Beyond the Classroom:
A Guide for Refugee Youth Tutors

Written by Jamie Bergstrom
He who opens a school door, closes a prison.
- Victor Hugo (French Refugee)

Today, we are truly a global family. What happens in one part of the world may affect us all.
- 14th Dalai Lama (Tibetan Refugee)

Out of your vulnerabilities will come your strength.
- Sigmund Freud (Austrian Refugee)

Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think.
- Albert Einstein (German Refugee)
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At a Glance...

Global and Local Statistics:

Refugees worldwide

Boroughs
- Bronx 23%
- Brooklyn 36%
- Queens 40%
- Staten Island 1%

School Ages
- High School 66%
- Elementary School 16%
- Junior High School 8%

Countries of Origin
- Tibet 28%
- Nepal 11%
- Guinea 23%
- Burma 6%
- Others: Bhutan, Cameroon, Haiti, Iraq, Iran, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mauritania, Sierra Leone

Key Terms

Refugee: An individual who is outside his or her country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion who is unable to, or owing to such a fear, unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country. The definition is sometimes expanded to include people fleeing war or other armed conflict.

Asylum Seeker: An individual outside his or her country of origin seeking refugee status whose claim has not been legally substantiated. Often, an asylum seeker must undergo a legal procedure in which the host country decides if he/she qualifies for refugee or another form of legal status. International law recognizes the right to seek asylum, but does not oblige states to provide it.

Internally Displaced Person (IDP): Someone who has been forced from his/her home for refugee-like reasons, but remains within the borders of his/her own country. Still under the jurisdiction of a government that might not want international agencies to help him/her, an internally displaced person may continue to be vulnerable to persecution or violence.

Durable Solutions

Repatriation: As the durable solution of choice for the largest number of refugees, voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity requires the full commitment of the country of origin to help reintegrate its own people.

Local Integration: In cases where voluntary repatriation is not a viable option, finding a home in the country of asylum and integrating into the local community could offer a durable solution to their plight and the opportunity of starting a new life.

Resettlement: In such circumstances, UNHCR helps resettle refugees in a third country as the only safe and viable durable solution. Of the 10.5 million refugees of concern to UNHCR around the world, only about 1 per cent are submitted by the agency for resettlement.

Coming to the U.S.

Rethinking the Role of Education

Educational institutions are the center of children’s lives and early development. To help foster positive growth, we should rethink the role of education. Currently, schools seek further to academic standing. While this is important, there needs to be increased dialogue surrounding the personal development of students as well. What children learn at school goes far beyond the facts they memorize.

Development that occurs in school is a process related to experiences and interactions with peers and school administrators. The institution of school itself serves as the location for growth beyond academia. In relation to the student you tutor, start thinking about personal goals with your tutee and areas of improvement or skill attainment. Is there a way you can bridge his/her schoolwork and some of these other goals? This will help make the most of your time both for the student’s benefit and yours.

Role In Resettlement:

The role of education is even more crucial in the context of refugee resettlement. Children you work with may have experienced traumatic events throughout their childhoods and are still in the process of recovering. On top of that, school is now the primary focus of their lives. They have the stress of learning a new language and adjusting to a new culture. The preparation gap places many refugees at risk of dropping out of school. Parents find it difficult to support their children’s education as they struggle to acclimate and meet their family’s basic needs. You can see why the role of education is greater in the context of resettlement and why school is crucial to development.

Having a good relationship with your tutee is imperative when supporting children who evidence difficulties in learning or adapting to school, whether caused by war, social conflict, economic crisis, environmental disaster or family problems. To help you understand the role of education in the lives of youth in conflict situations please refer to the IRC Healing Classroom Initiative reprinted below:

While education has enormous healing potential in conflict and post-conflict contexts, war is not kept out of classrooms. There is much evidence to show that in practice schools can be targets during conflict for attacks and for recruitment of students, sometimes forcibly, into armed forces. Teachers can abuse and exploit students, from household labor, drastic disciplinary measures to sexual abuse. Girls are often especially vulnerable to this. The journey to and from school can be dangerous, especially for minorities. Curriculums can be manipulated to advocate messages of hate and violence...

After understanding the contrasting ideas surrounding education and more specifically, the classroom, it is apparent why your role as a refugee after-school and/or out-of-school tutor is so important. Fostering healthy attitudes towards school through positive experiences related to education is the first step. Now, let’s see how we can incorporate the experience of education with personal development in the role of refugee youth.

Let’s go beyond the classroom....
Going Beyond the Classroom

The lessons students learn at school go beyond academics and your tutoring session should too! In order to take education “beyond the classroom” start thinking about how tutoring can help students in other areas like social and emotional development. The IRC’s Refugee Youth Program has created a series of objectives, which help bridge the gap between personal development and academic growth. After reading through these objectives, think of ways you can incorporate these goals into your tutoring. Then refer to page 9 to learn about strategies that incorporate personal development by subject.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Objective</th>
<th>Social and Emotional Learning Objective</th>
<th>School Readiness Objective</th>
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| 1 Peer and Adult Support Network | Relationship Skills  
- Forming positive relationships  
- Working in Teams  
- Dealing effectively with conflict | • Students know names of many fellow students and staff  
• Student is a role model for others  
• Has many, diverse friends and gives and receives support  
• Is comfortable with multiple staff and seeks support when needed |
| 2 Understanding and Internalization of School Culture | Social Awareness  
- Recognize one’s emotions and values as well as one’s strengths and limitations | • Clear understanding of various staff roles  
• Fluent in school routine and rules  
• Successful at all classroom activities and guide others |
| 3 Self Confidence in an Academic Setting | Self Awareness  
- Recognize one’s emotions and values as well as one’s strengths and limitations | • Always comfortable to ask for help when he/she does not understand something  
• Highly independent and eager to try new skills/activities  
• Participates actively in classroom activities and guides others  
• Confident to express needs and wants |
| 4 Attitude Towards School | Self-Management  
- Managing emotions and behaviors to achieve one’s goals | • Clearly connects success in school to future success and expresses plan to continue education  
• Actively and consistently participates in class  
• Always attempts to complete assignments  
• Takes care of own and school |

Defining the Tutor:

What is a tutor?
This is not a question you hear very often, but before assuming the role think about what it actually entails and how that differs when working with refugee youth. This section is to help you make the most of your experience by reflecting on what you can do to strengthen your ability to tutor effectively. This section also discusses the various roles of tutors and how afterschool tutoring differs from in-class tutoring.

Proposed Dictionary Definitions:

A person charged with the instruction and guidance of another. -Merriam-Webster

A private teacher, typically one who teaches a single student or a very small group. -Oxford

One that gives additional, special, or remedial instruction. -Cambridge

A teacher or teaching assistant in some universities and colleges having a rank lower than that of an instructor. -American Heritage

Common Duties:

- Help students with subject content according to individual strengths.
- Assist students in improving academic achievement by meeting with them on a regular basis.
- Clarify learning problems and work on study skills.
Role of a Refugee Tutor

Your job is to increase academic growth and help facilitate study strategies for future development. Remember, there is nothing remedial about tutoring. Constructive supportive and input is an essential in advancing one’s worldview and desire to succeed academically. However, you will find that you often take on other roles in addition to this. Remember that that tutoring is multifaceted and it requires flexibility.

*If you are placed in the middle of conflict: It is not your responsibility to resolve a student’s issue with a teacher, parent, or peer. However you can suggest constructive and positive approaches. Be sure to refer the student to a professional capable of handling a serious situation.

Assistant

- As a tutor you act as an assistant, both to the student and the teacher. Even though you may not know the instructor personally, your work should follow his/her methods and aid in the primary instructor’s overall lesson plan. Always build off of existing plans and try to assist the student in understanding primary instruction before bringing in your own ideas.

- You also assist your tutee. This goes beyond assisting the student in finishing classwork, but also assisting your student in finding the best strategies and habits for him/her. You should strive to be a resource, helping students discover their interests, passions, and learning how to attain their goals.

Mentor

- Tutees often look up to their tutors. After working with the same person every week your relationship grows. You may find that students begin to ask you personal questions about your education or interests. If a student is interested in creative writing and you are too you should feel free to talk to him/her about developing those interests. If you work with older students, you may also be asked to assist with college applications. Help your tutee find what’s right for him/her. You will often find that students look up to you. Be a positive role model. Encourage happy, healthy behavior and be there as much as you can, while respecting the tutor/tutee boundaries.

Motivator

- Coming to a new country, state and school is not easy. Some children are withdrawn and uncomfortable in the educational sphere. Try to be as enthusiastic and encouraging as possible. You should help your tutee see the benefits of education and motivate him/her to succeed. You should also encourage your tutee to think outside the box and find creative solutions to problems. Just a little bit of support goes a long way, especially in the life of a refugee child. You are a representative of society when you work out-of-school or after school with your tutee. Be sure to represent the positive attributes of society, something you tutee may not have seen yet. Show your supportive side and motivate them to excel.
How is After-school Tutoring Different?

The classroom can be stressful for individuals and just working in an afterschool environment may make some students feel more comfortable. After-school and out-of-school programs connect students with people other than their teachers and families, serving as place of socialization with individuals from different ages and backgrounds. Be sure to encourage healthy social behavior, but stay focused on the given tasks! If you create a positive environment during your tutoring session your student may return to the classroom more confident, enthusiastic and prepared.

Individualized Plans:

Students are typically taught under a rigid and strict curriculum in the classroom but after school tutoring lets students work at their own pace. Tutors in the classroom work on the lesson plan at the time while afterschool tutors let students work at their pace, highlighting the student’s needs and targeting areas of weakness.

Creativity:

In the classroom students are taught how to complete given tasks within a time constraint. After school tutoring presents students with the opportunity to work on tasks for longer periods of time and refine ideas. Extra time also lets students get creative with their work as they try new ideas. You should always embrace a tutee’s creativity. Creativity out of school also has some very important benefits. As students expand their thinking beyond academics, they may find new ways of communicating their thoughts and feelings. Activities like writing poems and theater games are great after school exercises if the student already finished his/her primary work. When you work on creative activites, students are able to showcase their personality and ideas differently and in a way that puts them in control. This helps boost self-confidence and pride in their abilities.
Workshops:

After school students have more time to work on projects or college applications. You can use this time to workshop assignments and projects. If students do not have other pressing tasks you can go over their work with a fine toothcomb. You can even start new projects by using concept maps and diagrams. Take time to ask the student his/her goals and make lists and plans of how to reach those goals. Workshops can also be done in group settings. If you are working with a small group of students you can introduce methods of peer editing and peer review, even if you are with younger children. You can facilitate group conversation around working with peers by using constructive criticism methods like, “share two good things and one bad thing you liked.” These workshops also teach students how to articulate thoughts and demonstrate the importance of verbal expression and communication skills.

Sharing Ideas:

You should be supportive if your tutee is proud of an assignment or good idea and wants to share it with you. In the classroom students do not always have the opportunity to express ideas or read the paper they wrote. If a student tries to show you the good grade they earned on a math test feel free to congratulate them! You want students to feel excited about learning and confident in their ideas. When working with refugee youth, some students will want to share a lot of personal information with you. If a student is willing to talk you should listen. For instance, students may wish to base their story on something that reminds them of their home when working with an open-ended writing prompt. This can be therapeutic for students and help them bridge their communities together. If the student wishes to do so, you should support these decisions and understand that it may be an emotional outlet or a form of stress relief when you listen to a tutee’s ideas. Again, make sure you can constructively gear this conversation towards schoolwork.
Tutoring Across the Fields

As your relationship with your tutee grows, you will continue to work with him/her on more assignments. Your tutee may be advanced in some areas but need improvement in others. How do you work with different subjects? The answer varies from tutor to tutor, but this section will provide some strategies help you find out what works best for you. Keep in mind, some of these strategies are interdisciplinary and can be used in conjunction with other topics or techniques.

At the end of each subject you will find a “personal development” section for tips on incorporating individual growth into your tutoring session!
Social Studies

Social Studies are courses like history, government, economics and politics. Individual courses may vary in subject matter, but similar study techniques can be used for all.

Concept Maps/ Break it Down:

Think about cause and effect and how that relates to history or even economics (supply and demand). You can use concept maps to help explain the ideas that govern these topics. In order to understand how things like government work, break it down. Feel free to draw diagrams to explain which department controls what resources and how they work together. If you are learning about history have your tutee map out a timeline that shows events and implications. If you have a hard time creating these visuals go online and see if there are resources or study aids that your tutee can use.

Personal Development

Relationship Skills:

For starters, just working with your tutee exposes him/her to healthy relationships. You can even use examples of what you are studying to highlight some of the common dynamics. For example, how does the President work with congress? Questions like this engage you tutee and cause him/her to think about societal networks.

Social Awareness:

You can build off of the societal networks seen in history or government and ask your student to reflect on his/her role within that network. You can even do this with subjects like economics. Have your student identify him/herself (ex. Consumer) in the context of what you are working on that day. You can do the same with understanding the roles and duties of government.

Self-Awareness:

This is especially significant in history. As you go over historical events ask your students if they understand why these events happened. For example, why did the colonists have the Boston Tea Party? How did they feel before, during, after? Were they successful in their goals? Have your student find the underlying values they see in each event.

Self-Management:

Ask your student to look at historical examples when achieving a goal was not easy. What did the person/group have to do? Then ask your student some of his/her goals and what s/he needs to do in order to be successful.

Responsible Decision Making:

There are infinite examples of decision making in social studies. You can talk about personal finance in relation to economics or ethical decisions in politics and government or even use history to show actions and consequence. Whatever you decide to discuss, make sure your tutee can relate these examples to his/her own life.
Math

Quantitative skills can be difficult to teach. The best advice is to be patient and focused. Here are some handy tips to help you do so:

Working Together:

When a tutee comes to you with an assignment, it is important to make sure s/he knows what the question is asking first. Together you should identify the problem and then work through it. Your student may know how to do the problem overall, but is just bogged down with the end result. This is especially common in word problems. Just talk it out!

Work on a Similar Problem First:

Demonstrations can help you visually and verbally explain concepts. Go over your tutee's problem set and develop similar questions/ find example questions from the book that you can work on. Be sure you work on similar problems- not too advanced and not too easy. Make sure you do not use the student’s homework as your guide. If you end up completing the student’s assignment in the process, the student is not able to demonstrate his/her mastery of the topic.

Repetition of Concepts:

Depending on how much your tutee already knows, you may have to go back and review topics. Even if your tutee understands the lesson overall, repeating concepts or having him/her teach it back to you only strengthens ability in the subject and future comprehension.

Drawings:

Using drawings in math may only be helpful up until a given level, but nevertheless you can always try. Try drawing out a question (word questions in particular) or drawing the answer. When working with multiplication or division this can be especially helpful. Math drawings do not have to be masterpieces, they can simply be dots on a paper, but the added visual component may help.

Science:

Topics under science range from chemistry to the environment, so you really have to see how much your tutee already knows. Since science is largely concepts and memorization, you will find that review and flashcards might be best for doing well on tests, but in order to first explain these concepts, you might have to get creative.

Relate abstract ideas to everyday life:

When you are talking about biology and chemical processes, explain it in the context of something your student experiences everyday, like hunger and eating or tiredness and sleeping. If you can connect these ideas to something your student encounters s/he may be able to understand better. Another example of something your student sees everyday is the water cycle. You can relate the water cycle to other cycles and start drawing similarities in cycles and processes.

Use Visuals:

Even if you can explain something well, visuals always help! You might be able to explain abstract concepts well, but the tutee may not understand what that actually means or the applicability. Get creative and find visual examples. If you are talking about chemical reactions you can show pictures of oxidation, like the statue of liberty, that way your student can place the new information in context.

Personal Development

Relationship Skills:
As you work with your tutee on new concepts be sure to work together and bring attention to your partnership. Even if you are primarily teaching be sure the dynamic is interactive.

Social Awareness:
Even if you do not deal with this in your subject you can use the environment to showcase social lessons. For instance, if your tutee receives snacks you can both exercise manners.

Self-Awareness:
Constructively talk with your students about his/her strengths and weaknesses. This allows the student to assess where they can improve and builds confidence.

Self-Management:
If a student is really struggling you can frame your session around learning as a process and compare it to the processes of math/science. You can then talk about how education and future success is also a process and why having a good attitude now can help in the future.

Responsible Decision Making:
When working with math/science students, decision-making is very related to Self-management. Explain the importance of good decisions in school and motivation to achieve.
English Language Arts

Writing a cohesive story or understanding the meaning of a poem usually takes a great deal of time and lots of one-on-one. Below are some tips and tricks to help get you started.

Concept Maps:
Help your student visualize the actions and progression in a story by mapping it out. This can be done in reverse (after reading a story) or prior to writing one. Outlines and visuals provide an alternative way of viewing new material and the systematic structure can be easier to comprehend.

Ask Questions:
Reading and writing is how we communicate ideas and actions. To make sure your tutee understands what is going just ask questions! For example, after a major event in the story ask, “Do you think that was good or bad?” You can also check comprehension after smaller segments, “why was Dan’s mom mad?” This builds reflection and engagement with the material. You can also use this technique when a student is writing his/her own story. Questioning literary choices helps the student understand how others perceive his/her work.

Build Vocabulary:
By expanding vocabulary, your tutee will strengthen his/her ability to comprehend works in the future. Here are some ways to build vocabulary:

Structure of Questions:
• Predicting
• Finding the main idea
• Making inferences and drawing conclusions
• Determining author’s purpose
• Paraphrasing and summarizing
• Comparing/contrasting ideas

Techniques:
• Read sections with echo reading (student echoes) and reading aloud together.
• Discuss unusual words by asking your student to predict the meaning using context clues. After you and the student find the meaning of a word, reread the section.

Personal

Relationship Skills:
When you and your tutee work on understating things together, be sure to emphasize your partnership and teamwork. If you are working with more than one student you should also point how students can help each other.

Social Awareness:
After reading a story talk about characters and their roles within the story. Was there a lesson about leadership or compassion?

Self-Awareness:
When your student is reading a story or even writing one of his/her own, ask how they feel at certain points or even how the characters feel. Recognizing emotions and then talking about them builds awareness and self-reflection.
ESL Learners

English as Second Language Learners face additional hardship during their transitions to US schools. Language skills are an important part of education and it can be extremely frustrating for students when they struggle with English. If you find yourself working with and ESL student remember to be patient and thorough. If you happen to speak a student’s first language avoid translating word for word. It is important for your tutee to exercise English skills and you do not want to inhibit further growth.

Below are strategies/ exercises to help you and your tutee out:

- Draw it out
- Act it out
- Reading aloud
- Getting students to self-correct
- Conversation practice
- Fill-in-the-blank
- Dictation
- Paragraph writing

Development

Strive for completion with each tutoring session. If you know you cannot finish a lesson plan that day set a small goal and teach ways to manage focus, time, emotions in order to reach that goal.

Feel free to look to the text you use with your tutee as a conversation starter. If you read a story about a selfish person you should have a discussion about why that behavior was wrong. Even as you map out the plot talk about the decisions being made and find ways for the student to relate to it.


Tutors play a large role in the learning process and your engagement aids in a student’s future development. To ensure that you are promoting positive growth here is a list of things that you should try to DO.

Students often look up to tutors as mentors. Keep in mind that your actions are always being watched and may have negative affects on students as well. To help you keep in mind what could actually hurt the tutee’s experience and future success, here is a list of things NOT TO DO.
DOs

Be Enthusiastic.

If you do not display love for the subject your tutee will not either. Keep in mind that enthusiasm is not strictly limited to the subject at hand, but even just for the love of learning. You can positively influence a student to keep exploring new subjects and challenge them to succeed if you have a positive attitude towards learning. You can also think of this as an opportunity to “learn how to learn.” You good attitude can be applied to a variety of topics, so try not to get bogged down if you are working on something you are not personally fond of. Enthusiasm is contagious!

Encourage active participation.

Encouragement goes far beyond supporting the completion of a particular assignment. Try to engage your tutee by encouraging them to ask questions, solve problems, and to offer ideas. You want your tutee to think for him/herself and find creative solutions to problems. Let your tutee identify strategies that work best for him/her. Be sure students understand a topic by encouraging them to explain in their own words what a question is asking or the point of a story. This active participation builds an encouraging environment where students feel like they have the ability to ask questions and think for themselves.

Be Patient.

This is probably one of the most important characteristics of a tutor. Never act annoyed that the student does not know something. Even if they ask the most basic questions always demonstrate your patience. Learning is a process and if you make students feel like they are too slow they might think school is not for them. Understand that these students have gone through a lot and now they are learning new material, often times in a new language completely. Take it slow and be willing to go over topics a few times- you want the student to feel comfortable with it.

Let the student tell you what he or she does and does not know about the problem.

Before diving into the work try to find out where the student needs the most help. The tutee may understand everything but the last step of the problem or may have trouble with the entire lesson. You want to make the most of your time and meet the students needs, so be sure to ask if there is anything specific the tutee is having trouble with before trying to work with the student.
**DOs**

**Make the student feel comfortable.**
Welcome every student with a smile and be sure to introduce yourself. Don’t be afraid to spend a moment getting to know each other. You want the tutee to feel comfortable and feel like they can come back in the future. The classroom may be hard on a student and you want to establish a one-on-one connection where s/he feels like they s/he has the ability to ask questions. Let them know you are there to assist them and not lecture.

**Ask open ended questions/ encourage discussion.**
When going over new material try to actively converse with the student. If a student is shy or self-conscious, he/she is less likely to ask questions and may not benefit from your presence. If possible avoid yes or no questions and constructively push the student out of their comfort zone.

**Take time to answer questions.**
If a student comes to you with a question make sure you completely explain it before moving on. Try your best to explain concepts, clarify misunderstandings and then go over it again—this time with the student explaining it to you. You can never spend too much time on learning something new.

**Go over the instructions.**
Ask your tutees what they are working on and then look over the instructions/prompt with them. This will help you and the student devise the best action plan possible and tackle any areas of improvement. You also want to make sure you focus on the task and assist the student with the overall project. For instance, if a student is asked to write a story, outline the story with him/her where s/he can continue the work independently at home. Avoid spending the entire session working on the introduction and leaving the student confused on the rest of the project.

**Show up!**
Unlike traditional tutoring, where you go in occasionally and work with whoever is there, refugee tutoring involves the same students. These students have experienced extreme changes in their lives, the most recent being resettling to the US. Consistency in school is may be the only thing they have, so make sure to regularly go.

**Embrace his/her culture.**
Coming to the US is hard enough so try to embrace their traditions and make them feel welcome. Many teachers will allow students to work on assignments in both English and their native language and you should support those efforts. However, avoid using native language as a crutch if you find a student struggling with English. Also, don’t be afraid to ask a student about a celebration they just had or an upcoming holiday, but be sure NOT to pry. Only talk about a student’s personal life if they bring it up—just try to be open and supportive!
**DON'Ts**

**Check the time/ use poor body language.**

Unless you are timing the student for an assignment you should not be looking at how much longer you have left. This makes students feel like your time with them is an obligation, rather than something you enjoy. If you observe bad body language (yawning, rubbing eyes, stretching) on top of this, your tutee may interpret it as disinterest. Remember, tutoring is about more than completing assignments - it is also about instilling future values and goals. If you are in a rush to leave, your tutee will pick up on it and will be as uninterested in studying as you seem.

**Judge someone's ability or intellect based on appearance or age.**

This is especially important in relation to refugee youth, which come from all backgrounds. Some may have benefited from advanced education in their native country and others may be new to the classroom completely. Ability ranges in subject matter too. A student may be a math-wiz but struggle to communicate in English, simply because s/he moved here only two months ago. Age should never serve as an indicator of educational attainment and avoid teaching “down-to” or “up-to” the level you think the student should be at - this could severely damage the student's self confidence and future desire to study.

**Make student feel as though they are incapable or incompetent.**

Although this may not be your intention, saying things like “we went over this last week” or “you should know this” may make the student feel as though s/he does not have the ability to learn. Try to reframe your interactions by saying things like, “let’s review what we went over last week of” or ask, “do you want to go over it again?”

Be sure not to overload the student with complicated ideas or use complex language, especially if they are new to English. Lecturing too long or using phrases they may not understand may make a student feel like they are incompetent.

**Encourage dependency.**

A student should not rely on you to complete assignments or always explain questions. You want to build independence and challenge your students to work without your supervision. Although you should have a good relationship with your tutee, make sure they understand that you will not always be there. This is also important in relation to language. Just because you may speak their native language does not mean you should. Do not simply translate their work for them; instead try to integrate the two languages as part of the learning process.

**Allow your tutees to settle.**

You want to make learning engaging, but you also want students to know it can be difficult at times. Try to challenge them to reach for the “A” instead of settling for a “C.” Use this opportunity to stress the importance of determination and dedication, but do not unnecessarily stress them with grades.
DON'Ts

Criticize the primary instructor/ assume the role of the instructor.

You are only there to help with what the primary instructor is teaching. As the assistant you are in the position to greatly enhance a student’s perception and understanding of a subject, but do not reteach it with tricks or gimmicks. You should always be aware of the method of primary instruction and work off of that. If there is a slight variation that you know has worked well with others, you may want to share it, but be cautious! It is always safe to show them the way their instructor did it.

Do the work for them.

If possible try to recreate similar problems to work from and let the student do the actual homework. Additionally, if you make any changes to their work may sure you explain why. Never edit/ correct without verbally justifying it. This can be extremely confusing and student may feel uncomfortable asking questions in the future.

Assume a role of which you are not trained or qualified to handle.

If a student approaches you with a serious issue, like abuse or pregnancy, be sure to seek out the professional that can help. You should feel comfortable mentoring your students but respect the boundaries of your position. Students may try to follow up with you via text messages and emails, but reframe from doing so. This is both related to building independence and ensuring the student is in the best hands if something serious should occur.

Accept “uh-huh’s” and head nods as proof of understanding.

Just because a student says they understand a new lesson does not mean they really do. Never make assumptions about what s/he knows. If you are working on a new topic, try to do sample questions with the student so that you can gauge understanding. This will let you know if you need to spend more time on the lesson.

Say something is easy/ give false confidence.

What may be easy for you may be very challenging for a student. If student is told something is easy and then struggles to understand, s/he may doubt her/his own ability to be successful. They may even withdraw from school overall if they believe they cannot even understand “easy” things.

Be afraid to admit your own weaknesses.

Nobody is perfect—including you. A student may come to you with a question that you may not know. Rather than pretend to understand the subject matter you should feel comfortable admitting your areas of ignorance. If you pretend you understand something and explain it incorrectly, you are only hurting the student’s growth and your reputation as well. Be honest with your tutee about your own limits so that s/he feels comfortable approaching you in the future.
Let's Get Started..
A special thanks to...