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# What Does it Mean to Tutor? Conceptualizing Tutoring with a Commitment to Social Justice in Preservice Teacher Education

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Blue Technical High School (Blue Tech), a pseudonym, is a new technical high school in which students take community college courses. Other distinctive features of the school include a focus on project-based learning, flexible scheduling, one-to-one computer access, and the opportunity for students to receive industry certifications through real-world, work-based training. Based on data from the school, approximately 58% of students receive free and reduced lunch, and 59% of the students are White, 20% are African American, and 14% are Hispanic. The staff are majority White. Blue Tech is currently in its third year of a partnership with the Round College's (a pseudonym) Secondary Education Program in which preservice teachers tutor students at Blue Tech. The Principal and two teachers at Blue Tech work with the tutoring program and are strong supporters of the partnership with the college's Secondary Education Program. Unlike at most other schools where tutoring occurs at the end of the day, Blue Tech's leaders believe the tutoring experience is so valuable that they have dedicated 1-hour time slots throughout the day to the program. Three Blue Tech people work with the tutoring program: Christa, who teaches English; Ashley, who teaches math; and Edie, the principal of the school. I, Robert, am a faculty member in the Round College who supervises the preservice teachers. Although I have supervised preservice teachers tutoring at other high schools, this was my first year doing so at Blue Tech.

The partnership between Blue Tech and the Secondary Education Program is mutually beneficial to the Blue Tech students and to the preservice teachers' development. The preservice teachers benefit from working one-on-one with a high school student and the Blue Tech students get help with their learning as well as the broader support of a mentor.

Round College's 2-year teacher preparation program includes a sequenced field experience every semester, and the tutoring field experience occurs in the second semester. In the first semester, preservice teachers are placed at two different types of high school with the goals of learning about high school teaching, and high school students. In the second semester, preservice teachers provide in-depth tutoring to one student. In the third semester, preservice teachers have a field placement in their content area in which they observe, teach mini-lessons, and teach a small number of 90-minute lessons. Finally, their last semester is a full-time internship.

In preparation for tutoring, three education faculty members, all of whom are White (i.e., myself, the secondary program coordinator, and the director of the Education Lab who oversees the Round College's tutoring programs) met on campus with the 15 preservice teachers to go over the goals, describe course assignments, and provide information about Blue Tech. The preservice teachers were overwhelmingly White and there were approximately equal numbers of men and women. The faculty explained that tutoring would provide an opportunity to work in-depth with a high school student and noted the focus of the tutoring would vary depending on each student's needs and could include helping the tutee with content knowledge, getting organized, or developing writing skills. We stressed the importance of creating trust and allowing time with their tutee to build a relationship. However, our explanation of tutoring was not explicitly grounded in any theory or praxis. For example, in preparation for tutoring, no consideration was given to how the race, class, or gender of the tutors or the tutees might have affected tutoring.

The tutors and tutees were matched in the following way. Ashley and Christa identified students they thought would benefit from tutoring. Students' names, availability, and, in a few cases, notes of particular need were sent to the three faculty members at the college, who made the placements. Frequently, placements were made based on the availability of preservice teacher and the Blue Tech student.

The importance of the racial and gender backgrounds of tutors and tutees (See Table 1) was only recognized after the tutoring had begun when two tutors, Amanda and Christy, began to surface issues that possibly related to gender or racial identity. Pseudonyms are used for tutors and tutees.

The 10-week tutoring program, which involved two 1-hour tutoring sessions each week, was unfortunately reduced to 6 weeks because of COVID-19 restrictions. On the first visit to Blue Tech, the teachers and principal provided the preservice teachers with a 30-minute orientation and tour of the school. The preservice teachers had to submit a lesson plan for their tutoring that was reviewed by staff in the Education Lab. At the end of each week, the preservice teachers wrote

**Table 1:** Racial and Gender Backgrounds of Tutors and Tutees

| Pair | Tutor | Race | Gender | Tutee | Race | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Kaden | White | Male | Nick | White | Male |
| 2 | Maggie | White | Female | Alexis | White | Female |
| 3 | John | Multiracial | Male | Luke | White | Male |
| 4 | Brian | White | Male | Carlos | Hispanic | Male |
| 5 | Eddie | White | Male | Barry | White | Male |
| 6 | Frank | White | Male | James | White | Male |
| 7 | Henry | White | Male | Darius | African American | Male |
| 8 | Christy | White | Female | Maya | African American | Female |
| 9 | Paula | White | Female | Destiny | African American | Female |
| 10 | Amanda | White | Female | Ruby | African American | Female |
| 11 | Laura | White | Female | Chloe | African American | Female |
| 12 | Rachel | White | Female | Haley | White | Female |
| 13 | David | White | Male | Will | White | Male |
| 14 | Lola | Multiracial | Female | Ida | African American | Female |
| 15 | Molly | White | Female | Bree | White | Female |

a one-page reflection on their tutoring experience to include the lesson's objectives; the activities they used; an evaluation of whether they met the objectives; and what they learned about their tutees, themselves as tutors, and the process of tutoring. They were also encouraged to include any connections to the instructional design course in which they were currently enrolled as well as prior education courses.

## Preservice Teachers' Experience of Tutoring

After my third week of reading the preservice teachers' (i.e., tutors) reflections, I realized there were differences in how they were approaching tutoring. Initially, I identified two approaches. In the first approach, which was evident in the reflections provided by a few of the tutors, tutoring and learning were seen as largely a technical process. The preservice teachers and students worked together on a specific content, task, or skill but with little exploration of their relationship. The second approach also involved working on a specific content task or skill, but attention was also given to creating a caring relationship. The differences in approach were evident both in the preservice teachers' actions (e.g., the importance tutors placed on their weekly tutoring meetings, the thoughtfulness with which they approached tutoring and working with their student) and in their weekly reflections. By about the fourth week, I identified a third approach, in which a small number of tutors who had established caring relationships with their students were exploring connections between their students' identities and their learning. For example, one White female tutor who tutored a female student of color began to explore and help the student with what the tutor described as a lack of self-confidence. The tutor wrote in her reflection that a lack of self-confidence was something she had also experienced during her time in school.

As I recognized these different approaches to tutoring, I realized neither the faculty nor the Blue Tech teachers had discussed what we meant by "tutoring." We had all assumed everyone involved would have a commonsense understanding of tutoring. With this realization, I became concerned about the feedback I was providing to some of the tutors encouraging them to explore how race, gender, and social class influenced their tutees' experiences and particularly whether my ideas about tutoring were consistent with those of our Blue Tech colleagues. I decided to email our three Blue Tech colleagues and asked them to define tutoring. Below are their responses.

> I try to call your students UNCW Partners. Tutor has such a stigma for kids, and when it is said in front of their peers, they hate it. Tutor means someone who is going to guide, support, and sometimes instruct you in all areas of need (mental, spiritual, emotional, and/or academic). (Christa)

> I also think that "mentor" is a better word. From our almost three-year partnership, I've seen amazing relationships built, walls broken down, and trust built—on all accounts. I'm not sure that "tutoring" justifies the work that is being done from your students and ours. (Ashley)

> I usually refer to the tutors as mentors. I believe their most important job is being the person that "sees" the child with whom they are working. Everybody needs to be seen . . . some of the children we select may not feel seen in a classroom setting or maybe even at home. The other important things that tutors do typically follow naturally. (Edie)

It was informative to see how each understood tutoring and how all held a broad view of Blue Tech student development that was more consistent with mentoring than tutoring. Further, even though none of the definitions included explicit mention of race, class, or gender, the references to "seeing the child" and some children "not being seen" affirmed for me the attention given to power and inequality. I tentatively identified the following three approaches/understandings of tutoring. The three approaches build on one another in supporting student development:

- learning is a technical practice (e.g., teaching a skill, concept, or content)
- learning involves caring along with technical practice
- learning combines caring and technical practice with tutor and student seen in a larger socio-political context

In addition to the Blue Tech students' development, the other key goal of the tutoring program was the preservice teachers' development as teachers. I was concerned about those who viewed tutoring largely as a technical practice and those who operated from a caring perspective but did not consider their students' race, class, or gender. Specifically, if preservice teachers were unable to establish a sense of caring or see the importance of some of their students' identities when working in depth with one student, how would they be prepared to support the development of a diverse class of 25-plus students?

## Literature on Tutoring

In reviewing the literature on tutoring, I was interested to learn whether the research included the three understandings of tutoring I had outlined. One of the main findings from a review of the research on preservice teachers tutoring in literacy from 2001–2016 was that all the studies used a commonsense definition of tutoring (Hoffman & Mosley Wetzel, 2017). The authors wrote, "We were surprised to find that not one of the 32 studies we identified provided a conceptual definition of tutoring" (p. 348). The researchers noted most authors seemed to presume that everyone would know what tutoring is and therefore no definition was needed. Even if researchers had not conceptualized tutoring within their studies, I wondered whether there might be examples of studies that had adopted or illustrated one of three approaches to tutoring that I had tentatively outlined.

The definition of tutor is "a person charged with the instruction and guidance of another" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This definition provides some clarity but is still vague. Further, although the definition of tutoring contains a focus on the tutee's development, tutoring programs with preservice

teachers are also expected to benefit the tutors. Studies of preservice teachers tutoring, however, have either focused on the tutees' development or the tutors' development. Rarely are the connections between the two examined (i.e., what type of development for preservice teachers leads to what sort of outcomes for students?).

From their review of 32 studies, Hoffman and Mosley Wetzel (2017) identified the following benefits of tutorials to preservice teachers: teachers experience growth in flexibility, practical knowledge, and confidence in teaching; they provide experiences in building relationships that are central to teaching; and tutorial experiences with a clear structure seem to support preservice teacher learning. Finally, based on their years of experience with tutoring, Hoffman and Mosley Wetzel identified the following three design principles for effective tutorial experiences: "the design and structure of the tutorial experience(s), the intellectual and sociocultural assets and identities of the tutor and tutee(s), and the mediating processes that support growth in a particular context" (p. 359).

## Tutoring as a Technical Practice

Tutoring experiences are often included as an early field experience in teacher education programs. They provide opportunities for preservice teachers to apply what they have learned from their university classes and offer them a gradual introduction to teaching and to developing their teacher identity (Stump, 2010). Stump (2010) reported on a study of 11 preservice teachers and how they planned and conducted weekly math tutoring sessions with fourth graders who had failed the math third-grade state test. In the tutoring sessions, preservice teachers focused on the development of a single student's mathematical understanding. I noted this study as illustrating the first approach to tutoring as no mention was made of the importance of building relationships or of developing caring within the goals of tutoring.

## Tutoring and Caring

The importance of relationships and caring to tutoring was referenced in several studies. Hoffman and Mosley Wetzel (2017) wrote that one of the benefits of tutorials in terms of preservice teacher development is "providing experiences in building relationships that are central to teaching—not just coming to know students but also applying what is learned in relationships to develop curriculum" (p. 354). In describing the relationship between mentor/tutor and child, Fresco and Wertheim (2001) stated, "The situation of helping and the personal relationship which develops are considered the main components of the situation which results in its impact" (p. 4). Learning greater tolerance and empathy for individuals and groups in society are two of the benefits of tutoring for preservice teachers (Fresco and Wertheim, 2001).

The importance of relationships to teaching and specifically the view of teaching as a caring relationship can be attributed to the influential work of Nel Noddings. Noddings (2001) described caring in the following way: a relation between a person giving care and a person receiving that care, the one-caring and the one cared-for. She referred to caring as the one-caring trying to open themselves to the cared-for with full attention to feel what they feel (Noddings, 2001). Kim (2007) described the caring relationship in the following way: "The one-caring listens to the other and takes pleasure or pain in what he or she recounts. She remains present to the cared-for throughout their relation" (p. 259). Other key ideas from Noddings's sense of caring that can be seen as pertinent to tutoring include that teaching occurs within a relation of trust as its foundation; the one-caring teacher engages in the cared-for student's hopes rather than their own; the teacher has a commitment to their students, including the capacity to visualize a student's potential to become better; and the dialogue between teachers and cared-for students "reflects an open-ended common search for understanding, empathy, and appreciation" (Owens & Ennis, 2005, pp. 394–395).

In relation to caring and tutoring, Lysaker et al.'s (2004) conducted a study of reading development in which they explored the importance of the relationship developed between tutor and tutee and specifically the relational qualities that accompany successful tutoring. The authors analyzed the reflective writings of tutors in 10 tutor–student pairs classified as "very successful" or "less successful" based on student achievement assessments. They found "very successful" tutoring pairs were "deeply engaged in the human activity of caring and reciprocity" (p. 21). The authors also noted that in successful pairs, tutors "expressed a deep commitment by envisioning their students' futures in a hopeful manner and engaged in continual revision of their teaching" (p. 21). They concluded that helping tutors with instruction and developing strong positive relationships with their students may increase the benefits for children. Worthy and Patterson's (2001) study of 71 preservice teachers who tutored literacy in a predominantly Hispanic American, low-income school revealed some unexpected insights in relation to race. Working within the framework of caring, the researchers examined the benefits the preservice teachers experience from tutoring. They noted the tutors' strong emotional ties with students resulted in their increased personal satisfaction, learning about teaching, and feelings of responsibility for their student's learning. However, the authors also described a lesson they had not fully anticipated, which was "how establishing caring relationships and getting to know students individually can lead tutors beyond deficit descriptions of children who are not progressing in ways that schools might expect" (p. 337). In a follow up to this statement, the authors noted how, as they were both White and middle class, they had missed some potential opportunities to examine issues of race and class. They noted that they intended to consider these issues in the future.

## Tutoring, Caring, and Social Justice

Theories of caring in education have been criticized for their "acceptance of a predominantly White, middle-class, heterosexual feminine ethic as the basis for a supposedly feminist ethics" (Thompson, 1998, p. 527). Specific concerns include the inadequate attention given to issues of power within caring relationships, the deficit assumptions informing educational theories of care particularly in relation to children of color and the attribution of an ethic of care to women in general (Thompson, 1998).

In her study of exemplary teachers who teach diverse groups of students, Nieto (2006) integrated theories of caring and social justice. She stated:

> These teachers know from firsthand experience that relationships are at the heart of teaching. Care is a key ingredient in good teaching and teachers' relationships with their students make a difference. Caring for students, however, is more than a sentimental emotion. It means having genuine respect for students, including their identities, as well as high expectations and admiration for them. (p. 6)

Nieto described social justice in education as having four components. First, "it challenges, confronts, and disrupts misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes that lead to structural inequality and discrimination based on race, social class, gender, and other social and human differences" (p. 2). Second, it provides all students with the material and emotional resources they need to learn to their full potential. Third, it draws on the talents and strengths students bring to their education and specifically support the "rejection of the deficit perspective that has characterized much of the education of marginalized students" (p. 2). Fourth, it creates a learning environment that promotes critical thinking and supports agency for social change.

Several studies of the educational experiences of students of color have emphasized the importance of valuing students' culture. The recognition that many Latino students who hope to be educated have to navigate institutional barriers and circumvent insensitive marginalization prompted Garza's (2007) study of Latino high school students and their views of a caring teacher. Garza was particularly concerned that behaviors a teacher might define as caring may be viewed differently from the perspective of the students' ethnicity or their immediate needs in the classroom. Though teachers can demonstrate care by taking a genuine interest in getting to know their students beyond the academic setting and developing reciprocal relationships with them (Pang, 2005), if different cultures and languages are represented, caring needs to be culturally responsive (Garza, 2007). Garza identified the following benefits from listening to Latino student voices: helps to remove institutional racism, whether conscious

or unconscious; validates their Latino essence; and echoes a culturally responsive pedagogy to strengthen their academic participation.

In a tutoring program in which preservice teachers were to learn about students' participation in mathematics, Liebenberg, Bosman and Dippenaar (2019) required the preservice teachers to complete an English and a mathematics module underpinned by critical theory. The preservice teachers were also asked to consider their own socialization when entering school communities to tutor learners and were encouraged to respect the knowledge and practices of the learners they met as assets to inform their teaching (Liebenberg et al., 2019). The afterschool, one-on-one tutoring program occurred in weekly meetings over a period of 10 months and involved students in poor socioeconomic communities. The students who received tutoring were identified by their teachers as top achievers in English and mathematics. The authors examined the preservice teachers' reflective dialogues from 1-hour focus group sessions and concluded, "There were opportunities to critically reflect on key elements of pedagogy from tutoring, but preservice teachers needed support in challenging assumptions they have of learners, and what it means to engage them explicitly" (p. 29).

## Methods

The 15 preservice teachers wrote weekly one-page reflections on their tutoring experience. However, the data analyzed in this study were taken only from their final papers, which consisted of three parts: a description of their student, the process of tutoring, and what they learned from the experience of tutoring. The preservice teachers were given several prompts to consider in writing their final paper, including how they went about developing a relationship; their goals for tutoring; if they reached out to their students' teachers; and how race, class, or gender affected their students' experience of school as well as how their own race, class, or gender affected the tutoring relationship.

Christa and I both separately read all the papers while engaging in a process of open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). After the data were coded, we reread the papers to begin identifying themes. We compared the themes to reach consensus. We then considered each theme in relation to each of the papers. This process helped to establish interrater reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The themes, including the number of times they were identified, are listed in Table 2.

Two major themes emerged from the data: (a) preservice teachers' approaches to tutoring and (b) preservice teachers' insights about tutoring. Table 2 includes the major themes and subthemes.

## Findings

The findings from the study are presented starting with Theme 1 and its subthemes, followed by Theme 2 and its subthemes.

### Theme 1: Preservice Teachers' Approaches to Tutoring

#### *Developing Relationships*

Nearly all the tutors described how they built relationships with their students. Some relationships tutors described as occurring fairly naturally and without a lot of effort. One White male tutor Kaden described his experience with student Nick, a White male: "I understood that building a relationship with Nick was the most critical part of my field experience. Our common interests and personalities allowed me to accomplish this very quickly." Another White male tutor Eddie described a similar experience with his student Barry, a White male. Eddie wrote:

> Building a relationship with Barry was not too terribly difficult. He was a rather sociable student with a lot of interests we could talk about in order to get to know him, from fire trucks to the games he liked to play online.

Other tutors described a more extensive period of getting to know their students. Tutor Laura, a White female, described her experience working with student Chloe, an African American female:

> I think I was able to build a relationship with my student by making a conscious effort to get to know her. During multiple tutoring sessions, I gave her interest surveys, questionnaires, and other activities that were similar in nature. I read over the surveys right there and gave insights and shared similarities, differences, asked questions, etc. I think opening myself up to my student and taking a genuine interest in getting to know her, allowed us to build a bond.

Several tutors described their students as being shy, which made getting to know them more difficult. Amanda, a White female tutor, described her student Ruby, an African American female, as "extremely shy." She wrote, "I did not want to make her feel uncomfortable or for her to not understand why I was her tutor. I wanted the process to be very clear from the beginning." She noted her student "was still shy after the first few sessions, but she continued to open up which was rewarding for me." Amanda also realized Ruby found it embarrassing to have a tutor, and she asked that when she was with her friends that Amanda not describe herself as her tutor. Another tutor Maggie, a White female, who was working with Alexis, a White female, also described her student as shy. She described how she approached their relationship:

> In order to build a relationship with my student I had to be able to listen to her and make her feel comfortable. Listening to her was a big piece. When she did

**Table 2:** Themes Identified from Preservice Teachers' Final Reflective Papers

| Theme | Number of Times Mentioned |
|---|---|
| Importance of relationships to tutoring | 14 |
| References to student identity | 13 |
| Value of the experience in terms of insights about tutoring and learning | 12 |
| Insights about self as tutor | 9 |
| Goals for tutoring | 8 |
| Critical reflections on tutoring/learning | 6 |
| Challenges of tutoring | 6 |
| Students' reference to home life | 6 |
| Insights about students | 1 |

**Table 3:** Themes and Subthemes Identified from Preservice Teachers' Final Reflective Papers

| Theme | Subthemes |
|---|---|
| Preservice teachers' approaches to tutoring | Developing relationships<br>Goals for tutoring<br>References to student identity<br>Home connections<br>Challenges of tutoring |
| Preservice teachers' insights about tutoring | Insights about self<br>Insights about tutoring/learning, including critical reflections |

> feel comfortable, I noticed she would talk more often and for longer periods of time.

***Goals for Tutoring***

Some of the main tutoring goals included helping students learn specific content, develop skills (e.g., in writing and critical thinking), and get organized. Other goals tutors worked on included developing student motivation and self-confidence and exploring career options. John, a multiracial male tutor, listed the following summary of tutoring activities:

> Answering get-to-know-you questions during our first meeting, studying attributes of great high school students, two separate activities of using song lyrics to better understand how to interpret/analyze poetry, working on a planner/calendar, answering journal prompts to work on critical thinking skills, and taking an in-depth personality test.

Tutors planned their lessons based on the goals identified with their students and, in a few cases, information provided by the Blue Tech teachers. Goals for tutoring also changed over time as the tutors increased their understanding of their students. Christy, a White female, described the changes in her approach:

> Originally, I was told Maya, an African American female, needed help developing better study habits. But as I got to know Maya, I learned she didn't just need help forming study habits; she needed help building confidence. I implemented confidence builders into every lesson following this discovery and tried to both expose Maya's need for and inspire confidence in herself.

Rachel, a White female tutor, described how initially she focused a lot on getting her student ahead and doing well in her classes. However, she noted that as they worked together, she realized all Haley, a White female, really needed to be motivated was direction. She then switched to "focusing heavily on Haley's possible career options, her goals and her dreams, and we researched together different paths that she could take after school."

***References to Student Identity***

About half of the tutors made connections between the issues their students were facing and their students' identities. Maggie, a White female, wrote the following about her student Alexis, a White female:

> I feel like Alexis just craved acceptance more than anything. The biggest thing we worked on in tutoring was her confidence which could relate back to her gender. Since she craved acceptance, she would try to change her look or style to get it but we would talk about how that didn't always matter and how different the world is once you get done with school and how her friends treated her sometimes.

Maggie wrote that she did not feel as though her own race or class affected her relationship with her student but did indicate "being female helped her [the student] feel more comfortable to talk and get to know me."

Christy, a White female, described her experience with Maya, an African American female student: "We spent most of our time discussing Maya's identity as a Black female. We talked about all the ways she should be proud of who she is and how this affects every area of her life, including her education." Christy noted her own "experience as a female was relatable to Maya, and I was able to sympathize with some of her frustrations." She also noted, "My mom is also a working, single parent, so I related to that as well." Christy described her experience working with Maya:

> She shared many personal things with me, including past experiences and insecurities. We talked about many vulnerable things, including her identity as a Black female. Maya was honest with me about how this affects her self-esteem, and though I couldn't understand exactly how she felt (because I am not her) I listened and helped her fight these lies.

Amanda, a White female, described her experience working with Ruby, an African American female, and how at first Ruby was extremely shy around her, which was something one of the Blue Tech teachers had warned Amanda about. Amanda described how she chose materials that would "spark her [Ruby's] interest or applied to her (Abigail Adam's worksheet)." She also lent Ruby books on women's suffrage and Black influential women. Amanda noted she was "not totally sure how issues regarding Ruby's diversity affected her schooling experience. We never really discussed this." She noted Ruby chose Blue Tech and "absolutely loved it," and her best friend and her other friends were mainly Black. Amanda wrote, "I still wanted to be mindful of her diversity and not ignore it. This is why when discussing the Gettysburg Address, I also brought up segregation and racism that still exists." She noted, however, that Ruby "never mentioned anything personal relating to this, including any hostility she could have experienced being a woman."

Brian, a White male who was paired with his mentee Carlos, a Hispanic male, described how he was able to make a deeper connection when going over the Spanish-American war with Carlos for his history class. He noted,

> This led to a conversation about Aztecs, a culture which Carlos can trace some of his ancestry to. Talking about the history of his culture ignited passion, and I noticed how engaged he became as a result. Not only was he happy to talk about history, which is relevant to his culture and ancestral roots, but it seemed to make the rest of the session flow seamlessly.

Brian noted how he made it his goal to replicate this formula in the following sessions. He wrote, "The more I got to know him, the less I looked at tutoring as 'how do I tutor?' and I narrowed it down to 'how do I tutor Carlos?'"

Four of the male tutors, three of whom were White and one multiracial, who worked with White male students had similar replies to how they addressed issues of race, class, or gender. John, a multiracial male paired with Luke, a White male, wrote, "I never felt the need to bring race, class, or gender into the discussions. None of this ever seemed to be a distraction to him, and I felt no need to add it in as one." Another tutor, David, wrote, "Will and I shared similarities in terms of race, gender, and class and we didn't face any challenges in those areas." Henry, who worked with an African American male, wrote, "Unfortunately, we did not really discuss identity at all. Darius's race, nor his class or gender affected my relationship with him." At one meeting, Henry noted they discussed Darius's life outside of school, including his friend group and family, and Darius said he lived with his grandparents. In response to this, Henry noted "this did not appear to affect him too much."

***Home Connections***

In addition to the example of Henry and Darius, five tutors described connections their students made to their home life, including parent or family expectations for their students' school performance and career goals. Maggie, a White female, wrote that she thought the reason Alexis would get so flustered about getting a grade of a B in her schoolwork was because Alexis said her dad got upset when that happened. The other way the home was included was in students' descriptions of their families. One student described her mom as a single parent who was dealing with financial pressures. In another case, a student described living with her grandmother and stepfather and how she constantly worried about her younger sister.

***Challenges of Tutoring***

Several of the tutors described the challenge of feeling responsible for their student's learning. Henry, a White male, wrote, "I felt directly responsible for Darius, an African American male and his grades, for I wanted him to succeed." Tutors also often experienced a tension between what they had planned for the lesson and students' more immediate request for help, such as in preparing for a test, working on an assignment, or completing homework. Some tutors found this frustrating but others, like Lola, a multiracial female, changed their goals. She described how her goals became more student-centered in working with Ida, an African American female:

> If Ida came with something from class that she needed help with, we worked on that. If Ida had a project, we worked on that. If Ida was having a rough time, we talked. The goal became less about content and more about being there as a resource to Ida.

Laura, a White female, noted, "What I had planned wasn't always helpful and I really had to start thinking outside of the box and collaborate with other teachers to figure out what to do."

Other challenges noted by the tutors included meeting their student's learning style, finding a balance between building relationships and staying on task, and, a point identified by several tutors, having a limited knowledge of the content with which their student wanted help. Frank described his experience with this: "There were times when my student brought in Macbeth and trigonometry, and I had no idea what I was doing."

## Theme 2: Tutors' Insights About Tutoring

### *Insights About Self*

Nearly all the tutors included insights about themselves and student learning. Insights about self and impact on student learning were often included together, resulting in some overlap between this subtheme and the next.

Two tutors described how the experience of tutoring had increased their confidence and comfort level. Frank, a White male, wrote, "It helped me to be more confident and more comfortable working with students one on one and I know that that's crucial when you are teaching." The value of being able to work individually with a student was also mentioned several times. Maggie wrote, "I also learned how important it is for me to get to know who I am teaching. I learned how much I enjoy getting to know a student in a smaller setting because you have more time to focus." Three tutors listed how they had much more patience than they realized, and another wrote about being surprised by her creativity in being able to make fun lesson plans.

Three tutors offered more in-depth descriptions of their tutoring experience. Laura, a White female, wrote about her experience with Chloe, an African American female:

> I have learned that I am much more intuitive and nurturing than I gave myself credit for. I will never forget Chloe, and our time tutoring together. I am so thankful for this experience. I truly hope Chloe learned something from me because I learned an immense amount from her.

Amanda listed the following strengths related to tutoring: "I have seen my patience and how I am able to listen to others and I have learned that I find it easy to bring in interests of the student into the content." Another insight Amanda included was that she had "many opportunities in which I could have shared experiences I have had, and it could have been a learning curve for Ruby, but I chose silence instead." She noted she regretted this and one of her goals was to make her classroom more open and relatable for students. Finally, Paula, a White female, described her experience with student Destiny, an African American female:

> Even though I still believe lesson plans are very important, I also realize the importance of being flexible. I have learned how much I love the reward of seeing a student succeed. Nothing made me happier than seeing Destiny catch on to something or learn a new concept.

Two tutors wrote about how they could have improved their tutoring experience. Eddie wrote, "I learned that I need to be a lot more assertive and put in more work to keep everything on task during the tutoring sessions." Another tutor, John, wrote, "I've learned that I should spend more time to prepare beforehand. I did have points where my communication could've been better."

### *Insights About Tutoring/Learning Including Critical Reflections*

Kaden, who included several insights from tutoring, described how he wished he had "allowed my student to make more mistakes rather than walking him through each assignment." Most tutors' reflections, however, included insights about relationships and their own understanding of their students. Two tutors referenced the importance of trust and caring. Kaden wrote, "Sometimes another difficult assignment is not always what they need, but rather, a teacher who they can trust to ask any question to." Maggie wrote, "I learned that it really does make a difference to a student when you care about their work and getting to know how they function in school." Other references were made to the importance of knowing about students' lives. Frank wrote, "You really want to try and relate the content to your students so that they can have a better understanding of what you are talking about."

Kaden wrote that his biggest takeaway was that "these students have interests and lives outside of the classroom just as I do." Lola recalled her own high school experience. She wrote, "I had a lot going on behind the scenes," and noted it is important that "I bring that awareness to the table as a teacher." Two of her takeaways from tutoring were (a) "to remember that students are people with complex home lives, feelings, and a ton of experiences that I might not even be able to relate to;" and (b) "learning happens in a lot of ways and it is important to recognize opportunities for learning that might not have been in your intended design."

Tutors also identified aspects of students' development they had not considered. Paula wrote, "I regret to say that I did not spend a lot of time covering student identity. I definitely want to improve in this area in the future." This message was echoed in Henry's response: "If I were to do this again, I would discuss more personal issues with the student, such as identity and race, class, etc."

Some tutors recognized they were still learning about their students and seeing new possibilities for their students' development. Christy described how talking with her student's teachers helped her "understand Maya through their eyes. It also showed me how much they cared for Maya . . . that is the kind of teacher I want to be." Christy also described having learned so much from tutoring. She wrote, "I have learned that I CAN make an impact on my students, but I must be willing to learn and grow with them. Maya taught me a lot about empathy." She noted that, for the future, "I want to be aware of the different backgrounds my students are coming from . . . my students WILL learn differently, and there are many ways I can accommodate for them."

Laura noted that though she was sure the various activities in which she had engaged with Chloe had helped, "the most important thing had nothing to do with any of that." She realized her student was struggling because she saw no connection between her schoolwork and the career she sought. With the support of teachers, they were able to help the student make this connection. Laura wrote, "The main thing was that collectively, we let her know that we saw her, we cared about her, and school is not just miserable book work." She wrote that as a teacher, "I want to help all my students see themselves as successful and capable of whatever they set their minds to."

Amanda, a White female, wondered whether, if she had been a woman of color, it might have been easier for Ruby, an African American female, to open up to her. She wrote, "I tried to build the similarities off being a woman and teaching her the difference between matriarchal and patriarchal societies." However, she also realized it might have helped if she had shared her experiences with her own struggles as a woman. Finally, she wrote, "I want my students to learn that though conversations regarding diversity can be difficult they need to happen." For Maggie, one of the main takeaways from this experience as a teacher was to be able to "connect with my students as though I am tutoring them one-on-one."

## Discussion

The tutoring program began without a clear understanding of the goals of tutoring. This weakness, which was also identified in the review of the research on preservice teachers tutoring literacy (Hoffman et al., 2017), indicates that without a definition, tutoring is a problematic concept. The realization that tutors had different understandings of tutoring provided the impetus for this study.

Given the lack of a conceptual model of tutoring, the three approaches I identified in this study may

serve as a starting point. The approaches build on one another in supporting student development:

- learning is a technical practice (e.g., teaching a skill, concept, or content)
- learning involves caring along with technical practice
- learning combines caring and technical practice with tutor and student seen in a larger socio-political context

In this study, tutors' understanding of self was the key to their approach to tutoring. Kincheloe (2004) argued it is important for preservice teachers to critically examine how their own identities have been shaped by current and past sociocultural, political, and economic forces. Prior to entering school communities in which they would tutor learners, preservice teachers were asked to consider their own socialization (Liebenberg et al., 2019). The authors stated that by so doing, "They develop a deeper awareness of how others' identities are influenced by the dominant culture—which enhances their awareness of social justice and reciprocity" (p. 32). Although the tutoring program at Blue Tech did not have an explicit goal of social justice, some of the tutors found their way toward this with their students.

Based on the findings from this study, three changes are proposed to the tutoring program:

- Change the title from tutoring to mentoring
- Make explicit the social justice goals of the program to both mentors and high school students
- Have preservice teachers examine their own identities prior to mentoring

Though the field experience started with the title of a tutoring program, it soon became apparent that some tutors were exploring broader issues affecting their students' experience of school. Communication with the Blue Tech teachers and the principal about the goals of the program supported the change to mentoring, which was consistent with my perspective as the faculty member supervising the tutors.

Under tutoring, learning is often seen as a technical issue (i.e., requiring practice to improve). However, as Blue Tech's principal noted, "Their [tutors] most important job is being the person that 'sees' the child with whom they are working" and "everybody needs to be seen." This supports a view of learning as occurring in a social and political context and understanding opportunities to learn are affected by such factors as race, social class, and gender. It is important that preservice teachers are taught about the social justice goals of the program, so they see the whole person when mentoring students. Finally, to ensure preservice teachers can support their students' development, they must first critically examine their own social identities to learn how forces of race, class, and gender affect opportunities.

One other proposed change to the program that did not come directly from this study but from my experience of working with the preservice teachers is to create mentoring teams. Currently preservice teachers only get to know one student. Having preservice teachers work in teams of three would ensure all mentors have experiences working with students of diverse backgrounds. Preservice teachers would still be assigned to work one-on-one with a student, but they would share their experiences with their team members. This would also allow mentors to support each other and share ideas.

In conclusion, the tutoring program helped preservice teachers realize the importance of looking at the whole person when evaluating their success. Conversations with the two Blue Tech teachers and principal also established a clearer sense of purpose to the program around "seeing the child," including why some students, because of their race, class, and gender, are not seen. Findings from the study will strengthen the mentoring program both for the preservice teachers and the high school students. The insights from this study may also be informative for developers of other tutoring programs for preservice teachers.

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