The Role of *Accountability Partners* in the Tutoring Experience

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Using the Association for the Tutoring Profession's Code of Ethics as a back-drop, this article knits together the worlds of reading education, English education, success literature, and tutoring to define tutors as "accountability partners" in the tutoring experience and to delineate their three jobs in that respect.

"No one—not even rock stars, not professional athletes, not software billionaires and not even geniuses—ever makes it alone," says Gladwell in *Outliers* (2008, p. 115). College students are no exception. As Gladwell notes, "Extraordinary achievement is less about talent than it is about opportunity" (p. 76). It is no secret that working with a tutor is an opportunity to increase chances of success. In *Release Your Brilliance* (2008), Bailey does not mention tutoring, yet the tutoring profession can certainly identify with his term *accountability partner*. He encourages people to "find an accountability partner . . . so the two of [them] can share what [they] are learning and what actions [they] will take" (p. 21). (In writing this article, I am accountable to the fields

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of reading and English education, literature on success, and tutoring and thus operate as an *accountability partner* in my own right.)

In the tutoring experience, *accountability partner* has several meanings. First, the tutor must be accountable for her actions, so following guidelines of the center or employer is a form of partnership. *Accountability partner* can also refer to a guide on the journey of learning. In *Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949)—a text commonly known in the world of literary criticism—Campbell describes the journey of the hero: Main characters are heroes on journeys through life, every journey has a guide, and every journey has phases. In order to be helpful guides, tutors have three jobs beyond adherence to particular Learning Center policies and procedures. Tutors need to become familiar with and operate according to the Association for the Tutoring Profession's (ATP) Code of Ethics—job one. Tutors need to share the code of ethics/conduct with their students so that students see their roles in the journey—job two—and finally, tutors need to become familiar with and incorporate the components of Campbell's journey so that students can "find their brilliance"—job three.

Job One: Adhere to the ATP Code of Ethics

Tutors need to become familiar with the following code reproduced verbatim from the ATP web site:

1. Best interest: Tutors will be committed to acting in the best interest of tutees as specified by the employing organization or institute.

2. Responsibility: Tutors will take the responsibility for their own behavior and work to resolve conflicts that may arise between themselves and a client.

3. Integrity: Tutors will practice and promote accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness.

4. Fairness: Tutors will exercise reasonable judgment and take precautions to ensure that their potential biases, the boundaries of their competence, and the limitations of their expertise do not lead to or condone unjust practices.

5. Commitment: Tutors will fulfill commitments made to learners.

6. Respect for Others' Rights and Dignity: Tutors will respect the dignity and worth of all people and the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality and self-determination.

7. Excellence: Tutors will strive to maintain excellence by continuing to improve their tutoring skills and engage in applicable professional development activities.

8. Respect for Individual Differences: Tutors will respect cultural, individual, and role differences, including those based on age, sex, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language and socioeconomic status.

9. Professionalism: Tutors will not engage in inappropriate relations with tutees.

Using the code can also be useful for students: Sharing the code with students receiving tutoring can let them know that tutors are held to standards. In the following section, I take the liberty of converting the Code of Ethics for Tutors to an unofficial Code of Ethics for Students Receiving Tutoring.

Job Two: Present Students Receiving Tutoring with Their Own Version of the Code

Presenting students who are receiving tutoring with their own code of ethics on the first day of tutoring may help students realize that tutoring is not to be taken lightly. (All quotations in the section below are excerpted from the ATP Code of Ethics.)

Proposed Code of Ethics for Students Receiving Tutoring

1. Best interest: Students receiving tutoring "will be committed to acting in [their own] best interest" and in the best interest of the tutor.

2. Responsibility: Students receiving tutoring "will take responsibility for their own behavior and work to resolve conflicts that may arise between themselves and their [tutors]." *Responsibility* includes doing the work ahead of time, showing up on time, and giving advance notice if not attending.

3. Integrity: Students receiving tutoring will make every attempt to do the right thing: trying the assignment ahead of time, being honest, and having a positive mindset.

4. Fairness: Students receiving tutoring "will exercise reasonable judgments and take precautions to ensure that their potential biases do not lead to unjust practices."

5. Commitment: Students receiving tutoring "will fulfill commitments made to tutors": showing up, doing their own work, and being on time.

6. Respect for Others' Rights and Dignity: Students receiving tutoring "will respect the dignity and worth of all people, and the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality and self-esteem."

7. Excellence: Students receiving tutoring "will strive to maintain excellence by continuing to improve their [study] habits."

8. Respect for Individual Differences: Students receiving tutoring "will respect cultural, individual, and role differences, including those based on age, sex, gender, identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language and socioeconomic status."

9. Professionalism: Students receiving tutoring "will not engage in inappropriate relations with [tutors]."

Job Three: Help Students "Find Their Brilliance"

At the 2014 Teaching Academic Survival Skills (TASS) Conference, I presented a session called "The Big Ideas of Reading" in which I expanded upon Campbell's metaphor of the journey of the hero to explain the process of the journey of the reader. In the reading journey, I explained, there is a preparation phase, a journey phase, and an ownership phase (Sears, 2014). The journey of the reader closely parallels the journey of tutoring and learning; therefore, this article can be used as a guide for readers, learners, and tutors. Readers and learners may or may not be "trying to find their brilliance," an expression Bailey (2008) uses in *Release Your Brilliance*; therefore, tutors can assist with the process in the student's journey.

Phase 1: Preparation for the Journey

Phase one has two components: setting a purpose and having a sense of the essence of the journey.

Set a Purpose

As Ash (2005) notes, readers need to set a purpose. I argue that students embarking on a learning journey through tutoring need to set a similar purpose. In fact, students need to see connections to career, to a bigger world, and to personal growth.

Connect to Careers

As Frierson (2013) and Gruenbaum (2012, p. 111) note, employers expect employees to be able to read well. I add that staying up to date in one's career requires continued reading and learning. Tutoring, then, gives students an opportunity to practice qualities that employers find attractive: responsibility, integrity, fairness, commitment, respect, excellence, awareness of diversity, and professionalism. As I have learned from working with college students for 25 years, most students are enrolled in college to be able to get a good job that pays well.

Seek a Bigger World

Part of the *accountability partner*'s job is to get students out of their comfort zones and therefore become more educated people who live in an expanded world. As I have learned while visiting Freshman Seminar classes, college students may not be aware that the main purpose of college is to create educated people. In order to become educated people, students need to read often and well. Leaving the comfort zone is also going to be required at work.

Personal Growth

Part of the reason to embark on the learning journey is personal growth. Rosenblatt (1978), one of the best known names in the field of English education, shares the four reasons to read: identify with others, enlarge knowledge of the world,

escape, and understand our lives (pp. 37-40). I argue that these reasons to read are also reasons to learn and to extract the most from a tutoring session. When people identify with others, they see that they are not alone. When tutors share stories of their own journeys of learning, students feel better about their journeys. For example, if a math tutor shares that he was not always a fan of math, then the student begins to share a sense of community.

With the *accountability partner's* help, students can begin to see that personal growth is part of the purpose of tutoring. Often students focus on the small picture: the quiz they just failed, the dislike of the subject matter, the professor's presentation style. Tutors can help students move on from these things and try to learn despite them. Part of personal growth is escape: Tutoring does not take place in the classroom, tutors speak plain English, and tutors are not as intimidating as professors. The tutoring center operates as a safe haven, a place where questions are welcome and the atmosphere is inviting. Tutors can help students to see that chemistry, algebra, writing, and other content areas fit into our lives and that they—the students—can make a difference in the world. Bailey (2008) explains: "There is a void in the world that needs your touch, your insight, your wisdom, your magic. You are here to be different and to make a difference" (p. 31).

Have a Sense of the Essence of the Journey

Before embarking on the learning journey, accountability partners should have a sense of what the journey will entail. In other words, tutors should be aware of what tutoring is not, what tutoring is, what types of engagement are required for tutoring in general, and what specific ways they can assist students with reading.

What Tutoring Is Not

Pedagogy in the field of reading translates to tutoring. Barnhouse and Vinton (2012) share that reading is not a "linear process" (p. 43), and it is not just for *some* people (p. 23). In "How We Really Comprehend Nonfiction," Newkirk (2012) adds that reading is "not a treasure hunt for the main idea" (p. 32). Similarly, tutoring and learning are not linear processes: They do not follow a straight path from Point A to Point B. Much zigging and zagging are required. Additionally, students—and even some faculty—believe that tutoring is just for those who have difficulty learning. Sadly, public education perpetuates the myth that education is the search for the one right answer. As director of a college learning center since 1997, I often visit Freshman Seminar classes and ask how many students believe that their high schools did an excellent job of explaining how to learn. Typically, I see one or two hands per classroom. Students need to be aware that they need to learn how to learn, a journey where different kinds of treasure are available in multiple locations and projects and problems may have multiple answers.

What Tutoring Is

Again, the tutoring profession can learn from a partnership with reading education: In the world of reading education, Rosenblatt reminds us that reading is "transacting with text" (as cited in Barnhouse & Vinton, 2012, p. 19). Tutoring is no less a transaction: Tutors "transact" with students and help them to "transact with text." Barnhouse and Vinton remind us that reading is thinking (p. 45), a 1917 idea that originated with Edward Thorndike, a pioneer in the worlds of reading and psychology. Tutoring, I argue, is thinking aloud. In *The Art of Slow Reading: Six Time Honored*

Practices for Engagement (2012a), Newkirk calls reading a "partnership" (p. 4). Certainly tutoring is a partnership. Both Barnhouse and Vinton (p. 16) and Newkirk (2012b, p. 32) add that reading is a journey. Barnhouse and Vinton share that reading is active, not passive (p. 46)—certainly true of effective tutoring. Barnhouse and Vinton add that reading is the making of meaning (p. 129)—also true of tutoring. Finally, Newkirk (2012b) calls reading "fellow travelling," which is another appropriate metaphor for tutoring. Tutoring, then, is a transaction, thinking aloud, a journey, meaning making, and a partnership.

What Tutoring Requires of Us

As Newkirk (2012a) shows, reading requires six types of engagement: having patience (p. 123), paying attention to detail (p. 5), being present (p. 5), moving (p. 101), having a positive mindset, and working hard. I argue that the same actions are required for successful tutoring. In order for the process to have a chance, both student and *accountability partner* need to be present and pleasant. Some students live in what Bailey (2008) calls "mental ghettos" (p. 5). Students who are unfairly dismissing the subject matter and/or their own abilities need to be made aware of that. Gladwell (2008) adds that "wanting to learn is part" of the battle (p. 46) and that "hard work is a prison sentence only if it does not have meaning" (p. 150). Bailey reminds us to "be open to the possibilities of life" (p. 40). As Gladwell notes, "The thing that distinguishes one performer from another is how hard he or she works. The people at the very top don't work just harder or even much harder than everyone else, [sic] they work much *much* harder" (p. 39). Bailey believes that everyone has a "Universal Assignment" (p. 31) and this necessitates "looking for an answer to how you can use your Universal Assignment

each day" (p. 37) and "seek the guidance of people who can help you live your assignment" (p. 38).

Specific Ways to Assist Students with Reading

Reading and learning are the two feet on which students need to stand. In order to help students navigate text, tutors can learn from the experts in the world of reading education. Barnhouse and Vinton (2012) note that readers need to look for relevance in what they are reading (p. 176). *Accountability partners* can talk with students about the ways that subject matter relates to their lives and encourage them to make these connections. Ash (2005) shares that readers need to be "code breakers" and "grasp the text's literal meaning" as well as make meaning and analyze text (p. 36). Newkirk (2012a) reports that readers need to monitor their own reading (p. 11). Reading strategies are study strategies, and part of a tutor's duty is to share successful study strategies.

Phase Two: The Journey Itself

Most of the accountability partner's time should be devoted to guiding the student on the journey itself. Naturally, this will require the work ethic previously mentioned. In the terms of the Association for the Tutoring Profession, this equates to commitment but commitment to what?

Conversation/Reflection

In the reading world, conversation and reflection are necessary components of the reading process (Nally, 2013, Barnhouse and Vinton, 2012, Newkirk, 2012b, Newkirk, 2012a, Costa, 2008, Ash, 2005). In the case of reading, the conversation is

primarily with oneself. Successful tutoring requires two-way communication. In this phase, students and tutors should—at a reasonable pace—use five strategies: context, critical thinking, word consciousness, making of meaning, and comprehension.

Context

Whether students are reading chapters or preparing for tests, they need to try to understand their surroundings—the context of the situation. To do this, they need to know what the text and the course cover, who the key players are, and what they know about the text and the course. Tutors who have had the same course and perhaps even the same professor can help with context.

Critical Thinking

Tutors can encourage students to do as Paul and Elder (2007) and Leist, Woolwine, and Bays (2012) suggest: "raise vital questions and problems, gather and assess relevant information, come to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, [and] think openmindedly" (Paul & Elder, p. 4).

Word Consciousness

Tutors can encourage students to employ what Neal (2013) calls "word consciousness" (p. 3): finding one's own vocabulary. In secondary education and even in community college reading classes, teachers take control of vocabulary by assigning certain words from prepared lists or books—none of which encourages students to learn new words. On the contrary, experts agree that students need to make a conscious effort to learn new words (Flemming, 2014; Flanigan, Templeton, & Hayes, 2014; Newkirk 2012a; Neal, 2013; Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013; Vogt, 2013; Barnhouse &

Vinton, 2012). By making students aware of this responsibility for their own success, tutors can assist in a vital piece of the process.

Making of Meaning

Accountability partners can help students revisit readings to add to understanding. Barnhouse and Vinton (2012) share that readers have "first drafts of reading" just as they have first drafts of writing, and a "first draft is rarely if ever enough" (p. 55). Rosenblatt (1978) reminds us that reading is "transacting with text" (as cited in Barnhouse & Vinton, 2012, p. 19). When tutors and students discuss the meaning of text, learning opportunities increase.

In order to make meaning, students can use other strategies for navigating the text terrain. Ash (2005) reminds us of the value of predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing (p. 39). Tutors can make students aware of (or remind them) of rhetorical modes as study techniques. In College Composition I, students may have learned about comparison/contrast, classification, cause/effect, narration, description, exemplification, process, persuasion, and definition as types of papers they can write. These modes are also types of information they will encounter in any text, in any course, and in everyday life.

Conclusion

By using the ATP Code of Ethics, by holding students to a similar code of ethics, and by acting as guides, well-informed *accountability partners* can help students make the most of their learning journeys. Tutoring provides a unique opportunity to do what Barnhouse and Vinton (2012) call "connect[ing] the dots" (p. 43).

In the end, students should be able to take away some souvenirs from their tutoring experience. Toward this end, tutors can recycle some of the goals of reading: "awareness of and control over [their] own understanding or lack of it" (Standiford, 1984), connections between the information and the world (Barnhouse & Vinton, 2012, p. 152), appreciation of the process (Newkirk, 2012a, pp. 1, 5, 9), and the gift of learning. Bailey (2008) reminds us that knowledge and use of our "incredible gifts" will let us live, rather than exist (p. 28).

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