

Tutoring for Learning

Introduction

What is tutoring for learning?

We use 'tutoring for learning' to refer to a structured conversation between tutor and student with an explicit focus on learning. A number of other terms are used: academic tutoring, mentoring, tutorial interviews, personal tutoring, academic tracking, academic review, tutorial reviews, achievement target setting and other combinations of these words. Tutoring for learning is not a new concept. It has been happening for a long time, both formally and informally.

What is this broadsheet about?

Tutoring for Learning has been written¹ for teachers working with individuals or small groups of students to review and support their learning. It highlights the following themes in the development of tutoring for learning in schools:

- the picture of tutoring practices in your school
- rationales for tutoring
- links with learning
- stages in a learning conversation
- handling and developing the learning conversation
- preparation by the learner
- pitfalls and problems
- integrating with other aspects of school life
- time - some possibilities
- creating and improving the learning community
- further reading and references.

How to use the broadsheet

This broadsheet has been designed for tutors to work through in groups or on their own. We suggest that the activities and discussion points included in this broadsheet will be more effective if you can work through them with a colleague, or use them for team discussion. These materials have been adapted from workshop activities that we have run in many parts of the country.

¹ Written by Eileen Carnell and Caroline Lodge (2000),
with thanks to teachers at NAPCE workshops on *Academic Tutoring*.

The picture of tutoring practices in your school

More and more schools are investing time and other resources in tutoring for learning. We have found that some schools started with a particular target group (for example, a year group, boys, students who are on the borderline for GCSE grade C/D). Other schools involve all students. Some schools use all teachers, other use form tutors, senior managers or mentors, careers advisers and others not on the school staff.

Think about what is happening in your school, and how this has developed:

What is the process called and what does this tell you?

Which students are targeted?

Which members of staff are involved?

When does it happen and how often?

Rationales for tutoring

Schools sometimes introduce tutoring for learning without clarifying their understanding of what makes it "work". Some experiences of tutoring for learning are more effective than others. In our work with teachers we have found it useful to discuss the rationale underpinning each of the following statements. This helps clarify how tutoring might be more effective in helping students focus on their learning.

Below are nine statements about tutoring for learning. Use them to identify your beliefs as to why this practice works. For each item, rate on a scale of 1 to 4 to show whether you believe it is likely to lead to the desired effect. [1 = lowest likelihood, 4 = highest likelihood]

I believe that academic tutoring works because

| | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | the students can make connections between different aspects of the curriculum | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2 | it gives students time to reflect | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3 | it makes them work harder | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4 | it gives the students more personal attention | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5 | it allows students a greater sense of control and responsibility for their achievement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6 | it helps them be strategic about exams | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7 | it helps students develop more strategies and approaches to learning | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8 | the tutors set targets for them | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9 | it helps students learn more about their own learning | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

The most effective experiences are those which focus explicitly on learning. The suggestion 'working harder' (statement 3) may be a trap for students as they may repeat mistakes rather than reflect, learn, adapt and move on. While students value individual attention (statement 4), if this is all they get from tutoring it may be an inefficient use of time. However, if there is a focus on learning while they are getting personal attention, the time is spent more effectively. Students

need to be responsible for their own decisions to become effective learners so setting targets for students (statement 8) is unhelpful. This sense of control and responsibility is seen in statement 5, but this refers only to their achievement. Such an approach may not address learning explicitly.

Statements 1, 2, 6 and 7 support students' learning but only in part. For example, time to reflect (statement 2) is necessary for learning but reflection alone does not address the complete picture. Neither does awareness about strategies (statement 6 & 7), or an ability to make better links (statement 1).

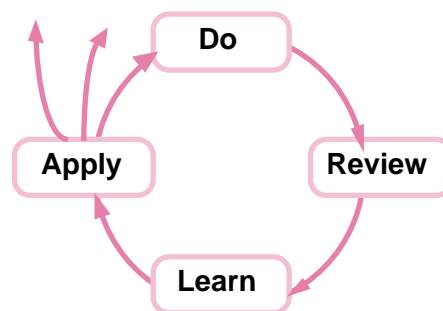
A focus on learning about learning (statement 9) is a meta-learning process and has the most impact. This rationale for tutoring underpins the development of an increased understanding of students' own learning and about themselves as learners. This contrasts with the view of a year 11 student: *"It's not that I haven't learnt much. It's just that I don't really understand what I am doing"* (Harris, Wallace, & Rudduck, 1995).

"Many pupils have found the opportunity of talking with their teachers on a one-to-one basis about achievements, experiences, needs and appropriate future targets a rewarding and helpful experience that has a positive effect on their motivation" (Broadfoot et al, 1988). We have also found that the most effective tutoring has an explicit focus on learning about learning, increasing student engagement and developing more positive feelings about learning. This approach increases a sense of ownership and responsibility by the learner.

This approach to tutoring is examined next.

Links with learning

In the discussion above, important features emerge in the process to do with reviewing, learning and applying. One helpful model of learning focuses on the need for reflection and evaluation (Review), the extraction of meaning from this review (Learn) and the planned use of learning in future action (Apply) and further activity in learning (Do) (Watkins, Carnell, Lodge, & Whalley, 1996).



A process model of learning (Dennison & Kirk, 1990)

This model provides a structure for a learning conversation by taking someone through the stages of the learning cycle:

- reviewing experiences
- abstracting the meaning from this
- planning the next steps
- being involved in further activity.

The conversation may focus on the subject matter of students' learning, but will be most effective when it also involves an awareness of their learning strategies, blocks, feelings, context and purposes - that is an understanding of their own learning. We call this meta-learning. The most effective conversations are explicit about these aspects of learning.

Stages in a learning conversation

| <i>Stage of learning conversation</i> | <i>Skills for tutors</i> | <i>Examples of prompts</i> |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of situation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - active listening - asking open questions - being non-judgmental | What's going well? And not so well ...* How do you feel about this? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New understanding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - empathising - reflecting back - sharing insights | How do you make sense of what's happening? New insights you have gained are ...* Are you noticing any patterns in your learning ? Have you noticed what helps your learning and what blocks it? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning next action | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - establishing clear, negotiated goals - action planning and target-setting | Your next steps will be ...* What and who do you need to help you? If you get stuck you will you talk to ...* When will the next review be most helpful? |

* The tutor does not complete this sentence but encourages the student to do so. It is a prompt.

Handling and developing the learning conversation

The tutor needs to move the student through the stages, and the order of prompts encourages this: reflection on the activity at the outset, moving on to learning from the experiences and finally planning future action and strategies. In this way the conversation follows a complete cycle of learning.

There are some important points to note about the conversation:

- Questions and prompts should be open-ended, inviting exploration.
- Relentless questioning can be off-putting.
- Time and silence might be necessary for thought.

As the tutor may not be the main source of ideas for future strategies the learner can be encouraged to use the following:

- *their imagination* (What might you do? What might a friend advise you to do?)
 - *other credible people* (Do you know of anyone who seems to be handling this sort of problem well? What might X do?)
 - *thinking as a third party* (If you were advising a friend about this, what could help them achieve their goal?)
 - *anticipation* (What will help me succeed or hinder me? How might others respond?)
- (Watkins and Butcher, 1995)

Helping someone review their progress and achievement requires the skills of active listening and appropriate questioning or prompting. Active listening requires respect, sincerity and genuineness. It involves paraphrasing, prompting or probing. It needs judgement about the use of open, closed and leading questions and when to move forward. Although the tutor often speaks very little, they will be concentrating hard on listening, checking their physical responses, monitoring the progress of the review and deciding when to move on.

Tutors need to practice and develop these skills, by working with colleagues, being observed and discussing feedback, by observing others, reviewing how they have worked, getting feedback from students, trying and reviewing different approaches. As tutors become more experienced they will feel confident about departing from scripts and get beyond the initial responses.

To develop skills for the learning conversation try the following activity which provides an experience similar to a tutoring conversation. Treat it as a practice, not as a role play.

Work in trios. *You will take each of three roles in turn:* tutor, learner and observer. Take it in turns to have a conversation to review some aspect of your work: e.g. a meeting you chaired, an INSET session you ran or a discussion you must have with a colleague.

Prepare by noting the main features you wish to review. Then prepare for your role as tutor by considering what questions to use, timing etc. When you carry out the reviews the observer should consider the practice of the tutor. After each review (10 minutes will be enough) consider the experiences of all three participants.

When all three reviews have taken place discuss:

- what were the significant things which happened?
- how might it be different with young people?
- how can you deal with any pitfalls? (see section below)

The learners' contributions grow as they develop a shared language with which to describe their learning through talking about learning with each other and with teachers. It is helpful to both tutor and learner to review the session itself as a final stage in the learning conversation.

Preparation by the learner

The learner can help make the conversation more effective by going through the prompts (see table on previous page) and making a few notes before the discussion. Some students have learned or already know how to review their work on their own, but talking often enriches the learning. "How do I know what I think until I hear what I say?" asked Charles Handy (TES 16.1.98).

Pitfalls and problems

Here are some we have collected. Discuss whether the following are likely to occur in your school and what you would do about them.

Tutors feel unprepared for this role.

Tutors and students do not do not see the need for any preparation.

Tutors can be tempted into using the sessions for 'therapy' or for nagging.

Tutors and learners predict it might be uncomfortable.

Tutors fear students raising difficulties they are having with other teachers.

The tutor feels s/he must provide solutions.

The tutor is uncomfortable with silences.

It is hard to start the conversation.

There is no clarity about goals for the session or about who decides the agenda.

Tutors get anxious about ideas like confidentiality.

Both parties get caught up in one issue and do not move through the cycle.

Frequency - once a year is not enough.

Integrating with other aspects of school life

The process of tutoring for learning will be more successful when other aspects of the school support the development of discussion about learning. Here is an activity to consider how tutoring for learning relates to other aspects of the school. Discuss the action you feel would be appropriate:

| <i>Other aspects of school</i> | <i>Action?</i> |
|--|----------------|
| <p>Structure - how does tutoring for learning connect with other systems and processes in your school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * group tutoring * IEPs * learning and teaching policies * subject teaching and the culture of lessons * PSHE * climate of the school * parents and reporting cycle * ... | |
| <p>Resources - what is required?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Teachers' time * Timetabled time * People * Money * ... | |
| <p>Monitoring and Evaluation: to what extent do our procedures help improve the tutoring?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Monitoring * Evaluation * Review | |

Time - some possibilities

Finding time is often problematic. Any model adopted will have advantages and disadvantages and schools will have to work out their own compromise between the ideal and the practical. Tutoring should be seen as teaching time as it requires professional preparation and proper attention to its process. It is a skilled task with important outcomes for learners (Betterton, & Nash, 1996).

| <i>Model</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|------------------------------------|--|
| suspension of lessons | Attendance by students only for interview. All students and tutors focus on this at the same time. Preparation time can be done as a group (e.g. PSHE lesson). |
| withdrawal from lessons | One or two lessons per week of tutor time is allocated. Disruptive to students' timetable. |
| withdrawal from tutor time or PSHE | Requires cover or co-tutors. Can disrupt the tutorial or PSHE programme. May connect to group work in tutor or PSHE programme. |
| using assembly time | Tutors and students do not attend assemblies. |
| differential lunch hours | Tutors use part of the lunch break for individual tutorials. |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| early finish | One shorter day each week enables tutorials to take place. But may clash with meetings. |
| early mornings | Students and tutor meet before school day begins. |
| end-on | At end of school day. |
| dedicated lesson | One lesson a week, all tutors work with students involved either in tutoring or cover classes. |
| group tutoring | This can help develop the learning community. |
| peer tutoring | Develops skills and reciprocity in learners. |

Creating and improving the learning community

In order to become learning communities, schools need to develop talk about learning, and young people need to become fluent in the language of learning. In such a community, tutoring for learning is integrated into the school, not an add-on. Tutoring for learning cannot fix a culture which does not encourage learning or learning conversations. In a learning community, all members are involved in such learning conversations, for examples, teachers who are taking part in a developmental appraisal process. Recent research into the most improving schools suggests that these schools are developing to improve students' learning (Gray et al, 1999).

Further reading and references

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- The journal Pastoral Care in Education, published quarterly.*
- Pastoral Leader Standards, 2000*
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- Targetting Strategies - Hit AND Miss, 1999*
- Learning about Learning. 1998*
- Reducing School Bullying - what works?, 1996*
- Governors and Pastoral Care, 1997*
- Quality Review in Pastoral Care, 1997*
- Managing Behaviour in Classrooms and Schools, 1996*
- Refugee Children in Schools, 1995*
- The Value of Pastoral Care and Personal-Social Education. 1994*
- Children and Bereavement, Death and Loss: what can the school do?, 1993*
- Whole School Personal-Social Education: policy and practice, 1992*
- Developing Effective Links with Parents, 1992*
- From Head of Year to Year Curriculum Coordinator? a collection of resources for INSET, 1992*
- Tutor Review, 1991*

Send for a publications list and order form.

See also: Best R, Lang P, Lodge C and Watkins C (Eds.) (1994), *Pastoral Care and PSE: entitlement and provision*, Cassell/NAPCE. 0-304-32780-8

Watkins C Lodge C and Best R (eds.) (2000), *Tomorrow's Schools - Towards Integrity*, London, Routledge/NAPCE. 0-415-23427-1