Me Talk Pretty One Day

In hindsight, I’ve spent considerable time reflecting on cultural competence and interpersonal skills, which are really one in the same. Although, I do consider agenda setting and sentence-level tutoring important parts of the learning process, they don’t take as long to develop as the former. A sense of cultural competence can be advantageous for a beginner tutor because tutees come from all backgrounds and different life stages. So, a tutor who is culturally well informed can create a conducive learning environment for their tutees by engaging them multi-laterally, such as immigrant to immigrant or bilingualist to bilingualist. I find that as you engage tutees on multiple levels it creates a flexibility and range that is valuable and dynamic. Of course, it might take a few weeks to establish this kind of rapport but as long as you’re open, as I was, to the possibility that you can learn more from your tutees then they from you, you’re in the right mindset. The first class meetings help to establish and define a new tutor’s role and presence in a session, through minimalist strategies and effective echoing techniques, so be sure to take notes. These strategies in and of themselves are safety nets, which you can fall back on in any situation of doubt. I’ve had to use them in times of uncomfortable silence and uncertainty but as you press on you’ll develop your own strategies that you can later share with others. And don’t fret if you’re socially awkward, like with anything that you start, it takes time to find your niche but allow yourself to learn and grow from first exchanges with your tutees.

The major fear factor for my class (that might be true for your’s too) was our inability to articulate grammar rules sufficiently for tutee’s. As beginning tutors you will be assigned lower level ESL/ERWT/LART students so you can expect to spend considerable time working on grammar. It’s ok if you don’t know all the ins and outs but it’s not ok to entirely fake it either. This is when you should start to engage your senior tutor and other WRC support staff for help. They’re quite knowledgeable and can answer any questions you might have before getting started. You also have twenty or so other freshmen tutors who are in the same boat. But a simple disclaimer: becoming a successful tutor is almost impossible to achieve on your own, you’ll most definitely need help. Initially, it was difficult asking for help but once I did, things became easier and more transparent. After going to my senior tutor for help with grammar he suggested a few websites that could help with sentence level grammar. The websites covered a lot of material from previous sessions and had convenient online exercises that you can do solo or with a tutee.
Logistics: After contacting your tutees and setting up first sessions, you’ll have to curate them into your academic course load; so be sure you’re comfortable with the number of tutees you have. You can always let Renato or Sandy know if you have too many or too few. Also, upon meeting your tutees, get their contact information because you’ll have to return their application back to the WRC after both of you have signed it. Now with the hard stuff out of the way, let the fun begin. After completing all the housekeeping tasks ie paperwork, you’ll have 1 hour with a tutee which can be used liberally. Understand most tutees tend to feel overwhelmed at the beginning of an assignment and don’t know where to begin, so this is where you’ll have to administer agenda setting practices. So do read your Bedford guide because it offers methods in which you can better decide what issues are more important than others. You might also be over ambitious like myself and try to take on too much but remember fifty minutes is not a long time. With some tutees you’ll have to spend more time going over an issue, even 2 or more sessions, before moving on to the next. It’s also important to adjust your speed for each individual tutee and to be aware of who’s doing most of the talking. I’m going to leave it hear since I realize this might be a lot of information in one reading. Just remember these important tenets: to have fun, ask questions keep an open mind! And you’ll soon be on your way to tutor stardom!