

Verbal Equinox

Spring 2010

Editor's Note

by Kathrine Reeder
Editor in Chief

In this edition of Verbal Equinox, the focus is on the importance of tutoring. Sometimes people forget how beneficial tutoring can be. However, when a student enters a session willing to engage in it and to work with a peer tutor, the growth from one session can be dramatic. The insights from our tutors and faculty in this edition provide a strong testimony of the important support tutoring centers give.

I wanted this edition to remind everyone how tutoring works best. Our tutors, especially the ones who contributed to the edition, are no strangers to tutoring. Because the tutors double as tutees themselves, they understand what our students are thinking and feeling when they enter the Developmental English Learning Center (DELC) and the Writing Center here on campus.

Some of the articles in here are personal accounts of how tutoring has helped the writers improve. Other articles are about ways to engage in effective dialogue with students about tutoring.

Enjoy Reading!

Coordinator's Corner

by Claire Hughes
Writing Center Coordinator

Our talented, earnest tutors have done it again! They have brought back Verbal Equinox for its next spring edition, and we are glad to return to producing student writing in this forum. One of our main goals is to support faculty in the ways they think about and discuss writing, so our tutors have written articles about how they best support student learning. We are delighted to have Kathrine Reeder, a DELC tutor and student leader, as editor of this issue, which includes not only tu-

tor voices from the DELC and the Writing Center but also a faculty perspective from Developmental English and the English master's program. Graduate students are drawn to our programs for the opportunities to develop their own skills, gain experience teaching writing concepts, and contribute to the discourse community, so they are tutoring more frequently in the centers now, providing a good mix with our bright, yearling undergrads. We will continue to produce Verbal Equinox each fall and spring and will look forward to inviting varied voices to join this dialogue.

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Confidence Found in Tutoring

by Katie Connors

As a student applying to graduate schools in English, I knew I needed to work on my writing. Throughout my undergraduate experience, I had many papers returned to me with similar comments, such as "brilliant connections, solid research, messy syntax, and comma splices-B." Discouraged by the overwhelming amount of Bs, I was resolved to earn As. After discussing my writing with many teachers, I received the same critique that I could earn high As on my papers if I would be less wordy, improve my syntax, and relearn how to use commas. I needed to have these higher-level writing skills in order to succeed in graduate school. These teachers tried to help me with their few comments at the end of my papers. However, somewhere in my educational experience, I had never solidly learned some basic grammatical principles. I needed to learn the beginning basics from someone with patience.

For the first time in college, I turned to a tutor. I set up weekly appointments for tutoring sessions with a grammar professor on campus. I dreaded it at first. Why would I want to go and humiliate myself by admitting I had never understood what a comma splice was (although I had received feedback that many of my papers had a few of them)? I was so embarrassed. I was a senior majoring in English with no grammar knowledge-despicable. As I sat down to meet with Debbie, my despair turned to hope. We had an

honest discussion of where I was with my writing. She had me bring in ten graded papers from my English classes.

She found the common problems in my writing; then she created a plan and timeline specifically for me. She outlined in-depth lessons on the subjects that I was struggling with the most. Through her, I discovered that my syntax was not as horrible as I thought it was. I was writing with the same patterns I was reading in all of my Victorian literature studies- wordy, verbose, and complex. This was not necessarily bad, just unnecessary for today. She explained that this showed I understood the literature I was reading; I just needed to write with modernity. I found that tutoring gave me a major self-esteem boost. Debbie pointed out my writing strengths and gave me confidence that I could overcome my writing problems. She helped me recognize that my problems were little. She helped me understand that having good arguments with inadequate grammar was more fixable than having poor arguments and impeccable grammar. She tutored with focused precision through creating goals. She gave me materials to read, exercises to do, and the obvious help of critiquing my current college papers. Debbie became my friend. She gave me confidence. She made me fall in love again with learning. She was not just my tutor-- she was my mentor. At this time, I learned

Katie Connors

WSU DELC/ Writing Center
Advanced Tutor

WSU Master of English
Student

more through my tutoring than I did through my classes. Why? Because my sessions were personalized for me and showed me a new angle of learning. This type of learning measured more progress than a grade. This was real learning-empowerment in confidence. I will never forget Debbie and how she changed my vision of something I never thought I could overcome: my grammar. A year later, I am tutoring with the same skills that I learned from Debbie and am trying to promote confidence, grammar, and learning with the people I tutor. I now see tutoring as a way to discover strengths and gain assurance in writing.

I See It in Their Writing

by Marilee Mason

As an instructor of the English 0955 course, I have a great appreciation for the services provided by our DELC tutors. Every semester, I watch as varying levels of anxiety cross the faces of my students when we go over the syllabus, and they learn that it is not just suggested but required that they take each Major Writing Assignment to the Writing Center to receive tutoring. Some students have expressed fear at the idea of being subjected to an unknown critic while others tell me that they think it will be "stupid," that they can manage without the tutoring, and besides, they "don't have time" in their desperately busy lives to go to the center outside of class time. But while some students probably could "manage" without tutor input, and although it's true that it takes some serious time-management to build time into a hectic real-life schedule for tutoring sessions, those students who give the center a chance to serve them always come back with a positive response to the time spent there. Students find the tutors to be kind, enthusiastic, and personally and genuinely committed to helping them discover what it takes to write a grammatically sound paper. Students in English 0955 come to discover that writing is a process which, when observed, can reduce the anxiety of having to write a paper. Part of that process includes having a rough draft read by at least one other person.

Another reader can help the writer catch errors and awkward phrases that he or she did not see. Tutors help students develop strategies for discovering their "favorite" issues in their own writing. Tutors are a good resource for students who are uncertain about how to develop a paper, or, in other words, how to make it long enough. Tutors are also good at helping students see ways to organize their thoughts to make the paper flow better and make it say what they are trying to communicate. But the most vital thing tutors offer is friendly, insightful guidance on those basic, course-specific grammar skills all writers need to hone for success in their academic and professional pursuits, and they manage all this without making the students feel like they are stupid. Many tutors have struggled with the very same issues in their own writing efforts, so they understand how it feels to be where the students are. Out of their own experiences, DELC tutors help 0955 students prepare for the university level writing tasks they will face throughout their academic careers and into their professional careers. The DELC is an entry-level tool which hopefully leads to a student's use of further services offered at the Writing Center. Students who learn to take this important step in the writing process and who take advantage of the free writing centers

Marilee Mason

WSU English Adjunct Instructor

WSU Master of English Graduate

on campus always benefit, even after they become accomplished writers. I, personally, have never written anything that was not improved when I had someone else read through it with me, and I know when my students are learning these concepts-it is evident in their writing.

Effective Preparation for Tutoring

by Clint Kingsley

In the hero's journey, the champion has a valiant companion who offers a powerful source of encouragement and aid. In the hero's journey of college, heroic students need regular support and encouragement as well. Tutoring provides excellent aid to students. They can get the most out of tutoring by entering sessions knowing what they want to accomplish. That, in fact, is the first step for the tutor: finding what the final product needs to be. The tutor does this by asking questions and getting the student interested in the work. As a tutor, I have noticed that students who come into the DELC with a desire to be there, instructions for the tutor, and a questioning attitude have positive experiences, and they become independent, self confident, and happy scholars.

As a hero's mentor, I love to help the hero understand the English language, and I am happy to see the students have "aha" moments. When a student has and feels a need to learn from the DELC tutors, he or she is more receptive to having a positive experience. I have noticed positive tutoring sessions happen with students who come into the DELC with a specific desire to learn how to be better writers and to know more about themselves and their writing.

I have noticed that a quick outline of what needs to be done in the beginning of a session initiates a good tutoring

experience. This is the preparation for the journey. As a tutor, I always begin with an outline, but it works better when a student comes in knowing what he or she needs specific help with and instructs the tutor on what the student would like to accomplish in the session.

Another key element in a good tutoring session is a questioning attitude. Every hero has a moment where he or she realizes a need to change. Both the student and the tutor need to be willing to adjust their understanding. They will not grow unless they do. Changeable students and changeable tutors are able to accept their imperfections and improve significantly.

Students who have qualities of desire, preparation, and humility tend to have very positive experiences in tutoring. They experience happiness and become more confident because they apply a good attitude. They will be successful in their hero's journey. I want every student to have a good experience in the DELC, and this can be achieved with effective preparation.

A mentor in the hero's journey develops a special bond with his or her pupil. The tutors and advisors in the Writing Center/ DELC at Weber State University strive to develop a positive relationship with tutees, and they focus on improving the quality of the lives of the students, not necessarily the improvement of the papers alone. The tutors and staff in the Writing Center and DELC have a deep respect for the students at Weber State University.

Clint Kingsley

WSU DELC/ Writing Center
Master Tutor

WSU Undergraduate Student

The tutors are the faithful sidekicks, standing by the heroic students, ready and waiting to help. It is the duty of these mentors to give students the most effective help they can.