Group and Individual Tutoring Techniques

In this section we will look at specific things you can do when you are working with a student. As we move through some of these techniques and ideas, it is critical to keep in mind that these are only guidelines. We are trying to build a framework that will allow tutors to use their strongest personal qualities to the greatest advantage.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following tips will provide you with the guidelines necessary to function effectively as a tutor:

- ✓ Determine your own attitudes about school, teachers, teaching and learning. Be sure not to allow them to influence your behavior during a tutoring session in any negative way.
- ✓ Give your students your undivided attention while you are tutoring them.
- ✓ Listen to your students. Let them think and speak!
- ✓ Establish good rapport with your students. Let each know that you care by showing trust, respect and acceptance.
- ✓ Build the students confidence whenever possible.
- ✓ Make sure the student understands the purpose of tutoring.
- ✓ Be familiar with the vocabulary needed to converse with your student.
- ✓ Learn your students name and pronounce it correctly.
- ✓ Be relaxed and friendly during all sessions.
- ✓ Know the skills that you are working on for each student.
- ✓ Use correct language and pronunciation during your tutoring sessions.
- ✓ Never let your students struggle with their answers to the point of frustration.

SHOWING YOU CARE

Students will pay attention or care about what they are learning, when you care about them. Often dealing with difficult students is trying on a tutor because they don't seem to care about the material the tutor is interested in helping them with. When the tutor is interested in the student, the student will be more apt to care about learning.

The following are some ways to show students that you care:

- ✓ **Be a welcoming person** -- greet them by name at the beginning of a session with a smile.
- ✓ **Be interested** -- ask them questions about their likes and dislikes or simply, ``How are you?'' Then really listen to their answers. When you meet again refer back to the personal information you have shared. You may ask them what they thought of the performance of their favorite team or player last night.
- ✓ **Don't be afraid to laugh with the student** -- avoid laughing at them or their mistakes. Shared laughter is a good bond between people.
- ✓ **Be aware of their accomplishments** -- if you know that the student has done well in sports or other school activities, take the time to compliment them on their involvement and efforts.
- ✓ **Set goals and recognize their achievements** -- make sure that they know that you are aware that a goal has been achieved. They will be happy that you remembered and cared to notice.
- ✓ **Smile and nod your head** -- just as a person who is really listening nods towards a speaker, the tutor who is caring will smile and nod at their student.
- ✓ **Don't ignore misbehavior** -- most students won't be afraid to test you. When they do, make sure that you remind them that you don't like what they did, but that you do like them.

USING THE RIGHT WORDS

TRY ASKING: `WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND?'

One of the most difficult questions a student has to answer after hearing a lesson is: ``What **don't** you understand?'' Students dread this question and many learn to never admit that they're confused.

If students knew what they didn't comprehend, they wouldn't be lost. They can form coherent questions only if they understand the whole lesson.

The solution is to ask instead, ``What **did** you understand?'' The student gets a positive start on the problem by telling you what he or she knows. The tutor can sort out the areas that have caused the student not to understand.

USE ENCOURAGEMENT TO MOTIVATE

You have the opportunity to praise the work of your students and this will give them recognition for a job well done. This is a comment that focuses on the student. You can say, ``You are so organized.'' The tutor can also motivate the student through encouragement by saying, ``Your essay showed great organization. Each idea was clearly developed.''

Other examples of the difference between praise and encouragement:

Praise: ``You're a great writer.''
Encouragement: ``This story is great. Your characters are so real.''

Praise: ``You are super. You always get these problems right.''
Encouragement: ``Your hard work on solving word problems really shows''

QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES

THE WRONG QUESTION WON'T PROVIDE THE RIGHT ANSWER

Asking questions of your students gets them to participate in the pursuit of knowledge, but the wrong approach can hamper this involvement.

Avoid asking complex questions -- ``Who knows the cause of the war of 1812 and how the British government reacted to it?'' Instead, ask one question at a time, as simply as you can.

Avoid asking railroading questions to get the answer that you want - ``Who knows a cause for the War of 1812, that was an economic one, that had to do with personal pride?'' Try to get the student to consider the factors themselves.

Avoid asking ``yes'' or ``no'' questions -- ``Did the British win the war of 1812?'' This limits the participation of the student to a 50/50 role of being correct.

In group tutoring, avoid calling on the first person who raises their hand -- This will indicate that you're willing to give them all time to think about the answer.

Avoid repeating every comment, answer or question a student has -- Students will get in the habit of waiting for you to give the answer. You should not become the official answer giver.

Avoid asking the same type of question all the time -- Mix up the demands of your questioning from factual to opinion to summarizing.

Avoid immediately saying if an answer is correct -- Make sure that the student is confident of their answer and not just guessing.

Handling Right And Wrong Answers

HOW TO HANDLE RIGHT ANSWERS

- ✓ Give praise and rewards at the right time.
- ✓ A right answer must be both complete and correct.
- ✓ Praise your student after every correct answer.
- ✓ When your student gives a right answer on the first try, without help, give special recognition.
- ✓ If your student fishes for answers, get a commitment before you respond.
- ✓ Let the student know it is all right to try even if unsure of the answer.

If your student doesn't answer, do these things:

- ✓ Calmly ask the question again, give a hint, ask another question that might elicit the same answer, be encouraging!
- ✓ Sound pleased when you get an answer, and praise the student if it's right.
- ✓ Don't make an issue of the resistance to answer.
- ✓ Have the student *think out loud* rather than say nothing

HOW TO HANDLE WRONG ANSWERS

- ✓ Correct your student's work without being discouraging
- ✓ Don't say ``no'' or ``that's wrong'' and *never* make fun of answers.
- ✓ Always try to get a right answer before going on to the next problem.
- ✓ If the student's answer is incomplete, help the student with both understanding the question and discovering the answer.
- ✓ If the answer is incorrect, provide clues to help lead the student to the answer.
- ✓ Once the student has discovered the right answer, repeat the question, have the student repeat the right answer, and provide praise.
- ✓ Be sure the student understands what the error was and give another opportunity later to repeat the question and answer so that the correct answer is reinforced.
- ✓ If the student consistently gets the wrong answer, review the different ways you might involve the student and try another approach until you find one that provides success for the student.

Classroom Management: *SOTTO VOCE*

Common disruptive behaviors like tapping pencils, talking to friends or playing with objects can be annoying and very difficult to deal with. They are small problems that can balloon into large ones if confronted with more force and attention than necessary.

A technique that avoids confrontation is called the *sotto voce* technique. It involves walking close enough to the student to say something like, ``Bill, would you please stop tapping your pencil?''

Then don't wait around for a response. Convey that you assume the answer is yes--by quickly saying, ``Thank you,'' breaking eye contact and moving away. This technique avoids power struggles and does not allow annoying behavior to escalate into private wars. It sends the following messages:

> ✓ I don't want to embarrass anyone.
> ✓ I accept you, but not your behavior.
> ✓ I don't want to get into an argument.
> ✓ I trust that you will comply.

Maintaining eye contact and staying in the student's space says the opposite-- that you don't trust the student will do as you ask and that you are there to force her to do so.

INFLUENCING BEHAVIOUR

A tutor is in a position of authority, but it is often obvious to the student that the tutor does not have the power of the teacher. However, tutors must also expect a certain level of behavior from the students that they are working with. When a tutor sets limits for a student, they are helping the student learn to set limits for themselves. When inappropriate behavior is encountered, here are some tips to help influence positive behavior:

Focus on the area to improve

Choose the behavior that is the most disruptive and the one you know the student can change. This will allow the student to experience success.

Develop a plan

The plan should spell out how the student is expected to behave, why it is necessary to change the behavior, and consequences and rewards.

Don't begin with a negative attitude

Sarcasm and put-downs will not encourage students to change their behavior.

Don't make empty threats

Once you have decided on consequences for behavior, you must follow through every time.

MOTIVATING STUDENTS

- ✓ There is no single formula for motivating every student, but there are some things that don't work.
- ✓ **Don't** use faulty praise. Students know when they did a good job.
- ✓ **Don't** devalue your praise by giving equal recognition to every assignment.
- ✓ **Don't** threaten or punish. Motivation involves taking risks. Students who are afraid won't take risks.
- ✓ **Don't** use clichés. "No guts, no glory" doesn't motivate today's students.
- ✓ **Don't** expect too much or too little
- ✓ **Don't** overstate failure.

GAINING AND MAINTAINING CONTROL

Three Keys to Discipline: Be Firm, Fair, and Consistent

As a tutor you can be tested consistently to see what the students can get away with. There is no magical approach to discipline, but there are three keys that will work no matter what strategy you employ.

To be firm -- you establish the limits of behavior in your tutoring session. You firmly enforce what is acceptable.

To be fair -- if what you set is unfair, many students will challenge it because it is unfair. Students will accept rules that are fairly set and applied.

To be consistent -- it is difficult to follow a rule if the rule keeps changing. If you say that they must not bother other students in the session, but sometimes say nothing when other students bother them, students learn that you aren't committed to your own rule.

Improving your Tutoring Management

Students will react to the expectations that you have set for them. You can improve your management by being aware of what parameters you have set for them.

Have you told them? Have you given explicit instructions so that they know what is required of them?

Have you shown them? Have you given them specific examples of what they are to do?

Have you listened to them? When they're having problems, have you asked them what they understand?

Have you praised them? Catch them succeeding at their work.

Being Friendly

Research has shown that students will be motivated to learn, and learn more, when they like the teacher. This means that a teacher must be able to evoke positive feelings about the teacher and the subject. The difficulty arises when teachers and tutors confuse being friendly with trying to be a friend. A tutor can be much more effective by being friendly rather than by trying to be a friend. Tutors can use the following strategies to help their students understand and comprehend the material they are working with.

- ✓ **Act as an equal** -- avoid appearing superior or snobbish
- ✓ **Be dynamic** -- students appreciate someone who is active and enthusiastic
- ✓ **Create a learning environment** -- choose a location and a situation that makes learning fun, interesting and entertaining
- ✓ **Be comfortable** -- be at ease with yourself
- ✓ **Concede some control** -- allow the student to lead and pursue knowledge
- ✓ **Show interest** -- be interested in what they have to say and remember their likes, hobbies and interests.
- ✓ **Be optimistic** -- convey a positive outlook. This will be contagious.

Better Behaviour

Information
Better behavior can be achieved by giving the student good information about what they are doing. Good information is not always an order or a command to correct the behavior that you see as being inappropriate.

e.g. A student is sitting in his chair with his feet in the aisle. You say, "Jim, your feet are in the aisle." If Jim does not move his feet you repeat the statement. If there is no response still, give information about his behavior. "Jim, someone will trip over your feet when they try to get by." Students need to know the consequences of their behavior.

Avoid Commands
Better behavior can be achieved by avoiding using commands all the time. "Sit down!" "Be quiet!" "Stand!" are all commands that tend to be ignored the more

they are issued. Make the student understand what behavior is being requested by making them think about it.

e.g. You want a student to sit down. You order her to her seat by saying, "Sit!" twice and are ignored. Say, "Cyndi, your seat." This causes Cyndi to think "What about my seat? . . . Oh, I'm supposed to be in it. . . . I'd better sit down." You are directing her attention to the problem so that she can tell herself what to do.

Give Real Choices
Better behavior can be achieved through giving students real choices. A real choice engages co-operation. A real choice does not include a threat.

e.g. Two students are good friends and never seem to stop talking.

The threat choice is: "You have a choice: Either you stop talking or I'm changing your seats."

The real choice first acknowledges the situation, "It's hard to sit near a good friend and not talk." Now offer a solution that puts them in control. "You can sit beside each other and restrain yourselves, or you can change seats so you won't be tempted to talk. . . . Let me know what you want to do by the next session."

CORRECTING STUDENTS

When correcting a student, don't use the following phrases:

You always . . .

You never . . .

The student will remember the one time when they in fact did do the right thing. This is enough to prove you wrong and the focus becomes placed on you rather than the student.

Here are some tips to help give proper correction:

- ✓ Give correction in ways that motivate them to be better or do a better job.
- ✓ Always see yourself as the coach who is helping someone improve.
- ✓ Show you care. Express concern about sharing ways that they can improve.
- ✓ Pick the right moment to offer corrections. You should be responding and not reacting to the situation.
- ✓ Avoid giving the impression that you're more concerned with seeing your ideas put into practice rather than helping the student improve.
- ✓ Give specific suggestions for improvement.

A P‍ROBLEM S‍OLVING T‍ECHNIQUE

One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary, but warmth is a vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.
-Carl Jung

Thinking Out Loud for the Tutor and the Student

Once a student has described a problem that they are having, a tutor should attempt to "go public" with what they have been told by stating aloud what the student has told them. This allows the student to hear what the tutor thinks the student has stated. The student is then invited to "go public" with what they have heard from the tutor. This will identify what the student does not understand and what the tutor sees as the problem.

If this is done within a small group, make sure that the group knows that their response is to help with the thinking process not to criticize errors that they hear presented to the group.

This technique takes the problem out of the realm of the printed page or the frustrations that mount from only thinking about it.

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