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A Tutor's Handbook

By Jimbo Clark

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Introduction

This tutor's handbook represents the past seven months I've spent tutoring elementary school students at Sarah Moore Green and Lonsdale Elementary schools. It is not meant to be an all-inclusive, exhaustive training manual for new would-be tutors. It is merely a collection of things I learned both from my experiences and from reading books on the subject. Many things written in here might sound fairly obvious, and most people would consider them to be true without any tutoring experience. I wrote the things I wrote here because now I know them to be true not because I read them, but because I have spent so much time tutoring that I can now with confidence assert that they are good principles. This handbook is merely a physical representation of what I learned and what I did this semester. To try and put into words all of my experiences and everything I learned would take many more pages, and none of them as straight-forward as this. I consider my real senior project to be what I actually did, the people I met, and what I learned, but this manual will have to serve physically in place of all that. Enjoy.

On the Role of a Tutor

First of all, a tutor is not the same as a teacher, and does not perform the same duties as a teacher. The tutor is also not merely an extension of the teacher, or a teacher's helper. A tutor provides more individual instruction than a teacher can provide in a traditional classroom setting. A tutor is somewhere between a teacher and a friend; a mixture of both yet not quite either. Students can speak more personally with a tutor than they can with a teacher, and their relationship can be on a more equal level. A student doesn't fear discipline from a tutor like they might from a teacher.

A tutor's role is to help a tutee learn. Sometimes a tutor teaches a tutee how to learn. A tutor helps students with areas they are struggling in, yet can also help students further explore areas that they are good at or interested in. A tutor does not teach a lot of specific subject matter like a teacher does, but rather helps a student to understand subject matter that has already been taught to him. A tutor does not give the answers to homework questions- he helps the tutee to find the answers on his own. He teaches his students strategies that they can use for studying and completing homework without the help of anyone else.

A tutor is a cheerleader, motivating students when they have no desire to complete the tasks required of them. A tutor is a counselor, listening to a student's problems and trying to help them solve them. Listening, empathizing, and offering advice are all things that good tutors do for their tutees. A tutor is a positive role model and tries at all times to set a good example through their words and actions.

Basically, the role of a tutor is to guide a student towards self-sufficiency.

Essential Attitudes

In Tutoring Matters, Jerome Rabow gives three “essential attitudes” every tutor should adopt. These three attitudes could easily be summed up as **unconditional acceptance**. Tutoring relationships founded on unconditional acceptance are much more likely to succeed than those in which the tutor chooses not to accept aspects of the tutee and his or her lifestyle, family, personality, etc. Unconditional acceptance yields *giving up expectations, displaying enthusiasm and interest, and feeling empathy*.

1. Give up Expectations

This is an attitude a tutor must assume *before* beginning tutoring. Do not expect your students to be “needy,” “disadvantaged,” or “slow.” Coming into tutoring with preconceived notions such as these can hinder your relationship from the start, coloring all of your perceptions and possibly blinding you from seeing a child’s true potential. Conversely, expecting too much out of your tutee can also doom a tutoring relationship to failure when those expectations are not met. Try to approach each tutee as a clean slate and instead of coming in with your own expectations *about* a tutee, cooperatively develop educated expectations *with* the tutee as the tutoring relationship progresses. “Success” should be defined relative to each unique tutoring relationship.

2. Display Enthusiasm and Interest

This advice should sound obvious- anytime one communicates with another person it is right to display enthusiasm and interest towards that person. Many inexperienced tutors,

though, assume that their role is to display enthusiasm and interest towards the task at hand rather than the tutee. These are not the same thing. Oftentimes, and especially at the early stages, what is most important in a tutoring relationship is simply creating and building a trusting relationship. Paying attention to the tutee and showing interest in him or her is one of the best ways to do this. Once you can demonstrate that you are interested in the tutee, and are enthusiastic about working with him or her, it becomes easier to get the tutee to focus on the task at hand.

3. Feel Empathy

First of all, empathy is not sympathy. If sympathy usually implies feeling sorry *for* someone, then empathy means feeling sorry *with* someone. Empathy is feeling something with someone. Your tutees, especially if they are of a different race or socioeconomic class, might express ideas or opinions that contradict the ones you hold. They might act in ways that you don’t approve of. Nevertheless, you must at all costs resist the temptation to impulsively lecture and moralize to your students. Instead, try and empathize with them- see it the way they see it. The neighborhood or household you grew up in might be quite different from theirs and your solutions might not work for them. Moralizing and lecturing lead to one-way communication and to your being just another authority figure, another teacher, another cop- just another adult telling them how to be.

Effective Practices

Jerome Rabow, in Tutoring Matters, also gives three effective practices that all tutors should use. These practices are *being patient*, *being observant and asking questions*, and *understanding students on their own level*.

1. *Be Patient*

One should be patient at all stages of the tutoring process. Be patient when you first meet your tutee and don't expect them to open up to you unreservedly on the first day. Don't be surprised if they hardly speak to you at all- just be patient. Also be patient during a tutoring session- sometimes silence is an effective tool to use when trying to motivate a student to answer a question. Many tutors find such silence uncomfortable and, being impatient, answer a question for a student. One must allow a student sufficient time to think things out for him or herself. Also be patient in looking for long-term progress with a tutee. You may not see concrete results of your tutoring until months after you start tutoring. *Be patient!*

2. *Be Observant and Ask Questions*

How does your tutee look today? Did they get a haircut? Do they look tired? Mention something about it to show that you pay attention to them. Try to remember when your tutee tells you about his or her family or things that he or she likes. Remembering such details also shows your tutee that you value them as a person and care about what they have to say. What kind of things do you see on your tutee's t-shirt, backpack, or notebook? Take notes if you have to! When you only see your tutee for

an hour or so a week it's important to establish some sort of continuity in the relationship, and this can easily be done simply by mentioning something you talked about last week to show that you remember. Also observe your tutee professionally- what tutoring techniques work well for them? Which techniques leave them yawning and looking around the room instead of paying attention? What are they good at? What are they not so good at? *Be Observant and Ask Questions!*

3. *Understanding Students on Their Own Level*

This practice is closely related to the essential attitude of feeling empathy. Basically, when one learns to *understand a student on their own level*, one does not put oneself in a position above the student. One creates a more horizontal than vertical relationship. A good tutor will not discipline, moralize, and lecture to a student like a teacher would. This turns a tutor into just another authority figure trying to tell a tutee how to be. A tutee doesn't need yet another person like that. A tutor is there to work *with* a student, to try to offer them understanding, support, and motivation on an equal level. One can still lead and be a good role model while still understanding a student and collaborating with him or her on the same level.

Connecting

Depending on the type of tutoring you get yourself into, your initial connection might be made for you. You might be paired up one-on-one with a tutee. Or, you might do tutoring at a less-structured after-school program where many students and tutors are all in the same room and there is no formal match-up. Whatever the case, these are some of the best ways to make initial connections with a tutee so that you can start building a successful tutor-tutee relationship.

1. *Respond to a Request for Help*

If you hear a student ask for help, then by all means, jump right in! Consider yourself lucky, you've already gotten through the most difficult part of the whole relationship-building process, making the first connection. Even if you don't hear a student ask for help, though, asking a student or group of students, "Can I help?" is a great way to break the ice. Make sure to ask, though. Some students might resent you trying too hard to break right into their world and "help" them. Be careful not to damage a tutee's pride by forcing help on them when they don't need it. That said, remember to be patient, and they'll almost always come around and ask for help eventually.

2. *Pick up on an Interest*

You see that a tutee is wearing a Cubs cap... you're a cubs fan... make the connection! Maybe you hear a tutee humming a song you like, or wearing a pin of your favorite cartoon... make the connection! If the students are allowed to play games and you're around, ask to join in. Most students are all-too-happy to have an adult to play with them and do something besides tell them what to do and lay tasks on them. Take advantage of just about every

opportunity you have to say, "Me too!" when communicating with your tutee. Even if a tutee is interested in something you not, ask them to tell you about it. If they have a talent, praise them on it. Picking up on an interest, mutual or not, is an excellent way to make a memorable connection with a tutee that can help to build your relationship

3. *Ask About Family, Friends, Favorite Subject, etc.*

We've all met people for the first time before, and we shouldn't think of meeting tutees much differently. When getting to know your tutee, ask away! It's an especially good idea to find out what the tutee does and doesn't like to study. It's just as important to find out what he's good at and what he's not as good at. Of course, if your tutee doesn't respond well to all the questions, remember above all to be patient and empathetic. Don't ask a question that you wouldn't be comfortable with them asking you. Also, it's a good idea to take notes and not forget what they tell you.

4. *Wait for Them to Approach You*

This is an alternative technique to use, for example, at an after-school program when you've asked students if they want help and they say "no," and don't respond well to your attempts to get to know them. It's almost certainly not the case that they don't like you. Some students are simply shy or mistrustful of outsiders. Some are afraid of being the first one at their table to make the move of acceptance towards "one of them." If the less outgoing students see, though, that you come regularly and are nice to other students, they almost always come around. Once again, be patient and empathetic and you can't go wrong.

Building Trust

Every tutoring relationship must be built upon a foundation of trust. A tutee must first trust you if they are to learn from you. They must not only trust that you are able to help them find the right answers to their homework, but they must trust that you really care about them and are there to help them.

1. *Show Respect*

One of the best things you can do to build trust is to show your tutee respect. Respect their differences and their individuality, and consider that their way of doing or thinking might be better for them than your way. Let students determine their own needs to a certain degree. It can be disrespectful to say something like, “Well, I can see that you are doing poorly in math, so we must work on math now instead of reading.”

Don’t force help on a tutee when they don’t want it, even if you think that they need it, because they might take this as a sign of disrespect, and therefore won’t trust you. Let tutees have their space sometimes; don’t hover over them to make sure that their working their hardest every second. This can send the message that you don’t trust them to complete tasks on their own.

2. *Establish Reciprocity*

Being observant and asking questions is one of the three effective practices a tutor should use. In conjunction with this, share stories about yourself with your tutee. Tell them about your family, your life, what you like and don’t like. Talk to them about how you like to learn, what you enjoyed and didn’t enjoy in school. It’s as important to share with your tutee as it is to find out more about them. Some students might not be used to such one on one

interaction with adults and might even be too timid at first to ask you many questions about yourself. That’s why sometimes it’s a good idea to volunteer the information yourself and set the example for open communication.

3. *Mean What you Say*

If you tell your tutee that you’re going to bring a book for them to read next week, bring the book! Not following through on something you say is a sure way to diminish the trust in a relationship. Especially if you only see your tutee once a week, he or she might look forward for a whole week to you coming and bringing a certain book or taking to the park to swing or whatever. Don’t make any empty promises.

4. *Be on Time*

The simplest way to establish trust is to simply be there. If you are supposed to come every Monday at 10:30, be there a few minutes early! You don’t want to leave a student wondering, “Where’s my tutor? Did I do something wrong?” Continuity in the relationship is key, and even missing a single session can reset weeks of working together by destroying the trust that’s been built. If you must miss a session, let the tutee know at least a week ahead of time. If there’s a last-minute emergency, call the school to see if the student can be contacted. It’s very easy to think, “Oh, I’m doing volunteer work out of the kindness of my heart, so if I don’t show up it’s not that big of a deal. After all, *I’m* doing *them* a favor.” This is a dangerous trap to fall into- you need to think of your tutee, a real person, and not some sort of “obligation” or “community service work.”

Setting Boundaries

Although a tutor is not an authority figure like a teacher, a tutor is also certainly not a completely equal friend, either. Tutors do need to set some boundaries when working with their tutees so that tutoring doesn't devolve into simply playing without any learning taking place. Two specific dangers should be mentioned with regard to boundaries.

1. *Jealousy*

Sometimes a tutee might become jealous if they learn that you work with other students. This is generally not a problem with individualized, structured tutoring, but occasionally happens at after-school program tutoring sessions. Sometimes one student will become really needy and keep saying, "I need help!" when you're working with another student just because they want all your attention. In such cases, one must politely but firmly tell that tutee that you are working with someone else right now, and you must give that student your full attention. You must also assure your other tutee that when you work with them, you will also give them your full attention. Be consistent.

2. *Overdependence*

A tutor's ultimate aim should be to cultivate self-sufficiency in a tutee. One should avoid giving tutees everything they ask for, because this will create dependency. Also, it is probably not a good idea to give a tutee your phone number or to spend much time with them outside of school. Again, although a trusting relationship is desired, this relationship should not be on the same level as a relationship a tutee would have with a friend his or her own age.

Motivating Students to Learn

One of the hardest parts about tutoring a student is motivating that student to do something that he or she doesn't necessarily want to do. These are a few techniques that can help to get a student to want to learn.

1. *Cater to Student's Interests*

One of the best ways to motivate a student to want to learn is to focus tutoring whenever possible on something that they are interested in. For example, one can use sports statistics to do math with a student who is really into sports. If a student likes drawing you can have them draw scenes you read from a story. If your tutee is into hip-hop, you can have him or her read you poems or rhyming books like Dr. Seuss to a beat. You can make up math problems that relate to racing or movies or whatever. Try at all times to relate your tutoring sessions to something that the tutee is interested so that you're not simply forcing them to complete tasks that hold no meaning for them. The best thing a tutor can do is to simply get a tutee interested in learning... about anything! Then, once the tutee is inspired enough to start asking questions and learning about something on their own, without supervision, he or she will have gained the skills and habits necessary for working on other tasks that they won't necessarily be as interested in.

2. *Be a Friend*

Sometimes a little companionship is all a student needs to be motivated enough to do schoolwork. Simply a physical presence near them to cheer them on, motivate them, say, "Good Job!" and "You're getting it!" is all it takes to get a bored, uncooperative, and seemingly

apathetic student to focus on his or her schoolwork. Talking with a tutee while they study or work on their homework can help them from getting too bored and stopping their work. Make a tutee feel like you're working *with* them and you want them to succeed not because that's your role, but because you really want to see them realize their potential for their own sake.

3. *Use the Trust Relationship*

Using your relationship means showing some emotional investment in whether the tutee succeeds or not. For example, if a tutee doesn't bring homework to work on, you can say, "I'm disappointed that you came here without bringing what you're supposed to bring. I came here to help you and now I can't." This seems to work better than, "I'll tell your teacher," or, "You need to do what you're supposed to do." Once you establish a relationship you can use that relationship to make a tutee feel an obligation to live up to your expectations. This only works, of course, if you always keep your word and have honest, open communication with your tutee. Sometimes it's good to make promises and obligations, like, "You promise to bring some homework to work on and I promise to push you on the swings the last five minutes if we get it done." Deals like this work once mutual trust is gained.

4. *Set Educated Goals*

Once the relationship becomes established, you and your tutee can set goals for your tutee. They can be short-term goals like, "Let's read six pages today." They can be medium-term goals like, "Let's not get suspended this week, huh?" You can also set long-term learning goals

get you passing English this year." The key is to make the tutee feel like you're both in it together.

5. *Material Rewards*

Although some argue against using incentives because they are an external motivator, material rewards can work very well with young children and when working with very un-motivated students. Offer your student a small material reward for reaching goals- stickers, for example, work well. One can use both "special" stickers and "normal" stickers. At the beginning of the session set a goal- for example, "If you read me five pages (or do 15 problems), I'll give you a special sticker." The student often tries to bargain his way down ("How about three pages?"), so always start high. This way, the student is encouraged to stretch his limits, but at the same time, he won't be totally disappointed if he doesn't reach his goal and doesn't get a special sticker, because he still receives a normal sticker for trying his best. When a student gets a special sticker he often puts it on his shirt and shows it off to his friends- "Look what my tutor gave me!" "Wow, cool! I want one! I didn't get one!" "Well, you need to read more."

6. *Offer to Do Something Fun at the End of the Session*

If it's a nice day outside, offer to push your student on the swings for the last five minutes if he reaches the goal set at the start of the session. Sometimes you can even convince a student that reading more *is* his reward! Students usually have assigned reading, and try to get out of it by asking, "Can we read Captain Underpants instead?" So tell them, "Well, if you complete your assigned reading and we have time left, then maybe I'll let you read me Captain Underpants."

Alternatively, you can offer to read the book to them if they read their book to you satisfactorily.

7. *PRAISE!*

It's been said before, but it's hard to overestimate the importance of verbal praise- "Yeah!" "That's right!" "Good job!" "Wow, you're getting better!" "That was a hard one!" "You're improving!" "Awesome!" etc., both during and after the session.

8. *A Final Note*

ALWAYS end the session with positive encouragement.
ALWAYS.

Making a Boring Task Interesting

The ability to make a boring task interesting and get students involved in is an invaluable one when tutoring. Besides motivating students to learn, sometimes you have to motivate students to complete tasks that really bear little relation to learning but do, unfortunately, affect their success in school.

1. *Relate Task at Hand to Student's Interests*

This can really take a lot of creativity. Doing something like drawing or reading, that a tutee is interested in, is an easy way to get them interested in learning more about that certain activity... but not always about decimals. In this case, try to relate even seemingly completely unrelated tasks to something they like. Use sports statistics to do math. Insert cartoon character's names into math word problems. When doing history ask them how a certain event might relate to their life today. Let your tutee get up and dance while you read them math problems and have him or her work out the answer while dancing! Try anything to make boring stuff even a little more interesting.

2. *Make Work Visual and Hands-On*

One can usually ask a tutee's teacher for props, learning aids, games, whatever they have to help you tutor your student. Many students who seem unmotivated or slow are simply visual learners that can't relate as much to verbal or written concepts like they can to visual ones. When teaching the alphabet, get flash cards or letter tiles. For math use manipulatives. For science try to get rocks for geology or at least diagrams for biology. Anything you can find that a tutee

can touch will make a tutoring session more interesting and will get them more involved than simply the two of you staring at a single piece of paper with a pencil in one of your hands.

3. *Encourage Friendly Competition*

A student can compete against himself. Try and challenge a student to complete a worksheet as fast as they can without getting any mistakes. Or a tutee can compete with you. If doing a crossword puzzle or fill in the blank type exercise, make a game of it to see who can find the answer first. Friendly competition probably works best when dealing with two or more tutees who have the same assignment and are on almost equal levels in the subject. In such a case, there's usually nothing wrong with making a competition out of who can finish fastest (if a worksheet) or who can come up with the most interesting (funny, long, etc.) answer for an English assignment. It's not even necessary for there to be a prize-bragging rights always suffice. Just use common sense- if one tutee is getting upset and crying because they lost, don't use competition again with that particular tutee.

Learning to Follow Your Student

Tutors, more so than teachers, are in a unique position to give students freedom to take charge of their own learning. A good tutor will have some sort of plan going into a tutoring session, but at the same time, will allow his tutee the freedom to take the session in a different direction if necessary.

1. *Listen to Your Student*

Put simply, if your tutee has an activity in mind that, according to your best judgment, promotes some kind of learning, do it. A tutor can help a student to explore learning about topics that the student might not have the opportunity to learn about within the context of a normal classroom with rigid guidelines and divisions of knowledge into subject classifications. Also listen to your student when they talk about how they want to approach a certain task... that is, listen to them about what to do and how to do it. Of course, one must set boundaries and make sure that the two of you aren't merely playing, but as long as you can honestly and surely say that you are helping them learn, then it is a good thing to be doing.

2. *Pay Attention to What Doesn't Work*

If you try getting a tutee to read you a book and they simply won't do it on their own, then that's probably not going to work. Don't try to force your tutees to participate in something that obviously isn't working. Be respectful enough to realize that sometimes it's not that your tutee is slow or unmotivated; it might be that your teaching techniques don't mesh well with their particular learning style and that you are being too stubborn to change your style to fit theirs. Also consider that getting all

the right answers might work in terms of grades, but might not work in terms of the student learning to become self-sufficient. Sometimes it's a good idea to allow the student to make his own mistakes so that he can learn from them. Just because the student gets a few things wrong and doesn't immediately improve doesn't mean that things aren't working. Still, try to be most sensitive to what your tutee thinks works or doesn't work.

3. *Adapting*

A good tutor must be able to adapt quickly during a tutoring session. If a student starts to seem really bored and their eyes wander around and they yawn, suggest standing up for a minute and walking around or getting a drink of water. Switch from one task to another, like reading to math, if the student has more than one task to complete. Try different ways of explaining the same concept if the way the student's teacher explains it or the way the book explains it aren't working. Learn to adapt to the pace and the manner in which your particular tutee learns best. Don't try to impose your way of learning on them.

What to do When a Tutee Feel Overwhelmed

Sometimes a tutee gets an assignment and becomes so overwhelmed that he or she can't even begin to attempt tackling it. Here are some techniques to use when a tutee feels overwhelmed and thus powerless to do anything about his or her assignment.

1. *Show Support*

Let the tutee know that you are there to help him, and that together you two can complete whatever task he may have before him. One of the biggest things to do is to not let a tutee say, "I can't! I can't!" Many times a student can do something very easily once they start doing it, but it's just looking at it before starting that makes it so intimidating. Tell a tutee, "Yes, you can! I've seen you do things you thought you couldn't before! So don't tell yourself that! Just believe you can and you can." Empathize with them, let them know that the same thing might have been hard for you when you were in school too, but now you know how to do it. All it takes is practice and time. Just get them to try, help them along, and soon they will have more confidence to do it on their own.

2. *Break Assignment Down into Smaller Steps*

This is a great technique that many students fail to utilize. Instead of thinking of doing forty problems or a whole research paper all at once, get your tutee to think of it in terms of doing just 10 problems to start with or writing one paragraph. Then, you can take a break, motivate, and be ready to do more a little later. You can set little milestones like, "Make it to 10 and then we can go outside for a minute." Or, "Do 20 and then we can read for a few minutes." Breaking it down like this, into

“Level 1” and “Level 2” can make it a lot easier to think about getting it all done eventually rather than all in one shot.

3. *Tie in Familiar Concepts*

Oftentimes a tutee becomes frustrated when trying to do something that she just learned, or rather, has just been introduced to but has yet to really learn. In these instances, try to tie the unfamiliar back to familiar concepts. For example, a three digit multiplication problem is really just a series of one-digit multiplication problems. Writing an essay is simply writing a series of paragraphs. If a student speaks another language, explaining the assignment in that language might help to tie the unfamiliar to the familiar and help them to understand the task at hand. The use of metaphor can help, for example, by comparing writing an essay to baking a cake (you need to add all the right ingredients, in the right order, in the proper ratio). Use any way you can think of to make something unfamiliar seem like something familiar that the student already knows how to do well.

Challenging Students

No, this isn't advice on “problem students.” It means that one needs to remember to challenge the students one works with. Many times a student focuses only on the easiest way to complete the task at hand, thus preventing any real learning- except learning how to please those in charge. One needs to remember to challenge one's students to get them to strengthen their minds. For example instead of just answering a question in a social studies book, try and critically answer it together. Why does the book even ask you that particular question? Why might they want you to use their answer?

According to Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner in Teaching as a Subversive Activity, the primary aim of teaching should be to equip students with “built-in crap detectors.” That is, students need to learn how to differentiate between what's crap and what's not on their own. Therefore, it helps to get students to question what they're taught to a certain degree. “Why do you think they want you to learn multiplication?” “Why is it important for you to know about the planets in the solar system?” Then, one can help the students to start finding answers to these questions. It's not to say that one should answer these questions for the students, that would be the same thing, but it's not a bad idea to bring these issues up with students that actually care about them.

Even if one doesn't raise these types of questions, chances are, at some point, a tutee will either tell you, “This is pointless. I don't need to know this,” or will ask you, “What's the point of this?” Use this as an opportunity for some serious challenging and critical discussion rather than just making excuses for being lazy. Why should your student complete his worksheet? Why should he learn his times tables? These are questions that should challenge tutors and perceptive tutees alike.

Don't Let Your Tutees Trick You!

There are some common tricks that many students try to pull that a good tutor should be on the lookout for.

- Don't be tricked into giving a tutee all the answers! There are many ways tutees trick you into doing this. For example, while reading, every time they come to a word they don't know they might just look up at you and expect you to say it. Don't. Make them sound it out for themselves. That's not to say don't offer help, but it does mean that you must make them work for it and not just give it to them. If your tutee seems genuinely upset, completely frustrated and ready to give up, then obviously, one should offer more help, but NEVER simply give a tutee the answer. That's not a tutor's role; a tutor's role is to train students to find their own answers.
- Don't let a tutee trick you into thinking they're not as smart as they really are. Tutees might, for example, say, "I don't know how to do this," when in fact what they mean is, "I don't want to do this right now," or, "Will you help me with this?" Walk your tutee through the steps of a task, check for understanding at each step, and usually you'll realize that they are smarter than they let on.
- Check with a tutee's teacher to find out if they have any homework or assigned reading (if turning in homework seems to be their main problem). Don't let a tutee trick you by saying, "We don't have any homework," or, "I don't have anything to read today." Tutees love to try and take advantage of outsider, non-authority figure adults when they can. It's hard to blame them for it, but still, don't be tricked!

Reading Techniques

"Repeat After Me"

This technique should only be used with extremely inexperienced readers, typically kindergarteners but some first-graders as well. Ask your student to read you the first sentence in his book- if he can't do it, or if it takes excessively long, try this technique. One simply reads each sentence one word at a time, pointing at the word, and has the student "repeat after me." This technique is valuable mainly for establishing "sight reading" of simple words.

"Together/Alone/Together"

This technique should be used with beginning readers (K-2) who can sound out words well, given time, but are obviously reading behind grade level. If you find your student having to slowly sound out half of the words or more in his assigned reading, ask him what he just read after completing a few sentences. If he can't tell you, it's because he's focusing so hard on sounding out words that he's not getting any meaning from it, and you should try this technique.

First, ask your student to read two to three sentences at the same time as you read. Read slow enough so that the student has about a second to look at each word, but not long enough to sound it out completely. Then, have the student read the same sentences again by himself. Once you have both read the entire page in this manner, start at the beginning and read the whole page together again without stopping. This technique boosts sight-reading, models correct pronunciation, builds fluency, and also builds confidence. A student gets discouraged quickly if it takes him ten minutes to get through a single page and this lets him feel like "I'm reading faster! Yes!"

“Guided Reading”

This technique should be used with students who can read fairly well but still get stuck on one or two words per sentence- it can be used with students in any grade level that fits this description.

Basically, one simply lets the student read, but verbally corrects her errors. One must be careful, though, not to overdo it. That is, if the student pauses before saying the word and then mispronounces it, it is okay to correct her. If she says the troublesome word with a rise in the pitch of her voice, sounding it like a question, she wants to be corrected. If, however, the student reads right through making a simple mistake like saying “had” instead of “have” or “boy” instead of “boys” and doesn’t notice her own mistake, it’s a good idea not to correct her. Little nit-picking corrections like these can frustrate a student and kill the steady pace of her reading, and it’s more important for a student to feel confident and enjoy reading than to read with 100% accuracy.

“Taking Turns”

This technique can be used in conjunction with any of the first three. One simply takes turns reading with the student. This gives him a bit of a break, especially if he’s having a lot of trouble, and lets him listen to correct and fluent reading. DO NOT intentionally slow down your reading to his level or sound out difficult words. He might take this as an insult. Model correct punctuation, read with emotion, read fluently; provide a model of what he can achieve with practice.

“Listen and Ask Questions”

This one’s self-explanatory: when working with students who read very well, simply let them read to you and ask them questions about

what they read every page or two. Move from simply reading to reading comprehension. Sample questions might include, “Why do you think he did that?” “How would you feel if you were her?” “Have you ever wanted to do that?” “Have you ever seen one of those?” “Do you want to go there?” Try to relate the material to the student and what she cares about, making reading more personal and less mechanical.

Random Tips

- Point to a picture in the book instead of saying a word. Teach kids to use pictures as a way to read alone.
- Sound out words slowly at first when a student asks you for help; this models the same technique they can use on their own.
- Ask them if they liked the story. Why did they like it?
- Make reading fun... use different voices for different characters and put emotion into your voice, especially for sound effects and interjections.
- Try to match your tutee’s reading level to the difficulty of the book you read together.
- Try to smile and enjoy listening to your tutee read, especially when you have to grin and bear it as they slowly struggle through tough passages!
- Show them books that you read and explain why you like (or don’t like) those books.

Acknowledging Benefits

An honest tutor should realize and admit to himself that he probably receives as many if not more benefits from tutoring than does his tutee. Some of the many benefits of tutoring include:

- A sense of accomplishment and self-worth that accompanies serving others
- An understanding of the learning process
- The feeling of pride one receives when others look up to you
- Experience interacting with persons of a different race or socioeconomic class that one might not otherwise interact with
- Being able to share a particular interest or talent with someone
- It looks great on a resume
- Chance to make a positive difference in someone else's life
- Opportunity to put into action social justice beliefs
- Reason to visit parts of town you've never been to before
- Chance to practically utilize specialized knowledge like math, chemistry, a foreign language, etc.
- The Warm Fuzzies!

Dangers

There are several psychological dangers to avoid when tutoring.

- *Burnout*

Basically, don't overdo it! It's good to want to tutor and to help other people, but don't let it take over your life. Sometimes tutors might start to feel as if other aspects of their life aren't as important as tutoring, and then they feel guilty for doing fun things instead of tutoring and helping others. There is plenty of time for fun and for tutoring, so don't overdo it because then you might get burnout. If you start to get so stressed out by tutoring that it negatively affects other parts of your life, then it's time to scale back and focus on something else. Although tutoring should be important to you, it shouldn't override other concerns and cause you to burnout.

- *Overinvestment*

Overinvestment is related to burnout and occurs when one simply cares too much about the students one is tutoring. It is important to keep in mind that you are a tutor, not a parent, and that the parent is responsible for taking care of your tutee. Yes, you might find out that your student's parent works too much, and doesn't always have enough money to buy your student new shoes or even the most nutritious food. As sad as it may be, you can't save the whole world, and even trying to "save" one student is not something you should overly concern yourself with. Sometimes it is a good idea to speak with parents, but don't risk alienating them. You don't want to draw a line with you on one side and them on the other.

Basically, it's good to care about your students, but don't care too much or the relationship will sour for both of you.

- *Apathy*

Sometimes one can become apathetic about changing anything if one focuses too much on particulars. It's easy to just throw one's hands up and cry, "We'll never close the educational gap in America!" if one thinks about it too much and in too grand a scale. It's best to focus on small successes in order to not become apathetic about changing the bigger picture. This is especially important if your students don't achieve the goals you set together or if they fail to master a concept that the two of you have worked on for some time. Don't give up, be patient! Look for small gains and learn to content yourself with those so that you don't lose hope, give up the mission, and become apathetic.

- *Generalizing*

Generalizing about people is never a good idea, but it's very easy to do while tutoring. Try at all times to see your tutee as a unique human being and not a product of his parents, or his school, or his neighborhood, or class, or race, or any of these things. It may be tempting for some tutors to see all of these things in their particular tutee and then project their feelings about one onto the other. This is especially important within a school, because one might work with just one "problem" tutee and then come to think that many kids in the same class or same school are similar, when they are in fact not.

Saying Good-bye

Saying goodbye can be one of the most difficult parts of the tutoring relationship. Some tutor/tutee pairs form fairly strong bonds, and severing those bonds can be painful. These are some guidelines to help with saying goodbye to tutees.

- *Difficulties*

First of all, one should be prepared for a couple of difficulties in saying goodbye that are at least somewhat unique to the tutor/tutee relationship. One of the main difficulties can be the feelings of guilt and shame that can accompany ending the relationship. One can feel, "How will these kids do without me? Will they succeed with their next tutor, or without a tutor?" One can feel like they are shirking duty in ending a tutoring relationship. However, a good tutor must keep in mind that the end goal of tutoring is to produce a tutee capable of learning and succeeding without a tutor, so saying goodbye is a necessary step in this relationship.

Also, sometimes tutees have problems with "letting go." Tutees can come to feel a very strong connection with a tutor, and separation can be painful for them. They might feel, "Why is my tutor leaving me? Is it something I did?" While it might be impossible to totally eradicate these fears from a tutee, there are ways of saying goodbye that minimize these difficulties for the tutee. Although saying goodbye and ending relationships can be painful, to put it quite simply, it's part of growing up, and should be looked at as simply another opportunity to be a good role model and set a good example for your tutee.

- *Good Goodbyes*

There are several guidelines to follow in order to say a proper good-bye. Make sure that one is kind, constructive, and enthusiastic. Tell your tutee that you enjoyed working with him or her. Summarize some of your accomplishments, or make mention of the progress you have made. Mention a fun thing you did or a funny joke you shared. Encourage your tutee for the future by letting them know that they've learned a lot and that they will now be more successful on their own. Make them believe that they won't need you and can make it on their own, or at least with another tutor.

Also, it is probably best to make the goodbye a nice clean break. Unless you are **completely** sure that you will be back next semester and can meet with them personally, let them know that this is it, you won't see each other any more. Let them know that you care about them but that you can't see them any more. Tell them clearly and firmly why you can't tutor them any more, whether it be that you're moving, or your class schedule is more demanding, or you're getting a new job, or whatever. Your tutee will value your honesty and will not hope or expect you to come back if you make yourself very clear.

Although it is up to the individual tutor to decide this, it is probably not a good idea to exchange phone numbers or email addresses with a tutee. Again, although a tutor can be closer to a tutee than a teacher can, the tutoring relationship functions best when certain boundaries are maintained, and tutors simply cannot be completely equal friends with younger students.

- *Bad Goodbyes*

There are certain things one should definitely NOT do when saying goodbye. First of all, make sure you say good-bye! If you simply stop coming around to see your tutee, then they will obviously figure out that the relationship is over, but this is disrespectful and dishonest. A tutee will be led to wonder, "What did I do? Is it my fault?" It's not fair to treat a tutee like that. They deserve a proper goodbye. If you simply leave a tutee, this will affect their level of trust with their next tutor, and by extrapolation, adults in general. It might be hard to say goodbye, and it might be painful, but it's necessary. Your students will appreciate the closure.

Also avoid making empty promises. It's better to say, "I won't be back, it's over," than to say, "Well, I might be back next semester, we'll have to see if I'm busy or not." It's wrong to leave a student wondering and hoping like that. They can handle a clean break much better in the long run, even if it's more painful in the moment. Don't give them your phone number unless you really plan on keeping in touch with them and not just blowing them off because you're too busy. Don't tell them you might drop by sometime or call them unless you really mean it. Although all these things will make it easier to say goodbye in the moment, they will be harmful in the long run. Even seemingly innocent phrases like, "Well, I'm sure we'll meet again someday," can be misleading. Break it off clean, don't make any empty promises, and don't give any false hope. This is the healthiest way for all involved.

A Good Tutor... (Final Tips)

- Involves the student's teacher in the tutoring- asks if there is anything that needs to be focused on and also gives periodic progress reports.
- Always arrives on time, helping to establish trust and reliability.
- Greets the student by name and with a smile.
- Makes a little small talk at the start of the session- "How are you today?" "How was your weekend?"
- Does not provide the answer, but rather helps the student solve the problem, sometimes by asking the student questions that lead him to the answer.
- Sets goals at the start of the session (i.e. let's get to #15, or page 43)
- Adapts his tutoring style to the learner's learning style.
- Realizes that his way might not be the best way.
- Is supportive and focuses on success; is not critical and does not focus on failure.
- Focuses on the task at hand... does not explain too much in order to show off superior knowledge.
- Knows when to say, "I don't know."
- Keeps notes on sessions to know what worked and what didn't.
- Remembers that the primary duty is to help the student learn.
- Keeps track of the time and ends the session on time.
- Listens attentively, and takes all the student's concerns seriously.
- Remembers that he or she is a role model whose behavior will be emulated by young children and acts accordingly.
- Represents UT in a positive way.
- Is patient and allows sufficient time for the student to think through.
- Utilizes silence as a tool when appropriate.
- Strives to develop self-sufficiency in the student.
- Doesn't take himself too seriously, and knows how to have fun!

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