

Non-Directive Writing Conferences with International Students

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Non-directive conferencing

- “Non-directive” conferencing is NOT conferencing without critiquing and giving direction to the student.
- “Non-directive” is really describing a relationship between the reader and writer that puts expectations on the writer to critically engage with the draft.
 - Molly Tetreault, Director, Connors Writing Center, University of New Hampshire, Durham

The idea

- What I do
- Unofficial duties
 - Teaching Assistant trainings/seminar papers
 - Started collaborating with the Connors Writing Center at University of New Hampshire
 - Molly Tetreault, Director of the Writing Center

Conferencing process at UNH Law

- Student turns in paper
- Professor comments and returns the paper
- Student comes to conference to discuss the paper and professor's comments

- “Conferences after grading may have some value, but only in a process approach can the full value of the conference be realized.”
 - Thomas A. Carnicelli, *The Writing Conference: A One-to-One Conversation in Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition*, ed. Timothy R. Donovan and Ben W. McLelland (1980).

International students

- JD students versus international students
- Student stumbles
- Combined with working with Molly

What is non-directive conferencing?

- Used often in writing centers
- Focuses on process and learning rather than only product
- Emphasizes collaboration and the social nature of writing

Focus on process

- Questions as the heart of conferencing (think Socratic method)
- Metacognition—raising the writer’s awareness of his/her thought process, writing process, etc.
- Revealing the “hidden discourse” not apparent in drafts.
 - Can you tell me more about ____?
 - Why did you _____?
 - What was your idea behind _____?

Differences between WC & us

- As readers, we are familiar with the assignment and have specific pieces we expect to see in the product.
- We don't need to collect information about the assignment.
- Experts in the discipline
- Grading the paper

My plan

- Normally 2 drafts, both graded
- Added a third draft to review in conference
 - Slightly earlier draft
 - Low stakes – 10 points which was basically participation grade

Typical conference

- Student comes to conference with two copies of paper.
- You read for first time in conference.
 - **Potential pitfall:** Focus on grammar issues rather than substance with ELL
- Student re-reads paper and writes down questions while you review draft.

Conference (fairly typical)

- Start with student questions
- Answer what makes sense to answer and then move into review of draft with student.
- Remember student questions and circle back.
- Ask questions of the writer & give direction where needed.

Benefits (real and hoped for)

- Having the conference mid-process, for low stakes, rather than after a high-stakes grade, will promote student thinking and revising.
- Correct major issues before the student gets a high-stakes grade.
- Establish a trust relationship with professor and encourage students to ask for additional help.
- Takes less time than commenting and returning papers

Why

- Previous system worked fairly well
- Always a small minority of students who stumbled
 - Examples
- For those students, the damage to their grade, and probably their psyche, was done.

Applications

- Writing fellows or TAs
- Can use it with any kind of assignment
- Reader does not need to have expertise in the topic or even in the field, just in the approach.

TAs

- Drawbacks of having a writing TA do this kind of conferencing.
 - Lack of expertise in assignment
 - Student expects the TA to be a spokesperson for professor
 - Written guidelines suggested.

Going forward

- Still working on developing the right approach in conferencing
- No results yet
- Like the idea so far
 - Able to spot common problems earlier in the writing process

Libguide at UNH Law Library

- <http://law.unh.libguides.com/seminarpaper>
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