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TESOL TUTOR TIME HOMEWORK CENTER A Collaboration of Volunteer Preservice Teachers in the Public Elementary Schools

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Bilingual parents who struggle with language acquisition themselves cannot assist their children with homework and need academic support. This report describes the inception and progress of a university/public school collaboration where preservice teachers, who are working toward endorsement in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), volunteer to teach English as a second language (ESL) students. The preservice teachers provide academic support, homework help, language practice, and comprehensive explanations for children who are struggling to either learn English or to keep up with academic assignments. The TESOL Tutor Time Homework Center provides Florida Atlantic University's students the opportunity to apply current TESOL methodologies and approaches, thus enhancing the ESL student's ability to master the English language and achieve curriculum competencies.

Keywords: *ESL tutoring; ESL homework; preservice teachers; school/university collaboration; ESL students*

The TESOL Tutor Time Homework Center, an after-school program, was created in response to a threefold need:

- Bilingual parents often struggle with language acquisition themselves, need academic support for their children, and are unable to assist their children with after-school tasks.

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- Children often struggle either to learn English or to keep up with academic assignments and need academic support, homework directions, practice drills, and comprehensive explanations.
- Preservice teachers in Florida Atlantic University's teacher education program need the chance to use current teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) methodologies and approaches, thus enhancing the English as a second language (ESL) student's ability to master the English language and achieve curriculum competencies.

LEGAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The state of Florida has responded to the needs of thousands of language-minority students by issuing a mandate titled the Multicultural Education Training and Advocacy Act (Florida Department of Education, Office of Multicultural Student Language Education, 1990), also known as the META Consent Decree, to ensure equal educational rights of English-language learners. The decision *League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) et al. v. State Board of Education Consent Decree* (1990) is the framework Florida uses to comply with federal and state laws and jurisprudence with regard to educating language-minority students. The META Consent Decree ensures that previously mandated federal civil rights laws are upheld and language-minority students receive equal access to all educational programs through comprehensible instruction, although not necessarily in their native languages.

All elementary teachers in the state of Florida must be TESOL endorsed. This endorsement certifies that they have been instructed in areas of methods of teaching ESL, curriculum development in ESL, testing and evaluation in ESL, applied linguistics and TESOL, and multicultural education and certifies that they are able to address the learning styles and educational needs of English-language learners in their charge. From the moment the teacher has his or her first ESL student, the time clock starts ticking and the teacher must fulfill 300 in-service TESOL preparation hours, or take a series of five graduate courses, to complete the TESOL endorsement within a period of 6 years.

AN ALTERNATIVE TESOL ENDORSEMENT PROGRAM

In response to the needs of teachers and language-minority students, Florida Atlantic University was the first public university in the state to initiate an innovative undergraduate teacher education program that provided preservice teachers the option (on successful completion of all program requirements) to graduate with a bachelor's degree in elementary education with TESOL endorsement. Because Florida Atlantic University graduates are already well prepared to teach linguistically, ethnically, and culturally diverse students, they are able to enter the workforce with many skills other teachers have not yet mastered.

Throughout the teacher education program, university students are exposed to typical methods-and-materials courses, but with a unique twist. Every lesson plan, project, activity, or presentation the students are involved in must include strategies for the limited English proficient (LEP) student. In addition, in the various courses that require a practicum or field experience, English-language learners are included in the obligatory preservice teacher/elementary education student interaction. Within the two TESOL-specific courses, interaction with second-language learners is also required. During the TESOL I course, students meet, interview, and analyze the circumstance of a bilingual adult, whereas TESOL II requires a 12-hour, hands-on TESOL practicum in an elementary school setting. It is within these parameters that details of this case study are examined.

THE TUTOR TIME VOLUNTEERS

Most preservice teachers throughout the country are from society's mainstream culture, have limited cross-cultural experience, and as a result, perceive the world from a narrow perspective (Garcia & Pugh, 1992; Zimpher, 1989). Florida Atlantic University finds it imperative to take measures to prepare educators to have the skills, knowledge, and positive attitudes necessary to teach linguis-

tically, ethnically, and culturally diverse students (Morris, Taylor, Knight, & Wasson, 1996). In this teacher education program, preservice teachers must participate in a 12-hour practicum working directly with public school students and apply classroom theory such as second-language instructional strategies, language-teaching methods, and content-modified lessons while teaching LEP students. As universities and schools work collaboratively, a “common culture” (Schlechty & Whitford, 1988) is created that enhances teacher preparation and development.

The preservice teachers involved in this volunteer, after-school TESOL homework program are planning to complete their student teaching assignments during the following semester. They have mastered the basic foundations of teacher preparation and are ready for a trial run in the classroom. Often they substitute-teach to gain classroom experience while supporting their families with the income earned from this endeavor. However, although caring for an entire class of students, substitute teaching does not provide the chance to work with ESL students that the after-school situation offers. By engaging in actual teaching, preservice teachers can practically apply theories they have learned about in the college classroom (Furlong, Barton, Miles, Whiting, & Whitty, in press).

PARENTAL INTERACTION

In this after-school program, preservice teachers have the unique opportunity to work with students outside the school day and essentially become a part of the extended community as they interact with parents as well as youngsters. As interested observers, parents often sit with their children while being tutored, and frequently, the preservice teachers tutor parents as an alternative or addition to tutoring a child and to gain experience teaching adult English learners. Connecting with families beyond the school scenario positively affects the success of the teaching and learning program (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998), and by reaching out to parents, mutual understanding can be fostered (Ariza, 2000). This type of interaction is a propitious way for parents of English learners to learn the “rules” of the American culture’s educational system

(Ariza, in press). In addition, family interaction is a great learning experience through a nontraditional teaching-learning paradigm (Mahan & Stachowski, 1990; Stachowski & Mahan, 1995); that is, the preservice teacher is reaching out beyond the child to the parents. The tutors often get to know the children and their needs better after working with the parents, and the parents begin to see how their children are being taught (which may be very different from teaching practices in their home countries). In turn, the children show great pride in their parents for trying to learn English, and as an affective plus, they are often more comfortable when accompanied by the parent.

In addition to staying and watching their children work, parents try to communicate their questions and concerns to the volunteers, which is an invaluable experience for the preservice teachers because they have the opportunity to practice trying to communicate with second-language parents. The university students begin to appreciate the struggle from the perspective of the teacher, the student, and the parent.

THE SCHOOLS AND TUTOR TIME STUDENTS

The idea for Tutor Time originated at a school in Sunrise, Florida, and included three surrounding schools in a 10-mile radius with similar demographic characteristics. We conducted a parental survey at all four schools to see if parents would be willing to bring their children to school for homework help. The response was phenomenal and 160 parents indicated their interest. A true need for this program existed, and parents were willing to make the effort to help their children. After the initial year, the program was moved to an urban school, Croissant Park, where the call for English-language tutors was greater.

Overcrowded, inner-city Croissant Park Elementary School, situated in the city of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, was the primary base for schools involved in the Tutor Time program, as it could tap into the language-minority population attending the AfterCare program already in existence on the premises. The school's large student body lived in a community of small, older houses and rentals that

attracted a transient population of non-English-speaking families. The teachers' classrooms, overflowing with students, spilled into portable rooms on the crowded campus. Teachers felt the drain on their collective resources as they struggled to teach academic content vital to students in their classes while maintaining and challenging the interest of the English-speaking population.

In the Florida schools, all matriculating students must complete a Home Language Survey with questions regarding the languages spoken in the home. Answers indicating the use of languages other than English designate the proper language classification. After determination of the student's dominant language, if he or she is an English-language learner, a popular standardized English proficiency test is administered for proper level placement. The county classification system of students ranged from A1 to C2 (A1 = no English, A2 = beginner, B1 = intermediate beginner, B2 = intermediate, C1 = high intermediate, and C2 = fluent), after reaching the C2 level, the students would exit the ESL program and be monitored for academic progress for 2 years (see Appendix A). All children who were identified as non-English-speaking or limited-English-speaking were eligible to attend the TESOL Tutor Time Homework Center.

English-language learners need to boost their cognitive academic language proficiencies, and the preservice teachers were about to discover for themselves how the theories they learned in the classroom, such as cognitive academic language proficiencies (Cummins, 1981), would directly correspond to classroom application. The preservice teachers witnessed firsthand the phenomenon of young students sounding so fluent that non-TESOL-trained individuals constantly asked, "Why are these children in ESL? They speak perfect English?"—yet the students were still failing academically.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

When university students begin TESOL II, one of the two stand-alone TESOL courses in the integrated program, the professor

reviews the course syllabus. Volunteering to be a tutor for the after-school program is optional; however, the class must decide as a whole whether they agree to participate. To maintain the integrity of the program, university students must commit to the entire 16 weeks. This has not been a problem because at this juncture in their academic programs, the preservice teachers value being in the classroom and look forward to spending time with the young English-language learners.

The arrangement is for the volunteers to meet at the school media center; greet the children as they come in; be assigned to work with one, or two, or a small group of children, depending on grade level and the number of children who are present; and tutor their students from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. On completion of the tutorial hour, the university class is held in the same media center. For the sake of continuity, and to measure progress made, the tutors would work with the same children from week to week.

During every session, from 20 to 30 students appeared. When the children arrived each week, they entered the room, wrote their names, and if they were able, they also wrote their grade and teacher's name on the sign-in roster. Their elementary school teachers provided assignment sheets so that they could prescribe specific curriculum tasks to accompany the children's homework. This let the volunteer know initially what areas on which to concentrate so that each student had an individualized plan.

Some children sat at tables with their tutor, whereas groups of younger children sat on the floor in a circle with their tutor. Although most children arrived with their special assignments, the room was stocked with paper, crayons, pencils, rulers, surplus worksheets donated by teachers, and a library of assorted books. This arrangement worked well when students happened to finish their teacher-sent assignments and needed more challenging or probing activities. The TESOL professor acted as a facilitator as she supervised, suggested activities and strategies, answered questions, translated, and smoothed potentially sticky situations that arose unexpectedly.

From 30 to 60 university students (two afternoon TESOL II classes, Wednesday and Thursday) met weekly at the school site

for the TESOL Tutor Time program and spent 2 hours a week tutoring LEP students. (The day TESOL II students had the same arrangements but went to the school during regular school hours.) Now in its 5th year, the program is eagerly awaited at the beginning of each semester.

RESULTS

For all parties involved, positive results were gained by this tutoring intervention. ESL students' comprehension and language proficiency increased, university students gained valuable experience working with language learners, and many parents engaged in their first unequivocally positive interaction with American public schools.

ASSESSMENT METHOD

Because it was impossible to attribute reclassification (e.g., the student jumps from language classification level A1 to level B1, see Appendix A) solely on the basis of several weeks of tutoring, a triangulation of documentation was maintained. For example, classroom teachers received completed student work samples each week from the TESOL Tutor Time Homework Center, and student progress was tracked through portfolio work samples, skills tests, and performance demonstrations. Progress was determined by this method, and teachers reported a distinct improvement of their students' overall understanding.

In an attempt to offer university students an authentic assessment experience, they were instructed to devise their own instruments to assess language proficiency (see Appendixes B1 and B2 for examples). To assess students' language proficiency or academic skills, the assessments included asking children questions about themselves or they were requested to recite the alphabet, count, or read and answer comprehension questions. After determining an area of weakness (e.g., low literacy skills, inability to count in English, etc.), university students devised a plan of

remediation to support students' learning (see Appendix C). In addition, they were required to keep detailed reflective journals (see Appendix D) that included observations of their students' progress in whatever area they were teaching: academic content, reading, writing, listening skills, speaking, or mathematics. One activity within the journal was to interview the student. Following is an excerpt from one preservice teacher's journal:

For the student interview, I talked to Renata [3rd grade], who moved to the U.S. from Brazil two years ago. Her home language is Portuguese and she told me that it is very hard to learn English in school. Renata finds the hardest part is writing because she does not know what to write. The most fun is talking, especially with her friends. She said that even though writing was difficult, talking and reading were easy.

Renata's proficiency level is A2 [beginner], and she had a little difficulty answering my questions. She was very polite but could not expand upon her answers or provide much detail. Though my intention was to explore the views of the less proficient students, I considered repeating the interview with one of the more fluent children. But then upon reviewing Renata's brief responses, I found that they did illustrate much of what we have been learning about second language acquisition theory and methodology.

Week 3: Next, her ease in talking with her friends and her difficulty with writing demonstrated to me the difference between the language skills needed for Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency [Cummins, 1981; Thomas & Collier, 1995]. Renata has been in the United States for two years, and for the most part, she sounds like a native English speaker. By being able to work with the children in this program, I have seen firsthand how someone who speaks English fluently can have problems academically. This proves to me the research is accurate when it claims that most students acquire social language within a short period, but academic language takes much longer. As I mentioned, she interacts very well socially with her classmate. The children usually use English in class and Renata is the only Portuguese speaker. Writing requires considerably greater academic skills than social, oral communication.

Renata feels comfortable in natural conversation and does what is necessary to communicate with her classmates. This "negotiation of meaning" is necessary . . . to produce comprehensible input that is essential for language learning [Long & Porter, 1985].

Week 6: Although Renata asserts that writing is hard and reading is easy, she has shown me that the ability to decode print does not indicate comprehension of meaning. She reads aloud well, and until I questioned her understanding I would have considered her an able reader.

Week 12: It was my last tutoring session with these students and I will really miss them. They are so eager . . . I also can't believe that it took me this long to realize that reading aloud is not the same as reading to yourself. I talk about my own dislike about reading aloud, and yet I did not put two and two together until that last TESOL class. Now I am really confident as a teacher in reading groups, and the students and I had fun really exploring the different concepts that arose. We acted out, played memory games, and made faces to understand words like "photographic memory," "squirm," "mumble," and "doubtful." I will not let these opportunities escape me again.

Summation of Interview: First, I was surprised by Renata's difficulty in answering my questions, as I have observed her talking quite fluently in class. In fact, she and the three girls in her group chat all day long. She is friendly with me in reading group and asks for my help with her work. In these familiar situations, she is confident and comfortable and not at all hesitant about talking. The Affective Filter Hypothesis addresses the importance of social-emotional variables to second language acquisition [Krashen, 1982]. I see how a low-anxiety environment can be crucial for language learners' use and acquisition of a second language. Alone, being asked unfamiliar questions, Renata's affective filter was raised and she was not confident or comfortable communicating with me.

PARENTAL COMMENTS

Parents were asked to note what progress, if any, they believed their children were making as a result of being tutored. Following are comments made by parents; they are translated from Spanish and Haitian Creole into English:

- We love being able to sit here with the children, and the children like that we are here.
- The program helps the children do their homework when we cannot help them in English.
- The tutors explain very well how the homework should be done.
- They show the children the meaning of the words they do not know.
- They make the children think before speaking.

- The most important of all is that the children leave the classroom happy because the “teachers” have patience and love for teaching.
- The classes of ESL are a great help for the children because they can speak in English and Spanish and they feel good about that.
- Thank you for all your help.
- I thank you for the ESL tutoring. The help [guidance] makes my child more responsible in doing his homework because he knows how to do it now. He has learned discipline.
- For my daughters, the ESL classes have helped a lot to make their writing better. If it were possible, I would like more reading worksheets for them to do at home.
- My children cannot read, but they loved the stories you read to them.
- Now he reads better and is able to do more at home.

IMPLICATIONS

TESOL Tutor Time is a unique program because it responds to the needs of the ESL population. Elementary ESL students get the chance to “catch up” academically while receiving the one-on-one individual attention that the classroom teacher does not have time to provide. The self-esteem of these students is enhanced as they become attached to the English-speaking “teacher” who shows so much interest in their welfare. The children bloom as they realize their special tutor is committed to working with them every week.

The LEP children gain individual attention, practice, and academic support from these sessions, but the university students gain much as well. Because of their long-term dedication and commitment to these ESL students, the preservice teachers involved in the TESOL Tutor Time program report they experience enhanced sensitivity within the following areas:

- Awareness of their sense of civic responsibility and caring for others of diverse linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds
- Sense of community involvement and volunteerism
- Joy in having the opportunity to learn how to teach LEP students firsthand and apply abstract learning skills to a practical situation
- Cognizance of improvement in their own motivation and academic achievement as they perceive the improvement of the elementary students they are tutoring

BENEFITS FOR PRESERVICE TEACHERS

While offering academic support to those who need it the most, the university students who volunteer their time are afforded the opportunity to:

- (a) apply theory-based methods, techniques, and strategies involved in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages;
- (b) compare and contrast the nature of first- and second-language acquisition;
- (c) apply essential strategies (including aural/oral approaches) for developing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills;
- (d) adapt content area lessons and written text for LEP students;
- (e) identify methods and strategies to apply in relation to the diverse learning styles found in the ESL population;
- (f) become exposed to initial placement procedures for language classification;
- (g) become experienced with grade- and age-appropriate activities for ESL students;
- (h) receive cross-grade level curriculum exposure to academic competencies required in public school;
- (i) become competent in utilizing ESL materials and applying strategies and methodologies such as total physical response, CALLA, suggestopedia, whole language, natural approach, and content-based instruction;
- (j) distinguish between social and academic language acquired by ESL children;
- (k) become familiar with the school district's language-reclassification indicators as they are used to measure improvement in oral skills; and
- (l) gain experience in gathering portfolio work samples that are used by classroom teachers to assess curriculum mastery.

CONCLUSION

The TESOL Tutor Time program has expanded into a more encompassing program. As a direct result of our endeavors, we created a family literacy partnership in the adjacent portable classroom, which was awarded a U.S.\$50,000 Barbara Bush Literacy Grant. Parents and families of the participants in the TESOL Tutor Time program and other community members were invited to par-

ticipate in the program; special literacy games, projects, and activities were offered; refreshments and suppers were served; clowns and storytellers performed for the families, and as the word spread, the turnout increased.

This university/public school collaborative effort still exists and will continue as long as there is a state-mandated TESOL integration elementary teacher program offered by Florida Atlantic University. University students look forward to the program and are pleased to learn they have the opportunity to practice working with ESL children before they are assigned to their professional classroom settings. The TESOL professor is delighted that the university students gain practical experience teaching and have the chance to apply the theories they learn in the classroom. And finally, parents of English-language learners are pleased that their children are receiving additional instruction and know that people really do want their children to be successful in this new country.

Appendix A

Broward Public Schools

Language Level Classification and Descriptions

- A1 Non-English Speaker (or minimal knowledge of English)
Demonstrates very little understanding;
Cannot communicate meaning orally;
Unable to participate in regular classroom instruction.
- A2 Limited-English Speaker
Demonstrates limited understanding;
Communicates orally in English, with one- or two-word responses.
- B1 Intermediate-English Speaker
Communicates orally in English, mostly with simple phrases and/or sentence responses;
Makes significant grammatical errors that interfere with understanding.
- B2 Intermediate-English Speaker
Communicates in English about everyday situations with little difficulty but lacks the academic language terminology;
Experiences some difficulty in following grade-level subject matter assignments.
- C1 Advanced-English Speaker
Understands and speaks English fairly well;
Makes occasional grammatical errors;

- May read and write English with varying degrees of proficiency.
- C2 Full-English Speaker
 Understands and speaks English with near fluency;
 Reads and writes English at a comparable level with native English-speaking counterparts;
 May read and write the native language with varying degrees of proficiency.
- D Full-English Speaker
 Speaks English fluently;
 Reads and writes English at a comparable level with English-speaking counterparts.
- E Monolingual-English Speaker
-

Appendix B1
Initial Language Proficiency Assessment
Home Language Survey
Heather Johnson, University Student

Name of Student _____ Date _____

Date of Birth _____ Age _____ Grade _____

Parent/Guardian's Name _____

Telephone () _____ Country of Origin _____

Other countries of residence:

1. What was the first language your child learned to speak? _____
2. Does you child speak any languages other than English? Yes No
3. What language does your child speak at home most often? _____
4. What language(s) do you speak most often to your child? _____
5. What language(s) does your child speak to friends? _____
6. What language(s) does the child speak to grandparents, aunts, uncles, or other relatives? _____
7. What language(s) do you (parents/guardians) read? _____
8. Do you read English? Yes No
9. What language(s) do you write? _____

Completed by _____

Appendix B2
Language Proficiency Assessment
LilyMae Vickers, University Student

Name of Student _____ Age _____ Grade _____

1. What language do you speak at home? _____
2. Do you have brothers and sisters? Yes No
3. If so, what languages do you speak with them at home? _____
4. Do you watch television? Yes No
5. If so, what is your favorite program? _____
6. In what language do you watch television? _____
7. Why did you leave your country? _____
8. Do you have new friends in your neighborhood? Yes No
9. What language do you speak mostly with your friends? _____
10. Can you count in English? (Have student demonstrate.) Yes No
(Poor Fair Good Excellent)
11. Do you like to read in your language? Yes No
12. Do you read well in your language? Yes No
13. Do you read in English? Yes No
(Have student demonstrate. Poor Fair Good Excellent)
(Ask comprehension questions. Poor Fair Good Excellent)
14. Did you go to school in your country? Yes No
15. (If yes) What grade were you in? _____
16. Tell me about what you liked to do in your country. _____
(Look for past tense usage. Poor Fair Good Excellent)
17. What do you want to be when you grow up? _____
(Look for future tense usage. Poor Fair Good Excellent)
18. Ask me what I did on my birthday last year. _____
(Can student use "do" and "did" correctly? Poor Fair Good Excellent)
19. Show student the map. Ask . . . Can you show me where you come from?

(Poor Fair Good Excellent)
20. Show addition problem. Can you add this? $49 + 37 =$ _____
(Correct Incorrect)
21. Show subtraction problem. Can you subtract this? $70 - 15 =$ _____
(Watch to see how student does problem.)
22. Show multiplication and division problems.
 23×180 $57 =$ _____ 100×184 $4 =$ _____
(Notice how student solves problems.)

Assessment: _____

Appendix C Plan of Remediation

Student's Name: _____
Date: _____
Assessment Given: _____
Plan of Remediation: _____
Results: _____
Date: _____

Appendix D Reflection Journal

Name of Student: _____
Date: _____
Time: _____
Location: _____
Task Objective: _____
Analysis of Observation: _____
Reflection: _____

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