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MCLCA Officers

PRESIDENT
Jacqueline Robertson
Ball State University
North Quad, 323, The Learning Center
Muncie, IN 47306
Day: 765/285-8107
Fax: 765/285-2167
jroberts@gw.bsu.edu

VICE PRESIDENT
Charlotte M. Short
University of Wisconsin-Parkside
900 Wood Road, Box 2000
Kenosha, WI 53141-2000
Day: 262/595-3334
Fax: 262/694-2181
charlotte.short@uwp.edu

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY
Mark May
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Avenue
Charleston, IL 61920-3099
Day: 217/581-6696
cfmsm@eiu.edu

TREASURER
Jadwiga Piper
National-Louis University
122 S. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60603
Day: 312/621-9650
Fax: 312/621-1205
jpip@chicago1.nl.edu

COMMUNICATIONS CHAIR
Tina Holland
Holy Cross College
1801 N. Michigan
Notre Dame, IN 46556
Day: 219/239-8384
Fax: 219/233-8371
holland@hcc.nd.edu

PAST PRESIDENT
Shevawn Eaton
Educational Services and Programs
Northern Illinois University
Williston Hall East
DeKalb, IL 60115-2854
Day: 815/753-0581
Fax: 815/753-4115
seaton1@niu.edu

RECORDING SECRETARY
Karla Sanders
Buena Vista University
610 W. 4th Street
Storm Lake, IA 50588
Day: 712/749-1237
Fax: 712/749-2037
sanders@bvu.edu

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY
Heather Newburg
Lake Superior State University
650 W. Easterday Avenue
Sault Sainte Marie, MI 49783-1699
Day: 906/635-2874
Fax: 906/635-2090
hnewburg@gw.lssu.edu

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Joyce Stumpe
Purdue North Central
Technology Building Room 157-B
1401 S. U.S. Hwy 421
Westville, IN 46391
Day: 219/785-5439
Fax: 219/785-5470
jes@purduenc.edu

NEWSLETTER EDITOR
Kim Folstein
Mt. Mary College
2900 N. Menomonee River Parkway
Milwaukee, WI 53222-4597
Day: 414/258-4810
Fax: 414/256-1205
folsteik@mtmary.edu

To our readers:

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

To our readers:

Appropriate to our commitment to engage in thorough exploration and research to directly assist students to maximize their learning potential, this issue of The Learning Assistance Review provides an in depth look at techniques and strategies that can be used in the classroom and learning center. You will also have an opportunity to reflect on the nature and goals of mathematics education when molded to fit into a job-training program and on the very nature of education in one of our book reviews.

In a classroom based study, Deming explores the use of learning logs in an integrated reading/writing class as a way to get 'real time' evaluative feedback on her teaching and her students' progress. The author describes the use of learning logs as a method to strengthen students' analytical and comprehensive reading and writing abilities, and to develop metacognitive awareness of these processes while simultaneously using the log assignments and entries to gauge and refine her own subject content and teaching strategies. Further, Deming investigates the student use of log writing as a way to learn and as a tool to enhance self-awareness of the learner.

Exploring teaching effectiveness from a different perspective, Stewart and Warzala examine the qualities and experiences of the in-class writing workshop tutor. Through interviews with each tutor, they identify the tutor's teaching approach, self-awareness of his or her role as a tutor, and perception of his or her position vis-a-vis the instructor. Findings are discussed which support matching tutors and instructors in regard to teaching style and stance toward students to ensure effective working relationships and thereby provide effective instruction.

How to read college textbooks and what strategies to teach students to increase analytical reading, comprehension, and retention occupy the thoughts of many learning assistance professionals. A study by O'Hear and Ashton examines student highlighting of text and its relationship to grade in a beginning level academic course. The authors explore whether beginning students highlight their texts, and if so, is substantive or non-substantive material highlighted. In addition, they ask whether students highlight certain types of material and if highlighting affects the grade. Finally, the results of a student questionnaire on study habits and attitudes is discussed in relationship to highlighting and the use of strategies in general and may be of assistance in designing study strategies instruction.

In *Join the Conversation,* Mower and LaLonde reflect on the nature of mathematics education—is it to learn a skill, the rules, or to learn how to think, how to conceptualize? Likening a basic mathematics class in a 'welfare to work' program to a journey 'down a

large rabbit-hole,' they question what it takes to learn mathematics and ask whether their students, reluctant and scared of math, had a fair beginning. They ask questions about motivation, creating the teachable moment, and working with adult learners. Their experiences and reflections will spark reflection for all of us.

Finally, we offer you two book reviews this fall—first, of a hands-on study strategies text, and second, of a reflective discussion on the goals of education and the means to achieve them in today's society. Cohen reviews the nature of study strategies texts while discussing Sharyn Lowenstein and Peaco Todd's Frame By Frame: A Visual Guide to College Success, a text that offers a unique approach through the integrated use of cartoon characters to address the issues of beginning students. McNamara explores Gardner's latest book, The Disciplined Mind: What All Students Would Understand. He highlights major themes including Gardner's assertion that K-12 education should concentrate on teaching truth, beauty, and morality through an examination of three topics—the theory of evolution, Mozart's opera, The Marriage of Figaro, and the Holocaust. We are encouraged to enter this discussion of the purpose, goals, and meaning of education today.

Enjoy.

Martha Casazza
National-Louis University
122 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60603
mcas@whe2.nl.edu

Nancy Bornstein
Alverno College
3401 South 39 Street
Milwaukee, WI 53215
nancy.bornstein@alverno.edu

By Mary P. Deming

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ARTICLES

LEARNING LOGS: A VEHICLE FOR STUDENT LEARNING AND REFLECTIVE TEACHING

By Mary P. Deming, Georgia State University

Abstract

This article provides a rationale for using learning logs, a type of journal in which students respond to specific aspects of their learning, in college reading and writing classes. Learning logs allow instructors to link assessment with instruction by providing up-to-date information about what students are learning. In particular, this article details the use of learning logs in a college basic writing class and provides sample prompts and student responses. Finally, this article provides additional samples of learning log assignments and advice to teachers on how to implement learning logs in their classrooms.

Introduction

Recently, I reflected on the configuration of my college reading/writing classes, looking for more innovative ways to improve teaching and, consequently, to increase students' learning. In particular, I searched for methods that would encourage students to read and write college-level materials more effectively, respond more meaningfully and analytically to what they read, and monitor and measure their reading and writing processes. At the same time, I searched for a method of evaluation to help gauge the effectiveness of my instruction in a timely manner. I did not want to learn at the end of the academic term that students did not understand what I was teaching or that they had not mastered the material necessary to pass the course.

One technique I explored and have found worthwhile is the use of learning logs based on focused, varied prompts. My eventual experimentation with learning logs has allowed students to describe their personal situations, name their fears, and share their questions and doubts. Each log entry provided a variety of insights for me as well. In particular, from reading students' learning logs, I have learned a great deal about what it is like to participate in a varsity college sport, nurse a critically ill baby, grieve the early death of a parent, practice newly discovered oratory skills, work at a fast-food restaurant, and take pictures of

professional models. I have also experienced life as a fraternity brother, a single mother, and a non-traditional student returning to college. I have witnessed friendships develop in the classroom and blossom through the learning logs, with students encouraging and complimenting each other. Most importantly, I have seen growth in my students, both academically and personally, and I have witnessed their satisfaction with this growth in their learning log responses.

Authentic Assessment and Learning Logs

I teach in a university department that until recently offered a two-course, non-credit writing sequence designed to prepare students for their freshman composition classes. Students were required to enroll in one or both of these courses based on their high school grade point averages (GPAs), their Scholastic Aptitude Verbal Test Scores (SAT), and their university placement test scores. I often taught the first-level writing course, one in which students begin with narrative writing and eventually move on to exposition. In this class, students work on writing fluency, composing multiple drafts, and revising and editing their papers. Student-teacher conferences are an important part of the course, and collaborative work helps students to write for a real audience. In addition, this class utilizes a literature-based approach, having students read from a thematically-arranged text (Gold & Deming, 1994) that represents a wide breadth of selections and authors. After students' initial introduction to the writing process, academic writing, and the parts of an essay, they read thematic chapters in the text and write weekly essays related to the particular chapter.

Recently, I experimented with learning logs with this first-level, basic writing class. A learning log is defined as a type of journal in which students respond to specific aspects of their learning, unlike a personal journal where they write primarily about their feelings and personal reflections (Commander & Smith, 1996). Wilson (1989) sees the benefits of logs, in particular reading logs, as a place where students can admit their confusion, ask questions, make connections, read with attention, identify with characters and authors, revise readings, and question. Furthermore, in her research on reading logs, Wilson (1989) notes that

> Students who keep reading logs do on their own what their teachers have urged them, in vain, to do. They ask questions, make predictions, form opinions, read the text to find evidence to support their opinions, and notice the subtleties of a writer's craft. (p. 68)

I decided to use learning logs to help students meet three goals I had set for the course:

1. Students should understand the literary selections that we read for discussion and writing.

2. Students should understand the basic composition principles presented.

3. Students should learn to monitor their reading and writing processes in order to regulate and improve each.

In addition, I wanted to employ learning logs to help me meet a goal I had set for myself—to improve my instruction by carefully reviewing and reflecting on the information provided by the learning logs. In particular, I wanted to utilize them to link assessment with instruction. Rhodes and Shanklin (1993) advise teachers to use assessment "to discover the power of your teaching. To learn more about the development of reading and writing. To sharpen the quality of your observations and your confidence in them" (p. 5). Consequently, I hoped that reading students' comments in their learning logs would help me become a more reflective teacher, one who monitors students' responses, responds to students as individuals, and evaluates the effectiveness of instruction. As Hillocks (1995) suggests, a reflective teacher maintains "a basic posture of inquiry in teaching, regarding actions as hypotheses to be assessed" (p. 30). Furthermore, reflective teaching can lead to research based on classroom practice and can produce a reexamination of theory.

Description of Learning Log Activities

I asked students to respond to ten learning log prompts, with at least one learning log prompt assigned weekly. Sample prompts asked students to reflect on their understanding of the readings and class instruction, discuss their implementation of writing strategies, and analyze their experiences with various aspects of composition. Most learning log responses were written outside of class with responses ranging between one and two pages long depending on the topic.

Some instructors evaluate learning logs based on the number of pages, while others prefer a credit or no credit score for each entry. Still other instructors measure the quality of the response in terms of insight and evidence of growth (Fulwiler, 1980). In this class, learning log responses received a score ranging from 0 to 10, with 10 as the maximum score (Commander & Smith, 1996), and learning logs were worth 5% of the students' final grade. I gave the students a Learning Log Assignment Description Sheet, similar to the one employed by Commander and Smith (1996), that provided an overview of the types of assignments, the purpose for using learning logs, grading procedures, format requirements, and a model of an effective learning log assignment.

Learning log responses were collected once a week. I responded to the students' comments in writing and returned the responses to them. For my own records, I kept a running account of students' comments, while I looked for trends concerning students' understanding of what they were reading, their comprehension and use of various reading and writing strategies, and their ability to monitor their reading and writing processes. I looked for trends in the class in general, trends developing over time, and differences between students' responses. This information was used to monitor and adjust instruction.

Sample Learning Log Prompts

Sample Learning Log Prompt #1 asked students to reflect on the literary selections they had read for homework in order to aid them in their understanding of the text: *1. What was your favorite literary selection in Chapter 3, "Our Feelings and the Feelings of Others"? Tell why you liked it in a paragraph or two. 2. What was your least favorite literary selection*

in Chapter 3? Tell why you disliked it. 3. What literary selection was the most difficult for you? Discuss why it was difficult.

Responses from Learning Log #1 provided an arena for students to consider carefully the literature they were reading and to share the experiences, both positive and negative, they were having in this process. Consequently, such responses became a place to begin to link systematic assessment with instruction. An analysis of the responses indicated that the students' favorite literary selection for that week was "Shame," a short autobiographical piece by Dick Gregory (as cited in Gold & Deming, 1994, pp. 48-52). Not surprisingly, students reported they liked it because it was easy to follow and understand, they could identify with the characters and the story, and it was a touching, meaningful selection. Interestingly, students identified primarily with Gregory's experience of "shame" as a student, but they failed to mention Gregory's "shaming" of another person at the end of the story. These responses reminded me of the importance of choosing literature with which students can identify, understand, and relate.

Students' least favorite piece was less clear-cut, as students mentioned three different works. Common reasons for disliking a work included that it brought back too many unhappy memories, they could not identify with the story, they disliked the topic, or they could not understand the structure. Finally, the most difficult reading for most students was the poem "The Death of the Hired Man," by Robert Frost (as cited in Gold & Deming, 1994, pp. 67-74). Students had difficulty following the story line, so I developed a short mini-lesson on the poem, using a reader's-theater technique. As a result, all of us garnered a clearer understanding of the work.

Sample Learning Log Prompt #2, also designed to help students monitor their understanding and their comprehension, combined a technique often used in response to literature assignments (Probst, 1984) with a technique recommended by Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) experts (Hynds, 1994; Wills, 1993; Young, 1996). This prompt asked students to respond in letter form to the selections that they had read: *Write a letter to a classmate responding to the literary selections you have read for homework. Tell which were your favorite and your least favorite readings. Explain why. If you have any questions about the readings, pose them to your classmate. Exchange papers with your classmate. Respond to your classmate's papers.*

As with Learning Log #1, students liked a particular essay or short story because it was easy to follow and understand, they could identify with the story or the characters, or it touched them in some way. Many students liked both the coach and the moral presented in the essay "A Winner's Secret," by John Feinstein (as cited in Gold & Deming, 1994, pp. 232-237), the story of Duke University's varsity basketball coach, Mike Krzyzewski.

Students' letters to each other produced interesting dialogues. One male student wrote to his partner, a female volleyball player, "I already knew of Coach K. I like a story that talks about how someone goes through a hard time to achieve his goals." The female volleyball player responded, "I really liked your letter. I strongly agree with you. Basketball is one of my interests and I love sports. We have the same interests." Another male student identified

with "A Winner's Secret" as well and wrote to his partner, "My father and I are big Duke fans. It tells a good lesson...the best way to success is by failing. You learn how to use failure." The student who read and responded to his letter agreed with this theme:

> I definitely can relate to the fact that the best way to success is by failure. I can't relate to it in the sports' aspect, but I can in life. I think you picked out the important lesson in the essays we read.

Again, students in their letters demonstrated the importance of their personally identifying with a literary text. One student referred to a different essay studied later in the term, "He Rocked, I Reeled," by Tama Jamawitz (as cited in Gold & Deming, 1994, pp. 166-168), an essay describing the qualities of a good teacher. This student wrote:

> My favorite was "He Rocked, I Reeled." I can relate to it. I once took a chemistry class in high school, and at first I hated it. But when my chemistry teacher taught the class, I began to like chemistry. She is so dedicated to science...Because of her enthusiasm, it inspired me to learn chemistry more.

The letter format of Learning Log #2 was quite exciting and revealing. With a particular audience in mind—one of their classmates—students assumed similar roles. First, most of them adopted the role of a casual friend using an informal letter format beginning with a "Dear..." salutation, followed by a sentence or two inquiring about their fellow student's well-being ("I hope you are doing well"). After establishing a friendly context, most students assumed the role of confident literary critics describing their favorite and least favorite reading selections and offering reasons why. Some students referred to interests they shared. For example, one student offered another a compliment:

> I liked the same stories that you liked....In reading the education assignments, it reminded me of you. I know that you want to be a teacher, and I think that you would be the type of teacher that would teach the lesson plus another message that would be behind the object lesson. I hope that all of your children in your class get to know you the way that I have. You are a caring person and a well-rounded individual. I think that you would be a good teacher because you have showed us that you are an excellent student.

This letter format might be used earlier and more frequently, since it allowed students to picture and relate to their audience, encouraged them to find and remain faithful to their writing voices, and most importantly, validated their opinions as readers and peers.

The next learning log prompt, **Sample Learning Log Prompt #3**, was designed to help students begin to monitor their reading and writing processes during the first two weeks of class: *1. Reflect on what we have discussed and read in this class so far. Summarize what you have learned about writing so far. 2. Reflect on what we have discussed and read in this class so far, including writing our first drafts for Essay #1. List and discuss any questions you need answered or any problems with which you might need help. Let me know what is unclear to you at this point.*

Some students commented about the literature components of the course, stating they were learning more about the different literary styles of writers. Other students summarized the readings, as Anderson (1992) had warned, and a few students mentioned their favorite authors. However, most comments were related to the writing process—its relationship to reading and the parts of an essay. For two students, the first two weeks of the class were a review. Perhaps more students felt that way as well. The use of a "Quick Take" (Barry, 1996) or a "K-W-L" activity (Ogle, 1986) would have prevented some students from sitting through material they already knew. Assessing students' prior knowledge before teaching a lesson is a much more valuable use of students' time and attention.

Students were also encouraged to ask questions or to make comments about the class, and many did. Some students requested that I review various aspects of grammar, such as run-ons and fragments. Others asked for help with writing thesis statements and expanding their body paragraphs. A few students shared fears: "The writing process is not working for me;" "I am having trouble absorbing the passage;" and "I'm not as good of a writer as I thought I was."

As a result of students' comments, particularly the last student's poignant admission, I strove harder to point out their successes and to work more diligently to prepare them for the demands of a new form of writing, academic discourse. In order to encourage students to continue to feel free enough to ask questions, they needed answers immediately and expected their suggestions for the class to be taken seriously.

Sample Learning Log Prompt #4 is an example of an assignment designed to evaluate students' understanding and use of the composition principles taught in the course and their ability to monitor their own writing processes: *You have now received Essay #1 back, graded with some comments. How do you feel about your grade? What strategies did you use effectively in this first essay? What areas do you need to strengthen? What steps will you take to improve in these areas? What questions do you have for your instructor related to her comments or topics that you want explained in class?*

As with all the learning log prompts, students were encouraged to ask questions. Seven students declared disappointment with their grades. One student wrote, "I am still making the same mistakes I made in high school, still frustrated." Yet, a few students were happily surprised with their good grades. Still other students noted the difference between writing in high school and writing in college. A few students addressed the need to be aware of their audience: "I realized that all teachers have different expectations. I am used to getting higher grades;" and "My professor liked my second solution about setting up a special address for the homeless. I know what my professor is looking for."

Despite their disappointment with their grades, most students astutely noted the areas they had to improve: grammar, spelling, writing thesis statements, and paragraph development. In recalling the strategies they used in writing their first essays, students mentioned utilizing various types of prewriting and organizational strategies (brainstorming, mapping, and outlining), using various kinds of introductions and conclusions ("I started off broadly..."), writing thesis statements, and trying a variety of words and sentence structures. In examining

their areas for improvement, students mentioned many of the same strategies, plus their need to add more details to their body paragraphs and to allow more time for proofreading. Clearly, students were recognizing and monitoring their writing processes and striving to improve them. Some students asked me to give them more time to complete their first drafts and group reviewing of essays, to find out the schedule of the lab tutors, to allow them to select their own topics, and to explain my grading procedures for essays. Three students asked me to meet with them individually to clarify my assignments and expectations. One student's comment, "Are you grading too critically for our level?" made me reflect once again about my expectations concerning the quality of beginning students' writing. Consequently, we had a class discussion on this topic, differentiating between evaluating effort versus evaluating product in a writing class.

Since many of the students evidenced pervasive difficulties with various aspects of grammar, in particular sentence structure, I decided to review some of these elements in class. To make sure that we shared the same grammar vocabulary, I assigned a "Quick Take," **Sample Learning Log Prompt #5**, to determine what students already understood about certain grammatical terms: *1. Please define as thoroughly as possible the following terms. You may offer an example, in a sentence, instead of a definition. Do not look up any of these terms. I am using this "Quick Take" to determine what I need to teach in these areas.*

1. Subject
2. Verb
3. Object or complement
4. Phrase
5. Independent clause
6. Dependent clause
7. Fragment
8. Run-on sentence
9. Comma splice
10. Simple sentence
11. Compound sentence
12. Compound-complex sentence
13. Ways to vary sentences

Sample Learning Log #5 was designed to assess, in a hierarchical way, students' knowledge of and understanding of certain grammatical terms. Students' responses fell into three categories. The least knowledgeable group of students knew only the meaning of certain grammatical words, like "subject," verb," and "object." The middle group not only knew those words, but also could define or give examples of certain types of clauses and sentence structure errors, like run-on sentences, fragments, and comma splices. The most knowledgeable group knew the meaning of basic grammatical words, types of clauses, and some types of sentences. However, no one in the class knew all types of sentences or the ways to ensure sentence variety. Based on the results of this learning log, I adjusted my plan of instruction. First, I recommended privately to the members of the least knowledgeable group that they visit our learning lab to review rudimentary grammatical knowledge. In class, students reviewed various types of clauses and sentence errors, but the major portion of the instruction dealt with sentence types and other ways to vary sentences in an essay. This learning log exercise helped diagnose students' strengths and areas for improvement, and as a result, I learned to teach primarily to the majority—the middle group.

The final example, **Learning Log Prompt #6**, asked students to evaluate the use of learning logs in their college composition class throughout the term: *Please take some time to review*

and assess the value of using learning logs this quarter in this composition class. BE HONEST! In particular, consider how this assessment tool has helped you (or not helped you) to understand the literary selections that we have read and the basic composition principles presented in the course. In addition, assess whether or not the learning logs have assisted you in monitoring your reading and writing processes, and note whether or not I have adjusted instruction based on your learning log comments. Finally, please comment on the logistics of using learning logs in the class including the length of the entries, the types of entries, the number of the entries, and their value in relation to the course grade. Feel free to include any other issues.

Responses from Sample Learning Log #6 were mostly positive, although, only a few students reported that writing learning logs significantly improved their understanding of the selections in the text.

- "This assessment tool did a decent job making sure I understood what I read...by making me report what I read on paper."
- "I admit that they were time consuming, but they were very helpful. They helped me to understand the reading selections because it made me think about them more because I had to write about them....I learned how to look into things more closely and see and understand things that were not told to me."
- "The learning logs haven't really helped me understand the selections better but it has helped my improvement on monitoring my reading and writing process. The best thing about the learning logs are that they let the teacher know what students do and don't know."

Students also reported that they liked writing learning logs because they were something different and gave them an opportunity to communicate with their instructor.

- "Teachers don't usually want to know about how a student might feel about the class."
- "They gave us a chance to express our thoughts on the readings and gave you a chance to see how we felt about certain things and also from the reading the logs, you would know whether or not we did the readings."
- "For one, class was adjusted so that we read fewer selections so that we could concentrate better and to learn the importance of each and also I remember I had asked about extra credit and you didn't exactly give us extra credit, but you let us do two revisions....I felt that when you were asked if we could have a little more time for our first drafts that you gave us that extra time."

Students also made recommendations for future learning log assignments, requesting more feedback so that the learning logs became more "interactive." Other suggestions included more variety in assignments, less emphasis on length of responses, and flexibility in

assigning grade values, in particular, allowing learning logs to count more than just 5% of their final grade. By counting the learning logs only 5% as compared to the 85% value I assigned to the formal essays of the class, I had been giving my students a mixed message about what I value. I could identify with Fulwiler (1989) when he confessed to the same imbalance: "While I believed that I valued—and therefore emphasized—the *process* of learning, my assignments suggested that I really valued the *product* of learning—the demonstrations of skills and knowledge in the formal papers and examinations." (p. 151)

Advice to Teachers

Anderson (1992) notes that many of the journal responses he has encountered are primarily summaries of what students read rather than careful analysis, synthesis, or reflection. Some of my students' responses reflected this phenomenon. When asked what was their favorite literary selection, some students said they liked a particular selection and then, as evidence for this preference, summarized it. This problem can be addressed by providing models of reflective responses. Model responses might include a debatable thesis statement, major reasons or points, and evidence from the text supporting the author's main points. In addition, students might be asked if they identified with a particular setting, character, or event. If so, they could compare their experience with those in the text. Both these exercises move students from literal analysis of a text to a deeper more, analytical one.

Anderson also mentions a lack of growth in some students' reading and writing processes over time. Rather than viewing this situation as a problem or a weakness in a student, this type of response can be seen as a red flag encouraging teachers to modify their teaching methods and curriculum to challenge students, so they will try to improve their abilities and performance. Perhaps it is not the students who are evidencing a lack of growth, but rather the assignments that are not challenging the students. I suggest, not only offering a variety of learning log prompts, but also assigning prompts that create a hierarchy of skills—each one increasing in difficulty. For example, prompts about literature might move from the personal response, "Who is your favorite character?" to the more difficult analytical prompts, "Compare two characters in the story," or "Compare a character in this story with a character in another literary work" (Probst, 1984).

A personal fear I had about this project was that the amount of information might be overwhelming. However, foremost was my goal to analyze and monitor all my students' comprehension. An interesting idea might involve studying in depth two or three students' learning log responses over time to describe their understanding of what they have read, their reading and writing processes, and their cognitive monitoring of these processes. With such an in-depth analysis of a few students, instructors could create what Alderman, Klein, Seeley, and Sanders (1993) call "Portraits of Learners." (p. 49)

Another of my original worries about using learning logs was that I wouldn't know how to organize the learning log topics, but this dilemma worked itself out by using three topics paralleling the three goals that I had set for the class. Specifically, students were asked to evaluate the literature they were reading, demonstrate their understanding of writing principles they were learning, and monitor the reading and writing processes they were

practicing. Also, some learning log topics result from what students revealed in earlier learning log responses. If students had questions, I learned to answer them immediately and to sympathize with their concerns. If nothing else, I learned how well my students were doing; when students did not understand an assignment, I was able to reteach it. I slowed the pace of the class if necessary and gave more time for certain topics and projects. Assuredly, learning logs help teachers notice problems while they occur, not after. Most importantly, learning logs allow instructors to monitor and to change their instruction. Hence, instructors can use learning logs to determine students' prior knowledge or lack of knowledge of an assignment. Additionally, using learning logs frequently and responding to entries immediately is critical.

Teachers might experiment with a variety of learning log types and topics. For example, instructors can ask students to examine the effectiveness of a particular assignment, or, encourage students to engage in metacognitive activities such as analyzing their writing processes. In particular, students could be requested to describe their proofreading processes. They could be questioned, "Do you read for errors in general and/or read for particular errors? Are there any special proofreading techniques that you can recommend?" A colleague suggests using a learning log prompt early in an academic term in order to learn more about students. She asks her at-risk high school students, "What are you serious about?" (E. Lewis, *Personal Communication,* February 5, 1997).

End-of-the-term evaluation prompts might query students, "What was your favorite reading this quarter? Describe why you liked it." Or, "What was your favorite activity this quarter. Describe why you liked it. What was your least favorite activity this quarter? Tell why. Or, if you were the instructor in this class, what topics, assignments, readings, and activities would you continue to teach, which would you add, and which would you drop" (Commander & Smith, 1996, p. 448).

Reflecting on Using Learning Logs

Although I used learning logs in a literature-based basic writing class, I believe they have a value in all literacy classrooms and in learning centers for students, teachers, and tutors. Learning logs are valuable for a number of reasons. First, learning logs allow students to discover writing as a "mode of learning" (Emig, 1977, p. 1). Through writing, students can discover what they know about a subject, what they still need to know about a subject, and to share their feelings about it. Learning logs also provide students practice with a variety of writing assignments, not just those related to an academic essay. Through these assignments, students can explore the various functions of language, in particular the "expressive" function and can learn to write for different audiences (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975). Martin, D'Arcy, Newton, and Parker (1994) write:

> The expressive is basic. Expressive speech is how we communicate with each other most of the time and expressive writing, being the form of writing nearest to speech, is crucial for trying out and coming to terms with new ideas. Because it is the kind of writing in which we most fully reveal ourselves to our reader—in

a trusting relationship—it is instrumental in setting up a dialogue between writer and reader from which both can learn. (p. 43)

Learning logs also help students to monitor their reading and writing processes and to reflect on their understanding of the literary selections and the other academic texts they read. Soldner (1998) notes many college students are not even aware of their own literacy processes and consequently have little control over them. "Students lack the necessary metacognitive awareness necessary to monitor, direct, and regulate their learning of text. They are inexperienced with comprehension monitoring and this lack of ability becomes apparent when developmental learners attempt to tackle college textbook material" (1998). Teachers can use responses in learning logs to determine some of the reasons students like or dislike a particular reading, to note if students monitor their reading habits and processes, and consequently, to adjust instruction if students have difficulty with particular selections.

Finally, learning logs can open up a private place for communication between teachers and students and between students and peers. Using learning logs helped me to know my students better and fostered a type of intimacy and deeper level of communication. One student, for example, whom I praised for her absolute honesty early in her learning logs eventually felt comfortable enough to describe in an essay, a more public forum, a major "turning point" in her life—a time when she was arrested for a minor infraction and subsequently experienced personal troubles. In her final learning log, she wrote "The only reason I liked writing Learning Logs in this composition class was because it gave me a chance to be honest with my professor...I was glad to see that she adjusted her instruction...The teacher of the class can make all of the difference on whether I enjoy the course or not..."

Another student demonstrated growth in his reading and writing strategies. It is revealing to compare his early learning log response, "I find it hard to believe that these essays will help me..." with his end-of-the-term response, "This quarter I learned that I do not know as much as I thought I did about writing. I had to learn new strategies for composing essays...I feel I have improved greatly as a writer...I am ready to go on."

In conclusion, learning logs, in unique and intimate ways, assist teachers to monitor their students' reading and writing processes, assess their students' understandings of texts and strategies, and reveal their students' particular needs and interests. As a result, reflective teachers continue to monitor and adjust their own instructional beliefs, strategies, and materials.

Mary P. Deming, *Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Composition in the Department of Academic Foundations at Georgia State University.*

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WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?: THE TUTORING EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE EYES OF IN-CLASS WRITING TUTORS

By Thomas C. Stewart, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania and Edward Warzala, Ulster County Community College

Abstract

This research examines the tutoring experience through the eyes of five in-class writing tutors at a medium-sized state college. This study focuses on the experiences and perceptions of five tutors who were assigned to work with instructors in developmental writing classes. Interviews with the tutors reveal much about their experiences and about their understanding of the work they do. In the conclusion, the implications of understanding the experience of tutors for coordinators of tutoring programs are discussed. The goal of the research is that the preliminary findings of this project will help tutorial and writing center coordinators to more effectively staff their programs.

Learning assistance and tutoring take many different forms at the post-secondary level. One-on-one tutoring, group tutoring, the Supplemental Instruction model of tutoring, and study skills workshops all exist, and often co-exist, at college campuses around the country. As the National Center for Educational Statistics (1991) points out, tutoring and learning assistance programs almost always play a key role in a college's developmental program, and much of what these programs aim to do, regardless of the subject area, is help students develop study strategies so that they can learn on their own. Research into learning assistance and tutoring also covers a wide variety of areas. Hock, Shumaker, and Dashler (1995) examine the effects of training on enhancing student independence. Matthews (1993), in a similar vein, discusses ways tutors can mold active learning in the students with whom they work. The work by Matthews (1993) suggests that what tutors need to understand to effectively help their students is the process of reading. By doing so, tutors can "begin to learn about the incredibly complex nature of learning" (p. 639). Kimbrough, Hochgurtel, and Smith (1998) discuss the use of Internet tutorials for students in an on-line science class. Hirsch (1994) suggests ways that learning assistance can help students overcome the baggage of previous academic failure. Harris's (1995) work stresses the importance of tutors for writing students. Blau, Hall, and Strauss (1998), in a linguistic analysis of tutoring sessions, explore the conversation between tutor and tutee. Casazza and Silverman (1996) have developed a guide for how learning assistance programs can be effectively managed in conjunction with a developmental program. Robert and Thomson's (1994) article documents the effectiveness of a learning assistance program in serving under represented students on a college campus. These works all focus on the effect of tutoring and learning assistance on the student receiving the service.

Focus on the Tutors: What Do They Have to Say?

The research that has been discussed is particularly helpful in terms of understanding the place of tutoring and learning assistance programs at the post-secondary level. This study focuses instead on the experiences of the tutors: Why have they become involved in tutoring? How do they interact with the course instructors? How do they relate to the students with whom they work? How does this relate to the hiring of in-class tutors? This research grew out of the authors' experiences as tutoring program administrators. Formal tutor training sessions focused on philosophical and programmatic issues, tutor responsibilities, strategies for working with tutees, working with ESL students and students with learning disabilities, expected outcomes for tutees, and pedagogical issues. In casual conversations with tutors, however, these researchers began to hear from tutors about how much they were learning and gaining from tutoring. This is nothing new in terms of subject matter: tutoring has always been viewed as beneficial for learning or re-learning content for the tutor. What inspired this study, however, was the desire to discover how an understanding of the tutors' own personalities and experiences could lead to a more effective tutoring program. This study investigates this by focusing on one type of tutor: the in-class writing workshop tutor. This study goes beyond exploring the experience of these tutors; this research aims also to make some preliminary speculation as to what type of tutor works best in an in-class setting. Before getting to the interviews, some background information about the program for which the tutors work is necessary.

Background

The site of this study was the campus of a four-year, mid-sized state college offering undergraduate and graduate degrees up to the Master's level. The student body at this college is culturally diverse, with a mix of students from urban and suburban backgrounds. As coordinators of the writing center and tutoring program at this campus, these researchers had daily contact with students and tutors from a variety of backgrounds. The tutors in this study worked with first-year writing classes that served developmental students. The format of the writing class had been developed to replace non-credit remedial writing courses. Instead, the students in the writing courses receive, upon successfully completing the course, three credits toward graduation. They actually attend four hours of class each week—three hours of regular classroom instruction plus a one hour writing workshop with the tutor, during which the tutor works individually with students. In addition, each student is required to attend one hour of one-on-one or small group tutoring with the tutor assigned to the class. In order to pass into the next class, each student in a writing class (only about a quarter of the writing classes have the workshop component) must pass the common final—an essay writing test that is graded holistically. The tutors who are selected for the workshop classes are among the most experienced of the writing tutors, since the assignment requires an extra level of commitment and maturity on the part of the tutors.

Methodology

Twelve tutors were interviewed individually for approximately 30 minutes each. At least a day before the interviews, the tutors were briefed on the general content of the points which

would be discussed. These researchers used a set of questions as a guide to the interviews. Questions were designed to elicit tutor perceptions of the dynamics existing between instructors and students, tutors and instructors, and tutors and students. Some of the questions were:

- In what ways are the tutees with whom you work like you? In what ways are they not like you?
- As an in-class tutor, do you identify more with the course instructor or with your tutees? Why?
- Do you think the time spent in class is more or less valuable than the time spent in tutoring sessions?

With the permission of the tutors, the interviews were recorded on videotape. After all of the interviews were completed, the researchers gathered and watched each of the interviews. A process of purposeful sampling was used to "learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). The particular approach used was intensity sampling, a method of identifying fairly typical examples of the subject of study, because of the interest in "information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely)" (Patton, 1990, p. 171). After watching and evaluating the dozen interviews, five tutors were selected who met the key criteria for intensity sampling. These participants:

- effectively articulated their conception of the dynamics of the three part (instructor-tutor-student) system they help to constitute, and
- made connections between their experiences as tutors and issues of tutoring practice as related to the larger enterprise of developmental education.

The interviews of the selected participants were then transcribed, and the transcripts were analyzed as a source of data about the tutors' experiences. During this stage, these participants were asked follow-up questions which were used to clarify some of their answers. Also, observations were made of the tutors at work with their tutees.

Interviewing the Tutors

Agatha

Agatha was hired as a workshop tutor after she had worked for several semesters as a one-on-one tutor. Agatha is an undergraduate English major and a writer who wants to be a writing teacher: "I always knew at some point that I would probably want to be a teacher." Her experience as a tutor has confirmed this. Agatha applies a leveling strategy in her tutoring sessions. Like many tutors, Agatha, a student with excellent grades and a strong ability to relate to students, was assigned the task of tutoring struggling students. Agatha establishes a dynamic in which her own academic vulnerabilities are made known to her

students. The students, of course, know that Agatha is qualified to be a tutor, but she "levels" the relationship by sharing her experiences: "I'm an English major myself, I wish I had someone to go to," and "No, I make mistakes, too," and that sets her tutees at ease. In cases where students are from diverse cultural or national backgrounds, this "leveling approach" may serve to close the social distance between tutor and student. Agatha's in-class instructor encouraged her to assume the role of second instructor. The instructor is confident in her own abilities and is able to delegate classroom responsibilities to the tutor. Indeed, Agatha indicates that she identifies more with the instructor than with the students, but not to the extent that it impairs her ability to effectively relate to developmental students. Agatha is aware of the tutoring dynamic and makes a conscious effort to reduce the typical barriers to learning. She says the task of the tutor is "to make (learning) so interesting that students want to pay attention."

Mira

A second-semester sophomore at the time of the study, Mira has done very well in college. In her early twenties and scheduled to graduate one semester early, Mira is a valuable in-class tutor because she is acutely aware of the needs of instructors and students alike. She sees many similarities between herself and the tutees: "They are the same age as I am. We hang out outside of tutoring. I see them around on campus.... They are just regular teenagers a lot of the time, and they have similar interests." Mira reads and computes situations quickly and accurately and is able to interpret the extent of a student's understanding through a quick series of questions.

Mira finds that her ability to balance the demands of social life, academics, and her work as a tutor is one of her key assets. In sharing her time management strategies with tutees, she has noticed that others seem unable to perform the balancing act as she can, and academic problems result. Mira has also learned that various learning styles exist among both strong and weak students. In her interview, it was the differences in learning styles that stood out to her. In class, Mira "floats" from student to student. Her instructor, who sees Mira's role as supportive, permits some independent instruction. Mira states that after a short time with the students they realize she is "a friendly person" and is not "intimidating." She "chats" with her students, and she has no worry or concern with being non-authoritarian. Feeling that the tutoring sessions offer a unique learning experience for students, Mira notes that she and the students are able to focus better in small groups (two or three students) or one-on-one sessions. Mira makes a conscious effort to be a "peer tutor." She chooses to put students at ease by establishing friendships with tutees. As she notes:

> I don't think it is necessarily bad to have a very informal relationship with your tutees. I think that you can do that and accomplish things.... A lot of people are worried about being authoritative..., but I don't really take that approach at all. I'm more casual and prefer to chat with them, and I think once they realize that I'm not an intimidating person, they are more willing to try new things with me.

Mira, who is a social peer with most of her tutees, finds that this stance is most effective for her in serving the needs of her tutees.

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Hannah

A serious woman in her early thirties, Hannah was recommended as a tutor by the head of the college's critical thinking program. Hannah was teaching one critical thinking course as an adjunct, and, when she asked about more work, her name was sent to the writing center. Working as both a tutor and a teacher at the same time, Hannah says, "I actually like tutoring better than teaching." Hannah has a graduate degree in philosophy from a prestigious private college. Self-deferentially, she joked about how her degree led to teaching: "It seemed like the best thing to do with my education.... Everyone would say, 'So, you're gonna teach philosophy.' My dad and uncle said they were going to open a philosophy store for me."

Hannah worked with a less experienced, less secure classroom instructor. It became apparent in the interview that Hannah differed with the instructor on content and pedagogy, but, as a tutor, she had to accept her supportive position in the classroom. Hannah maintained the role she was assigned in the classroom, but in tutoring sessions she assumed the role of instructor, or teacher-tutor. She was careful not to cross the lines of authority, but she clearly enjoyed her independent tutoring time far more than classroom time. It was clear from the interview, however, that Hannah was somewhat uncomfortable discussing the tension she felt in her position.

In stating she enjoyed tutoring better than teaching, Hannah noted she felt the tutoring relationship was far more effective and rewarding than her own independent classroom teaching experience. As she states:

> When you get feedback from the student that is oral, in conversation, it's different from getting feedback through their written work and then trying to figure out from that what you need to cover in the next lesson.

She follows this line of thought in more detail:

> When I was teaching a class, the students didn't open up to me as much as my students whom I'm tutoring. They'll tell me things I can't believe they're telling me, about their personal lives. They'll tell me things about their instructor or make comments, stuff you would say to another student about your professors.

Thus, Hannah finds working with one student more satisfying than working with a group. "Students I tutor one-on-one feel more of a personal connection with me and get more out of it." This contrasts with the "students I tutor in a group (who) feel like they are...not a person to me, they are part of a group." For Hannah, the personal connection she makes as a one-on-one tutor is of primary importance.

Laura

Laura became a tutor while taking a couple of German classes at the state college in order to keep her skills sharp before entering a Ph.D. program in linguistics. She had graduated a couple of years earlier from one of the top colleges in the country, and, while working as

a tutor, was offered a full scholarship at one of the country's top doctoral programs in linguistics. Because of her background in linguistics and English as a Second Language (ESL), Laura was offered a position tutoring a writing class specifically tailored to the needs of the large population of ESL students at the college. Her background helps her relate to the struggles of the ESL students; she frequently shares with them her experiences as a second language learner herself. Laura's work as a tutor has meshed with her career goal. As she says, "It definitely has encouraged me to go on to pursue a career as a professor or teacher. It's made me more comfortable."

Laura locates herself right in the middle of the continuum between student and teacher. She notes when asked about how she identifies herself, "I think I identify with both, and that's what an in-class tutor is, a liaison between the professor and the students." The tutor, in Laura's pedagogy, serves as a conduit between two parties—teacher and students—between whom there is often a barrier of power. Laura continues, "The students see me as a peer, and the teacher also sees me as a peer. And I can talk to the professor about things I wouldn't necessarily talk to the students about and vice versa."

The other element of Laura's pedagogy of tutoring is how she views the one-on-one relationship between tutor and tutee. At one point in her interview, Laura relates that while originally she was tutoring several of the students in her ESL class in small groups, the students requested that they meet with her individually—a request with which she complied. She has a complex view, seeing the value of both one-on-one and class sessions. She begins, "I would say that the one-on-one sessions are more valuable because I spend all my time on one student." She then modifies this statement slightly, "When we're in class it's a different relationship—it's more valuable from a different perspective. From the tutor-tutee perspective, the one-on-one sessions are more valuable." Laura's ability to see the complexities of learning and learning relationships are a valuable asset to her as a teacher-tutor.

Simon

Like Hannah, Simon came to the attention of the writing center through his work as an adjunct instructor with the critical thinking program. In his thirties, Simon is personable and approachable and is clearly well-liked by his tutees and the instructor of the class. Frequently, students would show up in the Tutoring Center looking for Simon at unscheduled times.

Concerned with power and privilege, Simon uses a type of leveling that is very different from that used by Agatha. Agatha uses leveling to make the tutees feel more comfortable. Simon uses it to eliminate the power barrier between instructor and student. He states, "The school system has made the teacher become the focus of education. As a tutor, I try to separate myself from that approach." His background in educational theory informs this decision:

> As an individual, I have problems with the institutional setting of the educational system, but this is a realistic way of dealing with the values of education. I accept

> what Freire says: "Education suffers from the sickness of narration." So for me, I still believe that one-on-one tutoring has a lot of advantages.

Simon identifies very closely with the tutees. When asked how he relates to the students, he notes, "We're both human beings, and we're also part of an educational system.... My identification with them is very sincere. I share the process that they are going through."

His view also takes in the complexities of the tutor-tutee relationship. In explaining the differences between himself and the tutees, he uses an analogy:

> In any kind of education, every bit of information is just like a menu for me. For example, when somebody goes to a restaurant, he or she does not order everything on the menu.... I, as an individual, am interested in certain information.... What differs me from the tutee is my experience in acquiring a particular set of knowledge as opposed to them.

Simon, like Laura, finds his own identity in both the teacher and the students in the class with which he is working. Yet, he is again aware of the complexities:

> I do identify with both (the teacher and student). There is a difference. First of all, the teacher has a specified position and role to play in the classroom. So for me, being in the class and listening to the lectures the teacher is giving will make me understand where the teacher is and what the teacher wants from the students.

He contrasts this with his understanding of students:

> Being in class and seeing how the students react has also helped me understand what they understand and where they are coming from—what their strengths are. In fact, through their inquiries and their interaction I will have a different understanding of what the student's role is and the role of the teacher.

Simon's sophisticated understanding of the complexity of these relationships makes him an invaluable asset to any workshop instructor or student. His interview reveals a post-modern tutor, one with the ability to see all sides and to position himself in a way that benefits all sides.

Conclusion

The voices of five very different in-class tutors have been heard: different people, different backgrounds, different levels of experience. In their conversations, they have had a lot to share about their experiences. They confirmed some things these researchers already believed to be true (they learned a lot from their work with tutees), and they also surprised these researchers with the depth of their awareness of their positioning as tutors. Agatha finds herself identifying primarily with the teacher. Mira is the opposite: she identifies primarily with the students. Hannah sees herself as a tutor who relates to the students not as a peer but as another teacher. Laura sees herself as a liaison between the two. Simon takes

a post-modern approach, seeing himself in both positions at once and thus is able to help both the instructor and the student. The question now faced after meeting these very different tutors is: what implications does understanding their experiences and stance as tutors have for tutoring program coordinators?

Tutoring programs are designed to promote the academic success of students. Tutoring center administrators are challenged to deliver the most effective academic services, often with declining resources at their disposal. No universal model of tutoring can meet all of the needs of increasingly diverse student bodies. This research suggests that one way to achieve the goals of effective tutoring and efficient expenditure of scarce resources is to facilitate the development of an effective working relationship between tutor and instructor in in-class tutoring programs. This means that coordinators of tutoring programs must first understand the demographics of instructors and tutors.

Administrators should attempt to learn the unique qualities and approaches to teaching of each tutor and instructor and should consider these characteristics when matching tutors and instructors. Peer tutors like Mira, who identify closely with students, feel most comfortable in a classroom where this is encouraged by the instructor. Agatha, on the other hand, identified with the instructor. In this case, it worked well because the instructor, as Agatha indicated in her interview, had a good rapport with the students. A tutor like Agatha might find it difficult in a class in which the instructor did not have good communication with the students. In particular, being placed with a less-experienced instructor might really impinge on the ability of a teacher-identifying tutor to relate to the students. Administrators who are responsible for ESL tutoring programs or who are working with instructors who are inexperienced with ESL students may wish to employ "teacher-tutors," like Laura and Hannah. Teacher-tutors offer the ESL student additional personalized intensive instruction beyond what can be provided by an instructor in the classroom. They offer the inexperienced instructor a highly-qualified assistant who will complement the instructor. Tutors like Simon, who, to a certain extent, transcend any classification, offer one important insight to tutor coordinators. Simon's background in educational theory garnered from years of study have been invaluable in his development as an ideal in-class tutor for both the instructor and the students. Finding someone like that as a tutor is rare. Nevertheless, tutoring program coordinators can enhance the experience and unique characteristics of all tutors by, first, defining the philosophy of their respective programs and, second, sharing that philosophy with the tutors through an effective tutor training program that also includes specific one-on-one and group teaching strategies.

Tutors who understand the philosophy of a tutoring program are more likely to be effective instruments in the implementation of that philosophy. With this in mind, directions for future research include exploring the perceptions of instructors and of students receiving tutoring to complement research on tutor perceptions and, also, studying how an understanding of the experiences of tutors can be turned into effective training and a more effective tutoring program. Understanding the tutor-instructor dynamic can only enhance the ability of tutoring administrators to improve the effectiveness of their programs.

Thomas C. Stewart, *Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor and Chair of the Department of Developmental Studies at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania.*

Edward Warzala, *Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Social Science at SUNY-Ulster County Community College in Stone Ridge, NY.*

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