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STRATEGIES FOR TUTORS DEVELOPING LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS WITH ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENTS IN WRITING CENTERS

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OVERVIEW

I currently work as a Business Writing Consultant in the Purdue Writing Lab and I help students work on a variety of business documents like cover letters, resumes, and statements of purpose. Recently the Purdue Writing Lab has seen an increase in the number of ESL students who use the Writing Lab. Between May 2013 and May 2014, 77% of students who used the Writing Lab identified themselves as ESL students. Many of these international students do not speak fluent English and many of them can be identified as English as Second Language Students. I recently talked to four undergraduate students from China about their exposure to English before they came to the United States and these four students had informed me that they would like to have a long-term relationship with a native English speaker to help improve their English writing and speaking skills.

RESEARCH QUESTION

My definition of a long-term relationship is to have a student meet the same tutor on a consistent basis so a student can improve their English speaking and writing skills. Thus I wanted to see how writing centers at universities around the country have started to cater to the increasing number of ESL students at their schools. I wanted to determine which writing centers have created programs that encourage a formal long-term relationship between a tutor and an ESL student. Furthermore, my research will also look at different strategies that tutors can use to foster these long-term relationships that are taken from readings and my own personal experiences. Finally, I want to use this research to help writing centers determine if there is a need to create or develop programs that encourage these long term-relationships.

STRATEGIES FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

For the past three months, I have led two ESL Conversation Groups for undergraduates in the Purdue Writing Lab on both Wednesdays and Thursdays. During these sessions, I will work with ESL students for about an hour and these groups have anywhere from one to five people. Each week, the conversation groups go over a topic and some example topics that I have gone over are sports, movies, and games. From these groups, I have been able to learn and interact with ESL students. I have been able to see growth in their English speaking and writing skills. In particular, Figure 1 shows an ESL student that I have been working with for the past month. This student has been coming out to my Wednesday night conversation group. He was in one of my classes and I had invited him to the ESL conversation group. I believe that the student continues to come out because I make sure that the student knows that I will help him improve his English speaking skills. By working with him, I have been able to develop a long-term relationship with him.



FIGURE 1 I have been working with this ESL student for the past month.

Strategies

1. Don't be awkward. When working with ESL students, establish a strong rapport with the student and be encouraging.
2. Never get frustrated. Remember that ESL students come from many different countries and that every ESL student responds differently.
3. Use open-ended questions instead of closed-ended questions. This will allow ESL students to take more time to think about their answers.
Closed-ended questions: Do you understand this point?
Open-ended questions: What do you think about this topic?
4. Show ESL students that you are willing to help them with their papers.

STRATEGIES FROM READINGS

Before I became a Business Writing Consultant, I had to take a class, English 390B, which would help train me to become a Business Writing Consultant. I learned a lot from this class because I was given readings that taught me strategies that would allow me to engage with students during a 30 minute tutorial session. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to observe tutorial sessions and these experiences prepared me to become a Business Writing Consultant this semester. However, I did not receive a lot of training from the Writing Lab on how to work with repeat clients over a long period of time especially with ESL students. This is because the Purdue University Writing Lab does not place a huge emphasis on developing a long-term relationship with ESL students because many tutors will work with ESL students only once. However, I noticed that many ESL students want or need help improving their English speaking and writing skills. I began to do research into writing centers around the country that have developed such programs and I have found some strategies from readings for tutors that would like to develop long-term relationships with ESL students.

Strategies

1. Helping ESL students understand what types of grammar issues they struggle with. A tutor who develops a long-term relationship with a student will be able to recognize recurring grammar issues that an ESL student faces.
2. Identify short term and long term goals with repeat ESL clients. This will help both the tutor and the student visualize what they would like to work on as they get to know each other.

PROGRAMS AT DIFFERENT WRITING CENTERS

I have looked into many different writing centers around the country to see if they had any programs currently in place that would help ESL students with their English writing and speaking skills. Every Writing Center is going to have different priorities when it comes to programs that help foster long-term relationships between tutors and ESL students. Most writing centers will allow ESL students to meet up with the same tutor; some writing centers actually have these types of programs in place while others writing centers do not have these types of programs.

1. Boston University College of Arts and Science Writing Center

They offered a program called "ESL Pronunciation Training" which would allow ESL students taking certain writing classes to meet in small groups with the same tutor over a period of six weeks.

<http://www.bu.edu/writingprogram/the-writing-center/>

2. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

They offered both writing and speaking groups where a group of ESL Students would meet weekly with ESL tutors and they will work on both essay writing and working on improving their English speaking skills.

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/esl/>

CONCLUSION

In the end, there are going to be some writing centers that have programs that encourage tutors to foster long-term relationships with ESL students in writing centers. However, there will be other writing centers that will not place a huge emphasis on developing long-term relationships with ESL students.

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