

## Tutors of Tolerance

The need for tolerance in our world is insurmountable; tolerance in America's cultural melting pot is necessary; and tolerance in a tutoring session is essential. We are all different, and we all disagree. But often times, we find a balance--a balance between punishing the person who thinks differently and letting that person walk all over us. The key is tolerance, and in a tutoring session it is pivotal. Many times, the person you are tutoring is not be not the same color as you, he or she may not speak the same language, or they may look just like you but are more interested in their cell phone. All of these circumstances potentially call for open-mindedness and tolerance. Many may think that tolerance is easy to come by, and while it's true that we use it more than we realize, consciously being tolerant takes much courage, patience, and humbleness. Under the right conditions, tolerance has the power to impact the world, facilitate every tutoring session, and even though we consider ourselves to be merely tutors, the impact we could have is great, too.

To be tolerant is to allow the existence, occurrence, or practice of (something that one does not necessarily like or agree with) without interference. It means accepting differences, and continuing. As a tutor, you are reading culturally explicit material. Many ESL writing prompts deal with personal experiences and differences between where they are from and America. In a study done at De Anza in Fall of 2007, 5.7% of students were African American, 36.3% were Asian, 17.1% were Hispanic, and 24.4% were white, non-Hispanic (Multicultural Awareness/Cross-Culture Communication Handout). De Anza College is a very diverse campus. In addition to physical differences, non-native English speakers have been taught to write essays differently (Writing Across Borders). In example, Chinese essays do not rely on citations nearly as much as American essays do. In China, students are encouraged to include great minds' thoughts, and build upon the ideas as their own. In America, this is known as plagiarism, which could render collegiate capital punishment at American Universities--expulsion. These are differences about which ESL students need to learn.

Different to ESL tutees still, are American academic essays that are structured with five paragraphs: introduction which contains the thesis that will drive the paper, three supporting paragraphs that stem from your thesis, and finally a conclusion which "ties" everything together. In other countries, academic essays may be

structured differently. For instance, Latin American essays are circular, rather than linear. In essays by Latin students, the thesis may not come until the middle of the paper, when the student has already talked about what the thesis states (Writing Across Borders). Reading these papers as an American tutor may be confusing. An essay that we deem to have no structure may just be culturally different, and not incorrect. It is our job as tutors to understand that these differences exist, and inform the students of academic differences in America. Tolerance in this situation can yield the understanding on the tutor's behalf that other educational instruction exists. Moreover, the tutee learns about the American academic essay, while still acknowledging their own writing style. Differences between tutors and tutees are also not always academic. In my own tutoring this quarter I've read run-on sentences, fragments, entire paragraphs lacking any punctuation, but understanding grammar did not help me when reading sentences that opposed my own values. In our third meeting, my tutee (we will call her Ann) and I completed my seventh assignment for my tutoring class by videotaping our session. I had Ann read her paper aloud as I always have my tutees do, based on Purdue's Writing Lab Newsletter's suggestions, and The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors. In the middle of her paper was a sentence that read, "...maybe if a boyfriend is mad at his girlfriend, the girlfriend should check her behavior to see what she did wrong." It caught me completely off guard. I had just read a completely sexist sentence, written by a woman, in America. I felt a little trapped. I didn't want her to have these thoughts, but was unsure if my job was to simply aid her in structure, grammar, and writing confidence. I had her read the sentence aloud again to see if she could hear exactly what she was saying, but nothing changed. I never said anything about it, and we moved on with her assignment. But the incident incited me to explore tolerance in tutoring sessions. Is it ok to comment on a tutee's paper in an extracurricular manner? What if their ideas seem archaic or biased? Is it ok to advocate "American" ideals? Though these questions beg for answers, there are none that are 100% correct because no tutee and tutor relationship is the same. The bond you've made with your tutee should be telling of what you're capable of bringing up with them. Sandy Blackborow is also always the person to ask if you are worried about guidelines, and the people in your Peer Writing class are good resources as well. And don't forget about the senior tutors for input. The most important thing to remember is to always be tolerant. Listen to their ideas and

acknowledge that they exist, even if you do not agree with a tutee. Tolerance and acceptance are different altogether, and knowing the difference is also key.

Tutees are also struggling to be tolerant, too, and a good tutor should recognize this. Tutees that are not native to America may be grappling with American educational standards that are dissimilar to the ones they already know, and they are relying partly on their tutors to make everything run smoothly. Tutees are actively being tolerant to criticism, opposing cultural norms, and an overall different curriculum than they are accustomed to. It is only fair that a tutor put in the same effort. Tolerance has the power to motivate and draw people closer. If you are trying to work on a bond with your tutee, try learning about his or her culture. In your next meeting, you can bring up something you learned about their home country. Now your tutee may feel a genuine sense of care on your behalf, and they may be more open to your grammatical and structural criticism. One is more likely to take advice from a friend than a foe.

In the Fall we tutors were forewarned that the tutor could learn more from the tutoring experience than the tutee. And while I thought this could be in fact be true, I did not know just how true until Winter. Reflecting on my experiences with my tutees, and my experience as a tutor in general made me realize that I learned something from every session, whether it be about my tutee, his or her country, or their struggle to find balance in America. Just like being aware of global differentials concerning academic writing is important, acknowledging that seemingly sexist or racial ideas may just be a social norm in another culture is pivotal to the tutor/tutee relationship. If you are striving to build a bond with your tutee, talking about your own cultures together can create a common ground, even if that just means acknowledging that you both have differences. If your tutee is uninterested in the work, talk to them. Find out where they are coming from. Perhaps it is cultural. In watching just some of the presentations performed by the students of the EWRT/LRNA 97 course Fall 2008 regarding topics important to tutoring, it became abundantly clear that tolerance is relevant to every tutoring session. Consciously being tolerant is a powerful thing. It incites recognition and discussion of cultural beliefs. It can be infectious, affecting the tutor and the tutee, creating a different, stronger dynamic between the two, allowing for a effective, and reflective tutoring session.

## Works Cited

David Mosher, Davin Granroth, and Troy Hicks. "Creating a Common Ground with ESL Writers". Purdue Writing Lab Newsletter March 2000. 6 December 2008

<<http://www.writinglabnewsletter.org/archives/v24/24.7.htm>>

Multicultural Awareness/Cross-Cultural Communication. Source: <http://www.research.fhda.edu/factbook> (This was a handout from class).

Ryan, Leigh and Lisa Zimmerman. The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors. Fourth Ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006.

Writing Across Borders, directed by Wayne Robertson. Oregon State University Center for Writing and Learning and Writing Intensive Curriculum Program, 2005.

Moodle Docs for this page