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.”

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](http://law.unh.libguides.com/seminarpaper)

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