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## Review: Talking About Writing

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## Review

Beverly Lyon Clark, *Talking About Writing: A Guide for Tutor and Teacher Conferences* (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan P, 1985)

*Janice Neuleib*

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Though Clark's subtitle refers to both tutors and teachers and though she does advise the first-time teacher, she addresses tutors particularly. Clark divides her text into two main sections, showing first what to tutor and then how to tutor. She concludes by discussing briefly the realm beyond tutoring, that is, journal keeping and opportunities for publishing materials developed by tutors. These sections give a complete overview of a tutor's responsibilities.

The book speaks directly to the beginning tutor who needs assurance. Clark keeps the tutor in mind as she writes and speaks to the concerns of the beginner who needs to know what to expect in this peculiar new situation. She often uses quotations from tutors to reinforce the points she makes about tutoring experiences, and she maintains a voice throughout that assures the reader that she understands the pleasures as well as the perils of tutoring. The tutor reading the text always has the impression that someone who has been there is giving the advice.

The first section of the book on "what to tutor" discusses the process approach to the teaching of writing. Clark devotes chapters to invention, drafting and revision, grammar and mechanics, special assignments, and evaluation. These chapters cover most of the main points that a tutor should

know in order to be prepared to assist a student who is in a process-centered classroom. The chapters direct the tutor by presenting student papers to illustrate how tutors should work with actual student text. In the final chapter in this section on evaluation, Clark describes the standards the tutor should keep in mind while helping students with papers.

As the book covers so many areas, some experts may object to certain techniques illustrated in the text. Since each person who trains tutors has a personal slant on what "process" means, Clark's choices of what to tutor may not always please. For example, Clark offers a quiz that prints the correct spelling next to the incorrect spelling of several spelling demons (63). Some experts might question the effectiveness of showing a student misspellings in print and insist that all spelling instruction should be based on a student's own list of trouble-some words. Although such possible disagreements on method may occur as a result of suggestions within the "what to tutor" chapters, the chapters for the most part stay within the generally accepted concepts of what the writing process is.

The second part of the book on "how to tutor" should present none of the theoretical difficulties involved in the "what to" section. Clark defines the role of the tutor as coach rather than dictator and then moves effectively through the stages of tutoring experiences. For example, Clark suggests techniques for use when nondirective tutoring is the ideal approach: being silent, mirroring, confirming, and recording (124, 125). She offers many concrete suggestions of this type throughout the chapter entitled "Down to Business."

A chapter on "Problems with Attitudes and Feelings" is followed by a chapter on "Evaluating Tutoring." These two chapters help the tutor see that the exhaustion attendant on tutoring is a natural response that can be handled by the experienced tutor. The chapter on evaluation gives a helpful self-evaluation checklist that can be easily adapted for any type of tutor. Clark offers several other ideas for tutor evaluation and then moves on to her final section entitled "Beyond Tutoring."

Particularly helpful in this section are the journal suggestions. By offering ideas for a tutor to write about, Clark presents possibilities for nascent papers on tutoring and the writing process in general. These journal entries lead easily into the last part of the book which suggests publication opportunities for tutors. The appendix then lists many articles on tutoring and writing as well as journals which may be possible places of publication.

One aspect of tutoring and research that Clark mentions only in passing is error analysis. She refers to Shaughnessy in her chapter on grammar, but she mentions neither Bartholomae nor Muriel Harris in this context. Bartholomae's "The Study of Error," [CCC 31 (1980): 253-69] and

Harris's "Mending the Fragmented Free Modifier," [CCC 32 (1981): 175-82] suggest specific approaches to error analysis that build on the work of Shaughnessy. Every reader will more than likely think of other articles and concepts that Clark should have addressed; the concept of error analysis, however, seems central to good tutoring and should be added to future editions.

As the book is now, however, Clark offers Writing Center directors a much-needed handbook for tutors. Each center, of course, has its own tutor handbook, but directors will want to add Clark's book as a good overview for the beginning tutor. Clark has given the profession a book that will be useful for all and is a must for beginners.

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