Volunteer tutors and adolescent at-risk English language learners (ELLs): The nature of interactions among volunteer tutors and at-risk ELLs in one-on-one tutoring sessions.

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Literacies and Learners
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Why are volunteer tutoring interactions with secondary at-risk ELLs important to investigate?

• ELLs population in the United States public schools is increasing
  (United States Department of Education, 2003; Passel & Cohn, 2008)

• High school graduation rate for ELLs is low
  (United States Department of Education, 2011; United States Census Bureau, 2012)

• The Inclusion Model
  (Reeves, 2006; NAEP, 2013)

• Lack of resources, teacher training, and limited vocab development
  (Griffin, Buenda, Crosland, & Doumbland, 2002; Verplaetese, 1998; Youngs, 1999; Olson & Land, 2007)

• Federal Funding, Title I
  (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014)
Gaps in the Literature

• Lack of research on how teachers are helping ELLs attain vocabulary in adolescent settings and if any best practices are being used.

• Many studies focused on discussing the methods used to support adolescent ELLs and challenges but few studies used a methodology that allowed for multiple observations of one particular support system in action.

• Tutoring programs with adolescent ELLs was not focused on in the literature.
Theoretical Homebase

• Social Learning Theory
  (Vygotsky, 1978)

• Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)
  (Vygotsky, 1978; Blanc, 1990)
Research Questions

• How do volunteer tutors interact in one-on-one tutoring sessions with at-risk adolescent ELLs?

• How are volunteer tutors supporting vocabulary acquisition with adolescent ELLs in one-on-one tutoring sessions?
Methods

- Qualitative Case Study, 7 weeks, 3 tutors
- Rich detail, deeper understanding of context
- Captures particular experiences of a small group of tutees/tutors vs. a more general overview of a large group of tutees/tutors
- Observe in an unobtrusive way (Role)
- Phenomenon, Case

(Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009)
Description of Site and Participants

• School Site (19%, ELL, 96% Hispanic, two settings)
• Pete
• Hannah
• Molly
• ELL adolescent students
• Faculty
• ESL Coordinator
Data Collection

- Observations
- Interviews (Semi-Structured, Informal)
- Tutoring Reflection Logs
- Field Notes/Memoing
- Document Analysis
Data Analysis

• Open Coding for Research Question 1 (interactions)
• ‘a-priori’ coding for Research Question 2 (vocabulary)
• Ensured Trustworthiness
  - Reflexivity, reflecting (Merriam, 2002)
  - Member Checks, ask-verify (Creswell, 1994)
  - Data Saturation, same tutors (Charmaz, 2006)
  - Triangulation (Merriam, 2002; Prasad, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009)
  - Rich Thick Description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002)
Results

How do volunteer tutors interact in one-on-one tutoring sessions with at-risk adolescent ELLs?

• Tutors interacted in 6 key ways within the one-on-one tutoring sessions
  - Models
    answering comprehension questions, multiple choice, demonstrated background knowledge
  - Encouragers
    Challenging or frustrating sessions
  - Partners
    Teachers, tutors, students
  - Strategists
    How to approach learning, Tutors used learning backgrounds
  - Facilitators
    Stopping to address a skill or continuing in disruptive environment
  - Translators
    Used students first language (L1) or broke down
Findings/Discussion

How do volunteer tutors interact in one-on-one tutoring sessions with at-risk adolescent ELLs?

- Tutors were independent agents
- ZPD progression
- Modeling connected to standardized testing
- Encouragement helped with academic advancement
- Partnering enabled learning as a social, shared interaction
- Strategy sharing resulted from knowing, mastering strategies from own educational background
- Facilitating meant recognizing problems and adapting
- Translating demonstrated empathy
How are volunteer tutors supporting vocabulary acquisition with adolescent ELLs in one-on-one tutoring sessions?

- Tutors supported vocabulary indirectly incidentally
- Tutors supported the vocabulary acquisition of general academic words signal words usually generated from written context
- Tutors used Instructional Techniques to teach vocabulary
  Frequently used was responsive context, visuals; Rarely used was pronunciation, specific meanings, personalizing
Findings/Discussion

How are volunteer tutors supporting vocabulary acquisition with adolescent ELLs

• Vocabulary Acquisition was not a focus in sessions
• Vocabulary was supported indirectly, usually as it came up in written context
• Words that were introduced were usually general academic words, signal words
• Metacognitive skills absent in the study
• Words were introduced through social context but not internalized
Recommendations For Volunteer Tutoring Programs

• Pre-screening of Tutors
• More communication between teachers and tutors
• Emphasis on explicit vocabulary learning
• Consistent space
• Students bring material
• Tutor Reflections
• Student Reflections
Recommendations for Future Research

- Longitudinal study with lower-level ELLs
- Same tutors working with the same students, collect data about motivation, comfort, outcomes
- Adolescent understandings of their learning gaps
- Specific subject interactions
- Tutors perceptions of vocabulary compared with tutoring method
- Students perception of vocabulary
Recommendations for Practice

• Using small amounts of the students first language (L1) in tutoring could be beneficial

• Field Experiences that include tutoring ELL adolescents in one-on-one settings could be really valuable

• Routine opportunities for one-on-one discussion and academic support for adolescent ELLs is recommended.
Impact

• First to explore volunteer tutors, adolescent ELL students, and academic vocabulary acquisition

• Findings will inform interventions to support the work of volunteer tutors, the academic success of ELL students, and vocabulary acquisition
Thank you!

• For your support, guidance, attention, and questions.
• I appreciate your willingness to be a part of my committee.