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# 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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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.

Sarah Renee Edwards Moore

Literacies and Learners

April 15, 2016

# 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

# Results

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.