

Teacher Candidates Learning from English Learners: Constructing Concepts of Language and Culture in Tuesday's Tutors After-School Program

By Shanan Fitts & Lisa A. Gross

In teacher preparation programs across the United States, early field experiences are considered to be an effective method of providing teacher candidates with opportunities to observe and interact with children (National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE, 2010). These practicum arrangements assist candidates in developing pedagogical skills, a sense of self as teacher, and positive dispositions towards different groups of children (NCATE, 2008). With the changing demographics of the U.S. population, many state certification agencies require candidates to work with children from culturally diverse populations.

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Such formative opportunities are designed to broaden candidates' socio-cultural understanding and shape their ability to address the needs of diverse learners. Lucas and Grinberg (2008) note that research conducted on teacher preparation for diversity often treats ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity "as one largely undifferentiated set of factors" (p. 606). These authors propose an examination of the specific types of knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for teaching children who are bilingual and English learners (ELs). This study examines the growth of preservice teacher

candidates' beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about school-age ELs in the context of an early field experience.

Developing Culturally and Linguistically Competent Teachers

The need to prepare mainstream, general education teachers to instruct language minority students has been thoroughly documented by a number of researchers (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Garcia, Arias, Harris Murri, & Serna, 2010; Lucas & Grinberg, 2008). Recommendations for preservice candidates include the need to: study a second language; develop knowledge of language learning and linguistics; understand the socio-political aspects of language use; and interact with children, families, and communities with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008). The present study addresses these recommendations with particular emphasis on the need for interactions with linguistically diverse individuals.

Most studies that explore teacher beliefs towards bilingual students and ELs show that teacher candidates hold negative, simplistic, and often erroneous views of linguistic diversity (Byrnes, Kiger, & Manning, 1997; de Courcy, 2007; Katz, Scott, & Hadjioannou, 2009; Marx, 2000; Pappamihel, 2007). Katz and her colleagues surveyed 306 preservice teachers in the United States and Cyprus and found that participants had negative beliefs about bilingualism and non-standard dialects. Interestingly, they noted no significant difference between bilingual and monolingual respondents. Other studies have demonstrated that proficiency in a second language can mediate teacher attitudes (Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Katz et al. (2009) concluded that training in diversity issues and exposure to non-dominant language varieties had a positive effect on teacher candidates' attitudes towards linguistic difference. Developing positive attitudes towards linguistic diversity is a foundational pre-requisite for developing effective and appropriate teaching practices (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Ethnographic research has documented the damaging consequences that negative attitudes and low expectations have on the teaching of bilingual and bicultural Latino/a students (Shannon & Escamilla, 1999; Valdés, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). Teachers who have positive attitudes about linguistic diversity are more likely to see their students as capable of academic success (Burant & Kirby, 2002; Marx, 2000) and express higher levels of teaching efficacy with ELs (Karabenick & Noda, 2004).

In many teacher education programs, a common approach to providing exposure to linguistic diversity is through internships and service learning. Studies reveal the benefits of service learning and partnerships between universities and schools in helping candidates develop positive attitudes towards ELs (Bollin, 2007; Pappamihel, 2007; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009). Using Bennett's (1993) framework of intercultural sensitivity, Pappamihel analyzed preservice teachers' attitudes towards EL students over the course of a semester. One hundred-thirty preservice teachers

tutored ESL students and kept a reflective journal. Pappamihel (2007) found that the experience had positive effects on teacher candidates' attitudes and knowledge about diverse learners and suggested that participants were developing cultural sensitivity. Pappamihel asserted that the opportunities to develop relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse individuals made the difference for her participants. Studies on field-based experiences reveal similar outcomes, indicating that preservice teachers can develop intercultural sensitivity, empathy, and insight into culturally appropriate teaching, especially with appropriate scaffolding from university faculty who can assist candidates in connecting the field-based experience to empirical research and theory (Bollin, 2007; Burant & Kirby, 2002; Zainuddin & Moore, 2004).

Teacher candidates often lack knowledge and understanding of the process of second language acquisition and programs designed for ELs, particularly bilingual education (Pappamihel, 2007; Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Zainuddin and Moore (2004) sought to explore ways to improve candidates' understanding of second language acquisition theories. In their study, preservice teachers were asked to keep field notes while tutoring English learners; they then analyzed this information with the researchers' assistance. Participants demonstrated growth in their understandings of the ways ELs use their native language while acquiring a second language and the concept of academic English.

Funds of Knowledge

One important aspect of learning about EL students includes developing an understanding of students' funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; McIntyre, Roseberry, & González, 2001). Funds of knowledge are "strategic bodies of essential information that households need to maintain their well being" (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992, p. 314). These bodies of information, produced over time through social interaction, connect individuals and households to one another forming a social network of knowledge and expertise (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). Access to funds of knowledge is mediated by myriad factors including social class, gender, age, or expertise (González et al., 2005). Moll (2005) urges teachers and researchers to be particularly aware of the ways in which social class influences children's access to community funds of knowledge and teachers' assessment of the value of particular practices. Current conceptualizations of funds of knowledge attend to a broad range of children's social and cultural capital (Yosso, 2005).

In applying the concept of funds of knowledge to teacher preparation and professional development, researchers have realized that studying and recognizing children's social networks and funds of knowledge helps teachers debunk deficit thinking and create more culturally responsive curricula (Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009; McIntyre et al., 2001). In Moll and González's pioneering work (González et al., 1995; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992), researchers worked alongside practicing teachers to model ethnographic interview and observation methods. Participating teachers visited homes and communities to learn about the knowl-

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edge, skills, and social connections used outside the classroom. Teachers then collaborated to construct curricula that drew upon the cultural practices observed, which improved student engagement. Participants reported that the relationships they developed with students and families allowed them to make more personal connections in school, and positively influenced their teaching effectiveness.

Over the past three years, our research team has collected data on the Tuesdays' Tutors after-school tutoring program in an effort to explore how preservice teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards and knowledge about culturally and linguistically diverse children are impacted over time. In an earlier study, we examined preservice teachers' identity formation and role acquisition (Gross, Fitts, Goodson-Espy, & Clark, 2010). It appeared that the candidates' experiences in their tutoring role influenced their perceptions of and attitudes towards English learners; therefore, the present study was designed to further investigate the evolution of preservice teachers' knowledge and beliefs about English learners. The study included two research questions:

1. How did participation in the Tuesdays' Tutors afterschool program influence preservice teachers' beliefs about and attitudes towards children who are bilingual or are identified as English learners?
2. How did participation in the Tuesdays' Tutors afterschool program influence preservice teachers' knowledge of participating K-8 students' funds of knowledge and cultural practices?

Methods

This qualitative study has been framed within a case study design (Creswell, 2006). Participants were enrolled in an introductory teaching course required for admission to the teacher education program at our university. The course covered a broad range of educational topics with at least one class meeting dedicated to demographic shifts in the state's population and the increasing number of English learners (ELs) in the public schools. All sections of this prerequisite course included a field-based component where students worked with school-aged children in some supporting role or teaching context. Participants enrolled in this specific section were paired with an EL student who they tutored once a week in the Tuesdays' Tutors afterschool program. This program had been coordinated by the course instructor in 2005 and, from its inception, had three primary goals: (1) to support ELs in their academic endeavors; (2) to develop preservice teacher candidates' understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity; and (3) to provide a context for exploring professional roles.

The Learning Context of Tuesdays' Tutors

As teacher education faculty, we believe that knowledge, identities, and skills

are developed through joint participation within communities of practice (CoPs) (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In CoPs, novice members develop knowledge and expertise through their interactions with more expert members, an induction process that includes learning the skills, knowledge, discourses, and values embedded within the community of practice. All of the first through eighth-grade students (tutees) who were involved in the tutoring program attended the same school, Hillside Elementary¹ and had been recommended for the program by Hillside's English as a Second Language teacher. In the fall of 2009, when data for this study were collected, there were 14 female tutees and six male; 19 tutees were Mexican-origin and one was European-American. The Mexican-origin Hillside students were seasoned and expert members of the program; 17 of them had participated in the afterschool program previously. As veteran members of the program, the tutees often demonstrated norms for participation, routines, and non-structured activities to the tutors, thereby establishing a reciprocal and collaborative atmosphere. The preservice teachers learned to depend on their tutees as language experts, looking to them for assistance in explicating homework or translating requests for those tutees who were Spanish dominant, just as the tutees relied on their tutors for guidance and academic support.

Although it would have been useful to collect information about the English and Spanish language proficiency levels of our tutees, along with achievement data, at the time of this study, Hillside's principal did not permit this. Our contact with the teachers at the school was quite limited, although the first author communicated regularly with the ESL teacher at Hillside. Nonetheless, the tutees discussed and demonstrated their bilingual and biliterate competencies in various ways over the course of the semester. Many of the tutees stated that although they used Spanish to communicate with their families, they were not literate in Spanish. As one tutee put it, "I can't read Spanish, I grew up here, remember?" Bilingual education is not available in this county; therefore, many of the Tuesdays' Tutors tutees had experienced some amount of subtractive bilingualism.

Preservice teachers were paired with one EL student for a series of ten weekly tutoring sessions. Each Tuesday afternoon, tutees were transported from the local school to the university. The pairs spent the initial ten minutes conversing informally during "snack and unpack" time. Then depending on the tutee's need, 20-to-60 minutes were dedicated to academic support. Upon completion of homework, the students and their university tutors engaged in about 20 minutes of physical activity which often included walks around campus, soccer, football, kickball or other non-competitive games. For the remaining hour of the lab, the tutors and their tutees worked on individual or small group thematic projects. During Fall 2009, the group engaged in a multimedia poetry project called *Where I'm From* (Lyon, n.d.). The purpose of *Where I'm From* (WIF) is to bring students' lives and voices into the classroom (Christensen, 2001) and encourage reflection on one's cultural, linguistic, and social origins.

Data Collection

Eighteen preservice teacher candidates consented to participate in this study; five of the participants were male and 13 were female. Data were collected through survey instruments and focus group interviews. Participants completed an initial survey at the beginning of the semester in early August, a midterm survey in mid-October, and a final exit survey in early December. Focus group interviews were conducted during the last week of the semester. Survey items and interview questions can be found in the Appendix.

The initial survey was administered prior to the start of the Tuesdays' Tutors program, and included demographic items, as well as open-ended questions about participants' language learning backgrounds, prior experiences tutoring children, understandings of English learners, and approaches for connecting with culturally and linguistically diverse children. Fifteen participants responded. This initial survey had been piloted with two groups of teacher candidates in 2008-2009, and had been revised to include questions about the teaching candidates' program area interest, career preference, and language background. The midterm survey, constructed and piloted in Fall 2008, included six open-ended questions specific to the participants' relations with the tutee, their perceptions of ELs, and strategies used during tutoring sessions. Thirteen participants completed this survey. The exit survey mirrored the initial survey and was completed by 12 participants after the last class meeting.

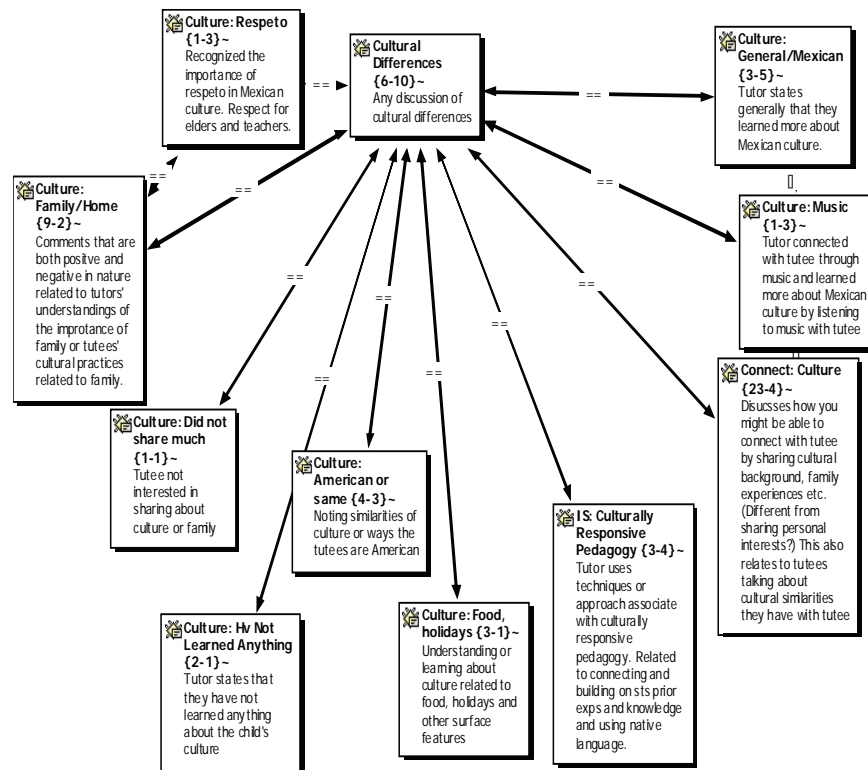
In addition to survey data, three focus group interviews were conducted during the final Tuesdays' Tutors session. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes; 17 preservice teachers participated. The focus groups afforded candidates a venue for reflection and discussion as individuals shared their experiences and personal growth through participation in the program. The interviews were an important source of triangulation for our survey data (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) and were essential for drawing out participants' insights. Nine participants completed all three surveys and participated in a focus group interview; these data sets allowed for an examination of growth over time. Finally, the first author attended the after-school program every week and kept an informal reflection journal. The credibility of our findings and interpretations were enhanced by this prolonged exposure to our research site and participants.

Data Analysis

Since the documents and artifacts collected for analysis generated mostly qualitative data, our process of analysis was primarily bottom up and proceeded from item analysis, to pattern analysis, to identifying the key themes in the data as a whole (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). In order to safeguard the rights of participants, all data analysis began after grades were submitted. The first author transcribed the focus group interviews, and entered the primary documents into a qualitative software analysis program (Atlas/ti v. 6). First, we analyzed the initial survey data and developed our code list. We coded, organized, and tabulated the categorical

data collected, such as sex, major, and language skills. Next, using a subset of the data, both researchers began to code the open-ended items on the initial survey, identifying and developing codes as we went. We then met to discuss our initial impressions and to develop a descriptive code list, which we used to begin coding the remaining survey responses. We conferred regularly, discussing, refining, and establishing code families (pattern codes) that were representative of the patterns and relationships in participants' responses (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 57). Code families relevant to the present study included: Challenges, Connections, Culture, Cultural Differences, Language, Perceptions of ELs, Prior Experience of Tutor, Popular Culture, Relationships, and Tutee Attributes. Figure 1 illustrates the code family for "Cultural Differences."

Figure 1
Network View of "Cultural Differences Code Family"



This figure displays codes included in the code family "Cultural Differences." Each node is a code. Numbers in parentheses signify frequency and density of the code. For example, by looking at this network view, the reader can see that the code Culture: Family/Home was used to code nine responses and is linked to two other codes.

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Initially, we coded each data collection point holistically, considering the group as a whole. After item and pattern analysis had been conducted on all data sets, interpretive assertions about key themes in the data resulted (Miles & Huberman, 1994; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). We tested assertions across data sources and compared individuals' responses over time to gain insight into changes or growth experienced over the course of the semester. For example, responses to Q1 on the midterm survey, "How have your interactions with the tutees impacted your perceptions about ESL learners?" and Q1 and Q2 on the exit survey were compared to the initial survey responses to discern changes in participants' perceptions of English learners. To examine growth in participants' understanding of ELs' cultural practices and funds of knowledge, responses to midterm Q2, "What have you learned about the language and culture of these students?" and focus interview data were compared to the participants' initial survey responses. By analyzing participants' responses over the course of the semester, the researchers were able to explore how (and if) the relations established between tutor and tutee had influenced participants' initial knowledge and beliefs regarding ELs' cultural practices.

Limitations

Neither author taught this course at the time of the study, though both had been previously involved in teaching the course or supporting the after-school program. Our interest in preservice teachers' initial perceptions of ELs had drawn us to Tuesdays' Tutors and provided a purposeful sampling group, albeit one of convenience. We worked closely with the course instructor and engaged in numerous informal conversations with her about her teaching philosophy, her thoughts about the program, and her students' learning. We did not observe her classroom teaching, examine her curricula, or collect the weekly reflection journals that the teacher candidates completed as a requirement for their course. Data collected for this study were not course assignments and were completed by participants on a voluntary basis. According to the instructor, very little course content was specifically focused on English learners, linguistic diversity, or second language acquisition. The course instructor and the first author facilitated the afterschool program during the data collection period.

Findings

Beliefs about English Learners

Our first research question explores the changes that we observed in the preservice teachers' knowledge about bilingual and bicultural children, language learning, and EL students' educational needs. At the outset of the field experience, survey data revealed that participants had limited personal experience in terms of interacting with people who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Although more than half of the respondents indicated that they had previous interactions with bilingual

people (see Table 1), the extent of these interactions was limited. While a number of respondents stated that they had attended school with Hispanics or individuals who spoke Spanish, only three had established relations with or participated in social activities with culturally or linguistically diverse individuals.

A primary theme emerging from preliminary data revealed a tendency for the respondents to describe ELs as people who were outside their own social networks:

A lot of the kids that went to my high school were bilingual because we live in a farming community, but I don't have much experience with learning their language. (TC442)

In high school, there were students in my classes who were bilingual. They had difficulties understanding the lessons. They had to go to tutoring to improve their academic skills. (TC553)

I was never really exposed to people like that in school. We were never in the same classes; I think they kept them apart from everyone else. Except I do remember one time in high school a Hispanic with little English was in my Spanish class... (TC876)

Table 1
Participant Characteristics

			Male	Female
Major area of academic study	Secondary Education	English	-	2
		Biology	-	1
		History	3	2
	Elementary Education	Elementary	1	8
		Communication Disorders	-	1
	Non-teaching major	Marketing	1	1
		Tourism	-	1
Language skills		Latin	2	2
		Spanish	1	5
		French	-	1
		None	3	7
Prior tutoring experience		Yes	2	9
		No	1	2
Prior experience with English learners or bilingual people		Yes	3	6
		No	1	7
Plan to teach		Yes	3	10
		Maybe	1	1

Note. The category of language skills includes two survey items: (1) languages spoken;)2) language learning experiences.

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The participants' use of "their" "them" and "people like that," discloses social distance between themselves and their bilingual high school peers, indicating that the bilingual students were not a part of the teacher candidates' social communities. The final two excerpts capture negative perceptions that may develop when young people are not afforded opportunities to interact and establish relationships with people from different social and cultural backgrounds. In addition to viewing English learners as outsiders, preservice candidates typically identified bilingual or EL students as Hispanic. All fifteen respondents predicted the biggest challenge of the tutoring experience was to be difficulties in communication. Only two of the fifteen respondents explicitly indexed more positive attitudes towards English learners at the outset of the program, describing them as smart, capable individuals who had a good command of English.

By the end of the semester, exit survey and focus group interview data revealed a notable shift in participants' beliefs, as more positive views of bilingualism and of the K-8 students' social and intellectual capabilities were expressed. All of the preservice teachers indicated that bilingual children were just as intellectually capable as children who speak English as a first language. For example one tutor, who saw English learners as struggling learners in her initial survey response, described her tutee as "enthusiastic and eager to begin her homework. From working with M., I have learned that a teacher needs to be creative... M. is an ESL student, but she learns very quickly" (TC553). Participants reflected on previously held negative beliefs, noting such assumptions were often based on lack of social experiences with ELs.

Participants' responses on mid-term and exit surveys included much more enthusiastic endorsements of bilingualism and of ELs in general. For example, one participant stated that "the experience has changed my preconceived notion that working with ESL students is accompanied by difficulty in communication. I was surprised that the majority of the students speak English quite well" (TC409). Another candidate (TC950), who had little prior knowledge about ELs, wrote that the tutoring experience "has really showed me how smart ESL learners are. It seems like it would be so difficult to understand two different languages and cultures at such a young age." There were also cases in which participants' exclamations regarding the intelligence of the ELs may have indicated that the child's intellect came as a surprise. This finding may suggest a deep-seated deficit view of this population on the part of these tutors. Based on our conversations with the course instructor, candidates likely knew that they were not supposed to think that EL or bilingual children were less intelligent, but this assumption was evident in comments throughout the midterm, post survey and the focus group interviews. Participating in the Tuesdays' Tutors program did result in opportunities to re-examine and re-evaluate potentially limited or deficit views of English learners, and develop a better understanding of ELs as bilingual and bicultural people.

By the end of the semester, every participant stated that previous beliefs and

knowledge about English learners had developed further or changed. There were two important (and sometimes overlapping) themes resulting from the candidates' interactions with EL children. Many respondents concluded that children who are bilingual (or learning English as a second language) were the same as all other children; however, a small number also concluded that there were social advantages associated with being bilingual. In some cases, participants' responses indicated that they held both of these beliefs.

Specific to the first theme, exit survey data revealed that about half of the respondents described English learners as "normal" or just like other children. This sentiment was also evident during our focus group interviews: "I think even though they have their own unique culture I think it's important to know that they are all equally kids, and (like we are) learning in our teaching class and ed psych, it's universal the stages that kids go through" (TC950). Thus some preservice teachers had moved from presuming that EL children would be different, and possibly deficient at the beginning of the semester, to perceiving ELs as the same as "normal," monolingual English-speaking children. This does represent a shift in perception; although it could be argued that this point of view is ethnocentric, glossing over and minimizing difference (Bennett, 1993; Pappamihel, 2007). The assertion that all children are the same may allow preservice candidates to attribute academic, behavioral, or social difficulties to the individual student, rather than to social inequity, or a lack of teaching expertise or intercultural competence on the part of the tutor.

Although many participants emphasized the similarities between their tutee and other school-aged children, some individuals pointed out that becoming bilingual confers both intellectual and social benefits. Data suggests this group of participants demonstrated an understanding that bilingualism promotes increased mental flexibility, a claim posited by researchers of bilingual individuals (Peal & Lambert, 1962; Bialystok & Majumder, 1998). The following excerpt exemplifies these nascent understandings:

By working with my tutee I have learned a lot about ESL students. My tutee has a very good grasp of both English and Spanish, making it easier for him to fit into both English- speaking communities along with being able to converse with Spanish speaking people. This gives him a great advantage in communicating his ideas and will help him with networking later in life. Being able to speak both languages fluently is a very valuable skill that not all of the other tutees have. (MT, TC414)

Another participant related his observations about the cognitive benefits of bilingualism thusly:

I've learned to definitely not underestimate a kid and their abilities just because they sound like they can't speak English well.... Sometimes I would help Luis, who can't speak English very well, and like today I was helping him with his math and I was surprised by how quickly he got some of the math problems and I had to tell myself, I shouldn't be surprised, math is sort of a universal concept, but just not to underestimate kids and guess that they're not going to be able to

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understand. Because a lot of these kids, because they know two languages are actually really quick at picking up on a lot of things and you have to realize that. (Focus Group, TC950)

For many of these preservice teachers, the Tuesdays' Tutors program was their first experience interacting with a bilingual child. Reflections clearly demonstrated that the tutoring experience had a positive impact on their beliefs and knowledge about bilingualism, which became more nuanced and positive over time. There was evidence that tutors began to see the tutees as bilingual rather than simply limited in their English, and some participants recognized the social and cognitive advantages associated with being bilingual.

Perceptions of English Language Competence

In addition to developing more positive dispositions regarding English learners, many participants gained greater insight into the concept of academic English (Cummins, 2003) as they worked with tutees on reading, writing, and homework assignments. Based on our observations of and interactions with the candidates and course instructor during Tuesdays' Tutors, it was evident that the concept of academic and social language (Cummins, 2003) had been introduced prior to the start of the tutoring program. Over the course of the semester, participants observed the academic language demands placed on ELs in school (Bailey, 2007). As they assisted tutees with their homework, participants observed the tutees' difficulties with discipline specific language, reading content area texts, and academic writing. This resulted in a greater awareness of the kinds of English needed for success in school. One participant (TC519), who tutored a very outgoing and articulate eighth grader, wrote on the exit survey "how hard the English language is because it is so backwards... no matter how long someone has known English, there are still little things to learn." In our focus group interview, she expanded on this realization, describing how learning English extends beyond conversational proficiency:

(My tutee) speaks it perfectly fine. You can tell when she's writing something in formal English, there are certain things that she can't grasp... it's things you never think about 'cause I was born speaking English. And she's been here for so long; it's really all she knows, but there's still the language; like she's still learning to this day.

Tutors began to recognize that EL students' command of interpersonal communication skills in English were necessary, but not sufficient for achieving high levels of academic success. Several tutors noted that the children struggled with their reading both in terms of having sufficient vocabulary knowledge to comprehend text and the ability to sound out unfamiliar words in English. This insight was particularly salient among those tutors working with children in upper elementary and middle grades. Many of these same tutors expressed the idea that part of the problem was motivating and engaging the student; something which required an effort on the

part of the teacher to learn about the child and develop a trusting relationship with him or her.

Learning about Culture: Funds of Knowledge

We also examined our data for evidence of changes or growth in participants' understandings related to the K-8 Latino students' cultural practices, social networks, and funds of knowledge. Preservice teachers gained different insights with relation to cultural differences, which can be grouped into three main themes: (1) tutors noted cultural differences and began to recognize their importance; (2) tutors saw no cultural differences, perceived the children as Americanized; and (3) tutors began to articulate an understanding of biculturalism or cultural hybridity (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejada, 1999). For most participants, these orientations were not mutually exclusive and often overlapped; in fact there were times when the tutors appeared to contradict themselves. This leads us to conclude that participation in the after-school program gave teacher candidates a fruitful context in which to reflect on, revisit, and revise their knowledge and beliefs about children's cultural identities and practices.

One cultural value that the majority of candidates expressed as important to the tutees was family. Tutors noted not only the significance of these family relationships, but articulated how the tutees' notions, definition, and valuing of family were qualitatively different from their own. Tutors noticed that the K-8 students felt and demonstrated love and allegiance to one another and that they had collaborative or inclusive ways of engaging in tasks. Tutors observed that family included the other children in the after-school program. Some of the university tutors remarked upon tutees' strong social ties with one another and recognized these ties as an asset:

I think family is really, really important in their culture. I've learned that too. And it's not just the small nuclear family that most of us are used to, but extended family, grandmothers and aunts, the uncle, the cousins, and then so many of them are related to each other in this program so that's kind of an interesting twist. Cause you've got aunts and cousins and nieces and sisters and brothers. So it's kind of its own little support network; so that was cool to learn about. (Focus Group, TC519)

These kids connect like a family, even if they don't like each other. Because they speak a different language they act as a family and stick up for one another all of the time. I find that very interesting because American children do not do this. (Focus Group, TC518)

Along with noting cultural differences, tutors described the ways that they were able to use discussions of cultural similarities and differences to build trusting relationships with their tutees. One child, who was a more recent arrival to the U.S., developed a close and positive relationship with his tutor, who was proficient in Spanish and had personal connections to Mexico. In the focus group interview, this tutor (TC014) explained that she deeply enjoyed the process of establishing a

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relationship her tutee and felt that their communication improved significantly over the course of the semester. The tutor attributed initial difficulties in communicating to their reserved personalities as opposed to language differences, and described the ways that she demonstrated interest in his life:

My cousin is married to someone from the same area of Mexico as him, and I was telling him that and I had a picture of my nephew, who kind of looks like him. Like both have like big cheeks and stuff, and I was showing him the picture and I think that kind of let him know that I'm not totally ignorant to his culture and his background and stuff. He was a little more open with me. He really didn't know what to think of me at first. So I kind of liked that, and he told me about his family and his sister. I mean it was kind of something simple, but it really broke down the barrier between us.

This tutor's improved relationship with her tutee eased communication and led to a more favorable assessment of the child's language abilities. Previous studies indicate that proficiency in second languages can increase a teacher's ability to empathize and connect with a student who is learning English as a second language (Youngs & Youngs, 2001), and, in this case, Spanish proficiency was certainly a mediating factor. However, other tutors without such language skills or background knowledge also learned the value of developing trust with their tutees as a prerequisite for successful teaching and learning.

While some participants indicated that they had gained insights about the cultural practices of the tutees, other tutors felt they learned nothing at all about the children's culture. These responses represented a steadfast commitment to the idea that the children were absolutely Americanized and therefore, did not have cultural practices. From midterm to focus group interviews, one candidate (TC494) maintained:

I have not learned much about the language or culture. My tutee is very much immersed in our culture with the exception of speaking Spanish. She has the typical teen crushes on the teen stars and she likes pop music. The only cultural thing I notice is when she and her friends speak Spanish to each other. They do not do it often, only when they are joking around with each other. (MT)

Such generalizations about the Americanization of ELs are concerning and demonstrate a minimization of difference. This participant's comments may reflect a lack of insight into the ways that the tutees used Spanish in the after-school program to reinforce social ties and accomplish tasks.

While tutors noticed that their tutees engaged in a wide variety of cultural practices, they typically identified these as being either "American" (listening to Mylie Cyrus) or Mexican or Hispanic (speaking Spanish with friends in social spaces). Of interest was the continued positioning of culture as exotic or foreign; "American" cultural practices tended to be normalized, and therefore not cultural at all. Still, the participants were developing an understanding of the tutees' identities as hybrid, situated, and complex:

And then like they were born in Mexico, but lived there a very short time. Like Elisa doesn't even remember living in Mexico, she just knows that's where she was born. Yet she'll still say, Mexico is where I'm from, Mexico is where I belong, Mexico is my home. Even though she's lived here most of her life. (Focus Group, TC114)

Another candidate wrote:

I have seen their interests and learned about customs within their families and smaller communities. These students still function and learn wonderfully in their school environment, yet still stay true to themselves and their culture and customs. (MT, TC317)

Though it was evident that almost all of candidates gained greater insight into the cultural practices and values of the tutees, for the most part, these insights related to surface aspects of culture such as different foods or holidays.

Discussion and Implications

Over the course of the semester, most of the preservice teachers participating in the Tuesdays' Tutors afterschool program developed positive personal relationships with young people identified as "English language learners" by their school system. As a result, candidates gained insight into the children's academic strengths and needs, their social networks, and their funds of knowledge. Over time, the participants developed more realistic and positive attitudes towards bilingual youth and gained greater insight into the complexity of learning a second language. Comparable to findings in recent studies (Bollin, 2007; Pappamihiel, 2007; Zainuddin & Moore, 2004), we noted that the opportunity to participate in a field-based experience with bilingual children, in conjunction with on-going discussion and reflection, resulted in a better understanding of basic concepts related to second language acquisition (SLA). Those participants who tutored older students were able to observe the different dimensions of language proficiency and learned that to succeed in school and shed the label of English learner, bilingual children must acquire specific and complex forms of academic English (Cummins, 2003; Bailey, 2007). According to the course instructor, these candidates had learned the concepts of basic interpersonal communication skills and academic language proficiency; still, most inferred that children labeled as ELs would have difficulties communicating effectively in English. This preconceived notion clearly changed over the course of the semester, and supports the notion that the preservice teachers benefitted from being able to observe and apply theoretical concepts in practical settings (Zainuddin & Moore, 2004).

In addition, more positive attitudes towards bilingualism and an appreciation for the tutees' linguistic capital evolved over time. Yosso (2005) argues that White, middle-class, English-speaking teachers need to recognize, value, and utilize Latino/a youth's "cultural community wealth" (p. 77). Linguistic capital, the "intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in

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more than one language and/or style” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) is one aspect of this cultural wealth. Yosso notes that Latino/a students’ linguistic capital is frequently overlooked by White teachers and thus not valued at school. In the ten weeks of Tuesdays’ Tutors, many participants did observe bilingualism as an asset and came to understand that bilingualism confers cognitive and social benefits. Participants observed how bilingual children assisted their peers, and the tutors, by using both languages while addressing academic tasks. If programs such as Tuesdays’ Tutors are to make a lasting impact on candidates’ attitudes and teaching practices, teacher educators must do more to show candidates how to leverage the linguistic capital of bilingual children in mainstream classroom settings.

Also worthy of discussion is how more nuanced understandings of the Latino K-8 tutees’ cultural identities and the funds of knowledge developed from these weekly interactions. When asked what had been learned about their tutees’ cultural practices, many candidates stated that extended familial relationships and ties to Mexico were integral aspects of the tutees’ cultural identities. Only a small number of participants discussed cultural hybridity in children’s cultural practices; most normalized U.S. culture and labeled children’s cultural practices as either Mexican or American. In fact, some candidates perceived this group of students as generally Americanized. Tutors maintaining such a perspective might believe that it is unnecessary, and perhaps even detrimental, to alter approaches to teaching or interacting with ELs. Our findings in this area bear further investigation. It would be an unintended consequence of the Tuesdays’ Tutors after-school program if preservice teachers left with a strengthened belief in one-size-fits all teaching (Harper & DeJong, 2004).

The tutors’ own funds of knowledge appeared to mediate the development of positive tutor-tutee relationships and communication. For example, one participant’s (TC014) ability to explore connections between herself and her tutee enhanced the value of the tutoring experience on both an academic and personal level. More common for the tutors however, was the realization that they were able to establish positive and productive relationships with their tutees through extended conversations, patience, and sharing about their own families. This finding underscores the importance of reflecting on how our own life experiences and cultural practices intersect with or compare to the experiences of those who we teach (Marx, 2000) and corroborates the importance of establishing trust as part of the process of learning about a child’s funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005).

Given the paucity of bilingual teacher candidates and people of color enrolled in our program, Tuesdays’ Tutors may perpetuate the notion that White, middle-class, English-speakers people are appropriate models for underprivileged children of color because of their access to the funds of knowledge valued and leveraged in schools. Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011) argue that that there is an over-emphasis in the research literature on helping White teachers “recognize” the funds of knowledge of students of color, but not enough research focused on how teachers might help

students “convert or transform various funds of knowledge into other more tangible kinds of capital (e.g. better grades, higher college enrollment rates, higher civic participation)” (p. 167). We agree with this assertion, but do believe that for many preservice teachers, the ability to “recognize” funds of knowledge as cultural capital is still an important first step. Future research might take a more longitudinal approach in order to see how these teachers use this knowledge to improve ELs’ academic achievement.

One of the primary limitations of our study relates to the extent of coursework dedicated to linguistic diversity, second language acquisition, and effective instruction for bilingual children in our teacher preparation program. The preservice teachers involved in this study had minimal preparation to work with language learners. As many researchers have noted, teacher educators cannot be so naïve as to think that the beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge sought will miraculously accrue as a result of experience alone (Burant & Kirby, 2002; Gallego, 2001). The Tuesdays’ Tutors field experience was developed to provide teaching candidates with experience working with English learners, yet was the field-based component of a general survey course on the teaching profession. Candidates would have benefitted more from their participation in the Tuesdays’ Tutors program if it had been connected to a course on second language acquisition and teaching ELs.

Even with these limitations, we believe that the potential benefits of field-based learning opportunities outweigh the drawbacks and limitations. Such field-based experiences afford developing teaching candidates avenues for self-reflection while positively impacting their confidence as teachers (Pappamihel, 2007). With the country’s changing demographics, future teachers need multiple, prolonged opportunities working with diverse learners in both formal and informal settings. Understanding students’ cultural and social capital, must include interactions and experiences with diverse populations outside of the schoolyard—where students’ daily actions and social networks are lived, established and valued.

Note

¹ All names of people and places have been changed to protect the confidentiality of participants.

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Appendix

Survey Instruments & Interview Questions

Initial Survey

1. Sex:
2. Age in years:
3. Academic Major:
4. Do you plan to go into teaching? If yes, please indicate what age group you think you want to work with:
5. If you answered yes to 4, please briefly describe the kind of school or teaching context you would prefer (location; urban, rural, suburban; demographics; other):
6. Do you have any prior teaching or tutoring experience? If so please describe/ list briefly:
7. Do you speak any languages other than English? Please list and indicate proficiency:
8. Please briefly describe your own language learning experiences.
9. Please describe your previous experiences with teaching or going to school with people who are bilingual or who are learning English as a second language.
10. What do you think you are going to be doing in the after-school program?
11. What are you looking forward to about this practicum?
12. What do you think might be a challenge (or challenges) for you?
13. During our Tuesdays' Tutors lab, you may have the opportunity to work with a child who is bilingual or who is acquiring English as a second language. When you think of children who are identified as English language learners, what comes to mind?
14. What are some ways in which you can connect to a student who might have a different cultural or linguistic background from your own?
15. What do you see as your role in a tutoring experience?

Midterm Survey Instrument

1. How have your interactions with the tutees impacted your perceptions about ESL learners?
2. What have you learned about the language and culture of the students enrolled in the program?
3. How would you describe your relationship with the tutees? What actions have you taken to establish rapport and trust with your tutee?
4. Describe the curricular expectations of your tutee (or others at your table). What content knowledge and skills do you see most often emphasized? (Think about the homework worksheets and the expectations of assignments you've helped with. What are students asked to work on for homework?)
5. List the instructional strategies you have used in assisting students with homework or other activities. Then explain how you know which strategy to use at what time. (In other words, when Student A struggles with a math problem I usually do Instructional Strategy B because . . .)

Exit Survey

1. During our Tuesdays' Tutors lab, you may have had the opportunity to work with a child who is bilingual or who is acquiring English as a second language. When you think of children who are identified as English language learners, what comes to mind?
2. During the lab, you had the chance to get to know a child with (possibly) a different cultural and linguistic background from yourself. What are some ways in which you can learn about and connect to a student who might have a different cultural or linguistic background from your own?
3. Now that you have had a chance to be a tutor, what do you see as your role or roles in a tutoring experience?

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. One of the purposes of the lab is to help you think about whether you want to be a teacher. Do you think that participating in the lab has helped you to develop as a teacher and if so, how?
2. What do you think are some of the roles that you've had to take on as a tutor?
3. How would you describe your tutee? If you had to describe your tutee to someone else, what are some things that come to mind?
4. Could you tell me about something that you have enjoyed in working with your tutee or an experience that you have had?
5. What was challenging for you in working with your tutee?
6. What advice you would give new tutors coming into this tutoring setting?
7. What have you learned about working with students who are acquiring English as a second language?
8. What have you learned about the different cultural backgrounds of our students?