

Reducing the Achievement Gap for Elementary English Language Learners through an After School Program

Description

The purpose of this poster is to (1) present a one-on-one tutoring model for pre-service teachers and Elementary English Language Learners (ELLs), and (2) discuss a conceptual framework for tutoring culturally and linguistically diverse students through afterschool programs.

Abstract

Background

Due to the changing demographics of the United States population, many state certification programs require teachers to have experience with culturally diverse students (Fitts & Gross, 2012). Statistical projections suggest that by 2040, one in three children will grow up in an immigrant household (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2009). These demographic changes have important implications for education and public policy.

An after school program that brings pre-service teachers and English Language Learners (ELLs) together has the potential to reduce the achievement gap for at-risk-students and promote meaningful pedagogical experiences for future educators.

Afterschool programs can provide children not only with academic services, but also with social skills, character development and safety (Hall, Williams, & Daniel, 2010). It is also known that children of immigrant families are less likely than their native-born counterparts to participate in recreational or academic programs outside of the school hours (Greenberg, 2013).

On the other hand, early field experiences allow pre-service teachers to interact with children and develop pedagogical skills and positive dispositions towards different groups of students (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010). Tutoring provides pre-service teachers with valuable connections between theory and practice, and promotes higher understanding of cultural diversity and its intrinsic value (Massey & Lewis, 2011).

There are indications that tutors and tutees perceive positive outcomes, even when there is limited training for tutors, and regardless of the delivery method (Massey & Lewis, 2011). It is expected that pre-service teachers will become better teachers of all students, by engaging in culturally relevant pedagogy (Morton, & Bennett, 2010).

Description of the one-on-one tutoring model

Twenty-three pre-service teachers from several education majors volunteered to tutor ELLs in a local elementary school once per week during the Spring semester 2014. Tutors may enroll in a service-learning tutoring course to obtain academic credit, however they are not required to enroll in any specific courses. Tutors only meet once per week, which makes it difficult to have other face-to-face meetings for training and support. The tutoring program is an initiative of the Center for Latino Achievement and Success in Education (CLASE) in the College of Education at the University of Georgia.

When the tutoring program first started a couple of semesters ago, tutors focused on helping children with their homework. Many of these students' parents do not speak English and are unable to assist their children with their schoolwork. Parents found the tutoring program to be a useful resource to provide students with the academic support that they lack at home.

However, the impact of a tutoring model that is solely based on homework help is questionable. Our hope is to expose tutors to culturally responsive strategies and facilitate the development of language proficiency and critical thinking skills in students.

This semester, tutors are using an online platform to connect with one another and build a community of practice. This platform seeks to provide additional resources and scaffolding for tutors, in addition to the initial training session and tutors' manual.

The tutoring model is structured as follows: 25 minutes for homework, 40 minutes for activities that promote reading, creativity, critical thinking, and communication, and 20 minutes for recreational games. Each tutoring session lasts for 1h 30min and children receive tutoring twice a week.

The tutoring model utilizes a resource-based learning approach. Tutors may use and share different types of materials (digital and non-digital) to work with their children. Tutors are encouraged to respond to students' individual needs, and interests to take full advantage of the one-on-one ratio.

Tutors are asked to take a survey at the beginning and at the end of the program. They are also encouraged to keep a log about their experience twice a month. The tutoring model is an initiative that is currently being piloted. This poster will

allow us to share with AECT members some of the lessons we have learned so far.

Implications for practice and research

The literature suggests several culturally responsive strategies to improve academic outcomes of ELLs. Culturally responsive teaching recognizes the learner's sociocultural context as a critical component of the learning environment. (Ooka Pang, 2005). Evidence-based strategies that have shown to be effective include pre-teaching critical vocabulary, language modeling, using visuals and graphic organizers, maximizing opportunities for academic language, using native language for transfer, and using systematic and explicit instruction (Sanford, Brown, & Turner, 2012).

This poster will discuss a framework for tutoring ELLs in an after school program, as well as a few alternatives to provide pre-service teachers with ongoing support. Our experience with this tutoring model may inform other teacher preparation programs, schools, and organizations of how to design and implement tutoring programs. Furthermore, our tutoring model lays the ground for an academic discussion about how to support ELLs outside of the school, and facilitate meaningful early field-based experiences for pre-service teachers. Gaps in the literature and challenges faced during implementation may lead to research questions and areas for future development.

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