

Am I a Teacher or a Tutor?

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During a session with a student focused on the educational skills of the student -- please note I am purposefully neglecting to mention the place or circumstance which brings me together with this student or whether I am teaching or tutoring, I begin to reflect on my purpose, my role, and the goals for this student encounter. Some would call this daydreaming. Others would call this a momentary lapse in focus. Today's student would quip, "it's all good!" I prefer to call this a '*thoughtful event*' because my predilection is to let this moment evolve into a question: am I a *tutor* or am I a *teacher*?

OK, so let's turn to the dictionary. I find that teachers and tutors are both experienced professionals who educate children and adults. Other sources tell me that effectively organized teachers and tutors will prepare and use their lesson plans. However, it's important to note that a teacher's lesson plan emanates from an approved, standards-based curriculum plan devised to ensure that their students acquire age-appropriate skills and knowledge in a variety of subjects. Am I therefore correct to assume that a tutor's lesson plan emanates from the same source: a school-based curriculum? My experience tells me that this is often not the case unless the tutor confers with the teacher. The facts involving the curriculum are often inferentially provided to the tutor by the students as they explain the issue they are experiencing in the classroom. So where does that leave us: teachers *teach* and tutors *tutor*. What am I?

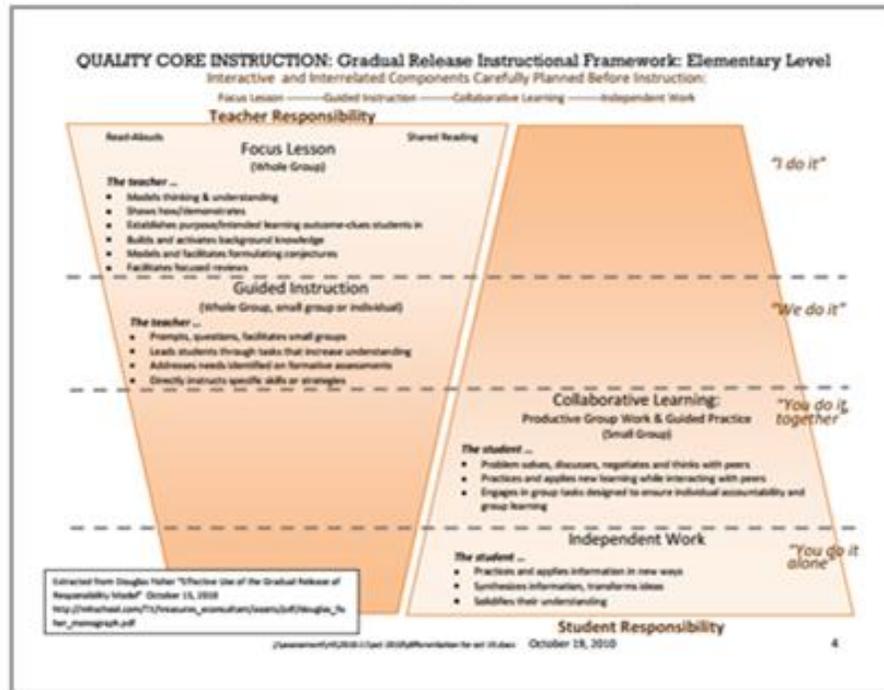
I prefer to put the difference between the purpose of a teacher and tutor this way: teachers introduce new skills and concepts with opportunities for practice. Tutors capitalize on the knowledge students acquire from their classroom instruction and provide direct assistance to guide students to help themselves. The goal therefore must be to assist or guide the student to the point at which they become independent learners. Good tutors offer a structured learning experience in an individual way. Good tutors provide a climate in which a tutee's self-esteem, attitude towards the subject matter, and academic performance improve in a self-paced and self-directed learning process. Good tutors develop independent and confident thinkers.

As I mentioned in a previous article related to School Anxiety, published in the NTA Fall newsletter (2019), an effective teaching sequence involves scaffolded instruction. Scaffolded instruction allows the student to conduct safe experimentation and is a recommended strategy to be used in tutoring sessions. The teaching strategies of tutor-supported "*direct instruction, guided instruction, and independent practice,*" afford the tutee an opportunity to learn through the student-centered practice of collaboration. This tutor-tutee interaction results in a student's independent practice and developing a sense of agency— "Yes, I can do this," See Figure 1. Yes, I can do this!



Figure 1. Yes, I can do this!

I have learned over time a certain perception, albeit an incorrect one, that the tutors' job was to help the student with their homework, or teaching the material the tutee didn't understand...a resoundingly bad idea!! A tutor is not a teacher! The teacher lectures and the tutor tutors. When the tutee didn't know the correct process for solving a math problem correctly, the tutor correctly followed the steps of *scaffolding*: "*I do it,*" "*We do it,*" "*You do it Together,*" and "*You do it Alone.*" See Figure 2. Caution: scaffolding is not to be confused with mimicking. Scaffolding is a process where the student learns the process of critical, independent thinking and problem solving.



From: *Effective of the gradual release of responsibility model*, by Fisher, D. (2010).
 Retrieved from: www.mkschool.com/TX/treasures_econsultant/assets/pdi/douglas_fisher_monograph_pdi
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Figure 2. Scaffolding: the gradual release of responsibility.

The main goal of tutoring is to help the tutee develop a permanent sense of *Agency* – Yes, I can do this. More importantly, mimicking the steps shown by a tutor will not help the tutee become an independent learner nor will it help the tutee learn critical thinking skills. Tutoring needs to be “procedure-oriented” not “answer-oriented.” Tutoring, when well done, has the ability to improve the lives of their tutees by building confidence and igniting curiosity and passion. Good tutoring does not provide the answer. Rather it reinforces the problem-solving process which thereby empowers the student to think critically and independently. Are you a *teacher* or a *tutor*?