteristics of learners is a good idea during this phase. Summarizing the overall expectations of the school and the basic rules that tutors have to observe in all tutoring sessions may also fit in well during this phase. The final step of this phase is to start the tutors thinking about what roles are. One way to do this is to use examples from the icebreaker to illustrate how occupational roles, like being a patient in a doctor's office, produce set patterns of behavior, generate expectations during interactions, and help facilitate communication. "Roles" can thus be defined as perceived patterns of interaction (scripts) that we expect people to enact.

Tutoring Roles.

The heart of the training session involves a consideration of various occupational roles and asks the tutors to relate these roles to tutoring sessions. Choose five or six well-understood occupations. These occupational roles may include an accountant, a cheerleader, a counselor, a detective, a doctor, a driver's education instructor, a lawyer, a mechanic, a salesperson, and a scientist. Once the occupations are chosen, sketch some of the basic characteristics of each occupational role. (Videotapes of actual tutoring sessions where these roles are enacted can be used or transcripts of tutoring sessions where tutors enact the roles that you want to illustrate can be provided. Experienced tutors often seem to have preferred interactional styles that can provide good examples for others.) Brief descriptions along with pictures in PowerPoint or on overhead transparencies may include characteristics like these:

- Accountant — keeps records, evaluates progress toward goals, pinpoints weaknesses, and projects future earnings or losses.
- Cheerleader — encourages involvement, provides examples, and supports a team.
- Counselor — listens carefully, provides nonjudgmental feedback, and shows concern for a person's well being.
- Detective — interviews witnesses, makes careful observations, verifies information, and draws conclusions.
- Doctor — questions and observes patients, performs tests, prescribes treatments, follows up.
- Driver's Education Instructor — works side-by-side with the tutee, correcting mistakes and preventing accidents.

- Lawyer — knows the rules, acts as an advocate, and helps contending parties reach an agreement.
- Mechanic.— describes symptoms, identifies problems, rebuilds defective parts, test drives, and performs tune-ups.
- Salesperson — understands the product, learns the customer’s needs, and motivates the customer to commit to the transaction.
- Scientist — develops hypotheses, conducts research, tests hypotheses, and formulates theories.

Once the trainer has described the various occupational roles, assign a few roles to a number of small groups. Ask each group to identify ways in which tutoring is like the role of people in the chosen occupations. In other words, ask the groups to discuss how tutors act like the members of these various professions. Ask the experienced tutors to consider which occupational role best describes the way that they interact with the tutees. After they have made the comparisons, ask each group to consider one or two questions like these:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of this role for tutors?
- What characteristics of a tutee might suggest that they would benefit from a tutor who played the role?
- What kinds of interpersonal skills are necessary to be good at this role?
- What are five specific examples of things tutors could say to the tutees that would illustrate this role?
- How would a tutor enacting a role describe to the tutee how they planned on conducting future sessions?

These questions can be chosen or tailored to address specific challenges often seen in the tutoring process.

While the groups are discussing their answers, the trainer should move from group to group, listening in, asking questions, and taking notes. After giving a two-minute warning, the trainer should ask each group to summarize the results of their discussion. Giving the groups overhead transparencies to record their best answers is one method that can help improve the presentation and make it easy for others to take notes and reflect on the answers. The trainer should ask for other people's reactions as each group explains their assigned role(s). Using probing questions to expose the underlying philosophy of each tutoring role can help the tutors better understand why they might try to enact a particular role.

Closing

The final phase of the training session is the closing. End this presentation by summarizing the various tutoring roles and explaining how tutors will become true educators when they learn how to shift from one role to another, especially when one kind of tutoring style is not working well. If time permits, a trainer may want to ask a volunteer star tutor and a volunteer "tutee" to pretend to conduct the first few minutes of a first tutoring session using one of the favorite roles. This can bring about a memorable conclusion to a training session. Be sure to thank everyone for their participation and good ideas, and encourage the tutors to speak with the course instructors to learn more about the instructors' expectations and strategies for teaching the course material. Continue the discussion of tutor roles in future training sessions.

CONCLUSION

Training new tutors through an analysis of the roles that tutors play is a good introduction to tutoring and also works well for more advanced tutors. Training tutors through tutoring role analyses will help tutors learn how to be more flexible in their approaches to tutoring and will engage tutors in an enjoyable and active learning activity. The training session as outlined above would typically last about an hour and a half. It is fairly easy to shorten or lengthen the session.