

Tutors' Self-Assessment as a Strategy for Making Work Emotionally Sustainable

Presenters

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Session

- [Session 2B: Exploring the Evolving Relationship of Education and Society](#)
- 171 MGH
- 3:30 PM to 5:15 PM

Writing is an emotional endeavor; tutoring is as well. Tutors must kindle frank, complex conversations between two strangers, with differing expectations, different interpersonal styles, and (often) much at stake. How can the tutor make a writer feel safe enough to talk candidly? How might the tutor weather the frightening moments when s/he doesn't know what to say next? The emotions of tutoring catch many new tutors by surprise and pose an ongoing challenge to veteran tutors, who even risk burnout. The dynamic and intimate territory of a writing session has no roadmap. Strategies from the literature may suddenly fail, and one's sense of comfort and skill as a tutor may vanish. With such unpredictability, tutors cannot merely follow rules; they must use their discretion, guided by reflection and self-assessment. As researchers, we asked whether tutors' self-assessment techniques benefited their tutoring work or (conversely) made it emotionally unsustainable. We were interested in differentiating between 'constructive' and 'destructive' styles of self-assessment and wanted to investigate whether constructive self-assessment might help tutors cope with the highly-variable emotional dimension of tutoring. Our first set of data comes from two 90-minute focus groups wherein 20 tutors were asked to freewrite self-assessments and then analyze and compare their self-assessment styles in facilitated small-group conversations. Preliminary findings from these think-aloud protocols gives important insight into the ways tutors are benchmarking their successes and failures. Further data will come from surveying tutors on the range of emotions they commonly experience before, during, and after sessions, and from completing in-depth interviews with a smaller number of tutors to reflect on the temporal interplay of self-assessment and emotion within particular sessions. This research has potential applications for any highly-interpersonal work where success is a matter of responsiveness, emotional-attentiveness, and continuous learning rather than a matter of following pre-determined rules.