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High-impact tutoring also known as high-dosage tutoring (HDT), is distinct from general tutoring. As a model, it consists of practice guidelines around training, frequency, and length of tutoring sessions. This approach is integrated with the school curriculum and ideally conducted during the school day. There is a resurging interest in tutoring, and many researchers, as well as federal, state, and district leaders, have adopted these HDT guidelines from the National Student Support Accelerator (NSSA) regarding dosage, frequency, and other logistics essential to structuring a high-impact program. The success of HDT initiatives are usually measured in randomized control trials assessing changes in students' standardized test performance, and these guidelines help establish consistency and quality assurance.

This study builds on the existing HDT practice guidelines to capture additional social inputs and outputs of a successful school-based tutoring partnership. I focus on better understanding the facilitators and barriers of on-the-ground implementation by exploring the experiences of graduate students working as K-12 tutors in an urban district. Since there is little research on the non-test benefits associated with the novel HDT model, this study also investigates whether tutors report evidence of any holistic benefits to students in addition to academic improvements.

Using a generic qualitative research design, 24 semi-structured interviews and two focus groups were conducted to explore the perspectives of tutor practitioners within urban school-based ecosystems. Six themes were identified through thematic analysis that illuminate factors impacting HDT engagement and success. The underexplored insights revealed in this study can help guide communication considerations, onboarding processes, tutor support and training, and

ways to operationalize and evaluate “success.” Future research could triangulate these findings by incorporating the perspectives of teacher-partners, parents, and students.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, District-University Partnership, Tutoring Initiatives, Interviews, Bottom-Up Evaluation, Focus Groups

UNDEREXPLORED BARRIERS, FACILITATORS, AND BENEFITS IN DISTRICT-UNIVSERITY TUTORING COLLABORATION

by

Monique Saastamoinen

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Dr. Kathy Hytten
Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Monique Saastamoinen has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair

Dr. Kathy Hytten

Committee Members

Dr. Kathleen Edwards

Dr. Megan Martin

Dr. Christopher Poulos

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Although some students thrived during the shift to virtual learning driven by the COVID-19 global pandemic, many experienced severe hardship and disengagement. Academically, studies across the nation have found students are significantly behind in their performance on grade level assessments compared to pre-pandemic scores (Hammerstein, 2021), a trend often referred to by different names such as “learning loss” or “unfinished learning.” In a recent study tracking math and reading for 5.4 million primary school students, researchers found that test scores in Fall 2021 dropped significantly in comparison to Fall 2019, with steeper drops in high-poverty schools (Kuhfield et al., 2022). Many federal and state initiatives are being designed to address these trends by providing supplemental support in schools in the form of tutoring programs focused on academic content, with impact measured by improvements in standardized test scores. There is no doubt students are still struggling with the disruptions of the pandemic, and although it is equally clear interventions to reengage students are needed, there are at least two problems with the current intervention approach. In addition to lost instructional time, the pandemic also exposed children to social isolation, financial hardships, and reduced access to healthcare providers. These disruptions to routines and services have resulted in a myriad of negative impacts on the wellbeing of children and adolescents, including declining mental health, fewer opportunities for socialization, and lagging developmental milestones. All these factors can also inhibit a child’s ability to learn.

The first problem with intervention that prioritizes academic metrics is that it bypasses the nonacademic, socioemotional, and systemic factors impacting student learning. Life does not occur in a vacuum, so holistic interventions likely will have greater positive impacts than content-focused approaches alone. The second problem with an academic-focused intervention is

that student progress is primarily evaluated using standardized test scores. Test score data can be useful in identifying disparities, as we cannot fix what we cannot measure and testing is a quick way to get assessment data for large groups. However, groups of students are not homogenous and come to testing with different levels of acculturation to the print culture prioritized in testing. Additionally, focusing on test performance as the primary indicator of successful intervention and student progress may be myopic given the fact that such a system (a) fails to account for racial and opportunity gaps, (b) does not account for the fact that learning and understanding are expressed in a range of ways, and (c) promotes a culture of "teaching to the test" in which specific test-material is drilled, thereby providing a limited assessment of student's actual mastery of a content area (Jensen et al., 2014).

Problem Statement

Disproportionate academic outcomes for students have been exacerbated by the ruptures and upheavals of the pandemic (Donnelly & Patrinos, 2021; Dorn et al., 2020), and are compounded by the current crisis in teacher-staffing shortages (Beumer, 2021; Wiggan et al., 2021; Winthrop, 2020). The students experiencing negative outcomes because of schooling disruptions are most often students of color and students from high-poverty schools (U.S. Office for Civil Rights, 2021) who already face a range of hardships resulting from legacies of institutional racism such as segregation (Reardon & Owens, 2016) and underfunding (Owens et al., 2016). Chronic stress, parental unemployment, trauma, and housing insecurity are just some of the systemic challenges exacerbated by the pandemic. These barriers are correlated with inconsistent school attendance, poor mental health, and lower self-esteem, all of which negatively impact a child's success in school (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018; Gubbels et al., 2019).

The current state of education is drawing national attention. As federal-, state-, and district-level policymakers work to intervene on the variety of challenges highlighted by the global health crisis, they are looking to educational researchers for proven strategies to address students' social, emotional, and learning needs. Researchers have indicated that tutoring is more likely to improve student achievement than other popular alternatives, such as extending the school day or mandating summer school (Figlip et al., 2018; Fryer, 2017; Nickow et al., 2020). This may be due to the fact that individualized instruction is an opportunity to develop close teacher-student relationships, and relationships have been found to foster positive development and more engaged learning (Jones & Kahn, 2017; Osher et al., 2020).

However, despite what we know about the fundamentally relational nature of teaching and learning (Brinkworth et al., 2018; Krane et al., 2016; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020; Muller, 2001), the existing research on tutoring initiatives is saturated with quantitative reports using standardized test scores as the primary measure of student progress, and consequently, program impact. As tutoring programs are expanded, there is a need for qualitative research that captures the human experience of these relational encounters. This research is an important step in diversifying indicators of progress in schools, and for broadening our understanding what matters in the pursuit of social equity for young people. I engage in this type of research in this study of the perceptions and experiences of tutors in a high-impact tutoring program. The fact that so many students face systemic barriers that cause learning loss, and that efforts to address these are often not holistic are two key problems that expanded access to individualized instruction via tutoring might begin to address.

Systemic Barriers and Opportunity Gaps

Variance in educational achievement is often referred to in the literature as the "achievement gap," and this construct generally points to differences in standardized test scores between different racial and socioeconomic groups. However, sociological analyses of students' learning environments and other sociocultural factors have demonstrated that the construct of opportunity gaps better explains disproportionate outcomes for students from historically marginalized groups (Ladson-Billings, 2006). There are a myriad of pertinent structural factors impacting student outcomes, such as "the teacher quality gap . . . the employment opportunity gap . . . [and] the affordable housing gap" (Irvine, 2010, p. xii; see also Chambers, 2009), yet many educational policies continue to prioritize closing the achievement gap with little to no attention to designing interventions that address the social factors correlated with disproportionate education and life outcomes.

Gloria Ladson-Billings's (2006) concept of opportunity gaps refers to the unequal distribution of educational resources, opportunities, and outcomes among different groups of students, particularly along lines of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. These gaps are not merely disparities in achievement or access to resources but are systemic in nature, rooted in historical and structural inequalities within the education system. Ladson-Billings emphasized that these gaps are not the result of individual shortcomings or deficits among students but are instead the product of broader societal inequities and discriminatory practices that limit the educational opportunities available to marginalized groups. As such, addressing opportunity gaps requires systemic interventions that address underlying structural barriers and provide equitable access to resources, support, and opportunities for all students.

Learning inequities existed long before COVID-19 disrupted schooling (Simon, 2021); however, the pandemic worsened educational disparities. Youth also experienced social isolation, financial hardships, and gaps in health care access because of the pandemic. Although some districts worked hard to maintain access, food insecurity disproportionally impacted low-income and rural students during school shutdowns, as when schools were in session the National School Lunch Program served over 30 million K–12 students per day (Billings & Aussenberg, 2019). Mental health issues and access barriers to service providers have been significant issues for young people as well. In 2021, adolescents reported many adverse experiences, including emotional abuse (55%), parental job loss (29%), hunger (24%), and physical abuse (11%), and the rate of drug overdoses for youth aged 12–17 nearly doubled from 282 deaths in 2019 to 546 deaths in 2020 (Panchal et al., 2022).

A range of development and academic setbacks are manifesting as students return to school. In a recent systematic review of student achievement patterns, studies across the nation showed that students are significantly behind in their performance on grade-level assessments compared to prepandemic learning outcomes (Hammerstein, 2021). In a study of more than 400,000 students across the country, researchers found significant gaps in literacy skills among K–12 students, and literacy gaps broadened between Black and Hispanic students and their White peers, consequently widening achievement gaps (Amplify Education, 2022). These exacerbated challenges extend beyond academic-content achievement, and may have long-term socioeconomic consequences, including lower graduation rates, reduced career retention, and decreased lifetime earnings, particularly for students of color and in high-poverty schools (Carlana & La Ferrara, 2021; Dorn et al., 2020). It is for these reasons that my conceptual

framework for this research is also informed by holistic and sociological perspectives on education.

Whole Child Perspectives

Another indicator of decline in youth overall wellbeing is the current state of youth mental health. In a systematic review of 324 empirical studies on the mental health outcomes of adolescents and children who experienced the COVID-19 lockdown, the prevalence of anxiety and depression symptoms increased in more than 57% of the studies (Panchal et al., 2021). In a study of parent-reported behavioral health issues, researchers found that from 2018 to 2020 the presence of significant emotional problems increased from 31.7% to 56.7%, and the presence of behavioral problems increased from 17.4% to 56.2% for young people 7–14 years-old (Rosen et al., 2021). In another study comparing data from a 10-year longitudinal study, researchers found that conduct, peer, and social behavior problems significantly increased after the COVID-19 lockdown (Ezpeleta et al., 2020). Interventions that address the academic, systemic, and social factors correlated with disproportionate education and life outcomes are needed.

Researchers and policymakers are concerned about the long-term consequences for students' life outcomes and wellbeing following the ruptures and upheavals of pandemic-prompted school closures. Some researchers have cautioned that without intervention, we can expect decreased graduation rates and increased class inequality in the years following the school closures and disruptions, with particularly high risk for students from marginalized groups (Carlana & La Ferrara, 2021; Dorn et al., 2020). Studies in education, child development, neurobiology, and psychology all point to the same conclusion: that the combination of content focus and interpersonal relationships make individualized instruction one of the most effective methods for improving students' learning outcomes (Jones & Kahn, 2017; Osher et al., 2020;

McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Roorda et al., 2011; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Quin 2017). However, in the wake of COVID-19, teachers are experiencing unprecedented staff shortages, burnout, and lingering challenges with the abrupt shifts to digital teaching modalities – all of which impact their work capacity and limit opportunities for individualized instruction (Beumer, 2021; Wiggan et al., 2021; Winthrop, 2020). Given the significant challenges teachers are facing, school-based interventions that involve the presence of tutors and mentors for small group and individual work may help facilitate the interpersonal relationships that are essential for youth's learning and human development.

Purpose of the Study

In recent years, understanding how tutoring could be scaled to increase access to the benefits and opportunities of individualized learning has become a more urgent conversation. Of particular interest are "high impact" and "high dosage" models of tutoring which are guided by established pedagogical practices regarding frequency and duration (and which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 2). Individualized learning, by its nature, is highly relational and highly effective. Private tutoring centers, referred to as *shadow education* in the United States, have grown in numbers from 3,000 in 1997 to over 9,000 in 2016, and most of this growth has been in high-income communities (Kim et al., 2021). There is a push now to grow in-school tutoring programs, with federal and state funding, to prevent financial access barriers which have historically excluded students from marginalized groups from this more personalized form of instruction.

Although individualized learning is a fundamentally relational act, current research on the benefits and implementation of K–12 tutoring predominantly relies on students' test scores as the primary indicator of progress. At the same time, there is limited research for administrators and

practitioners that captures pedagogical and relational characteristics involved in and resulting from tutoring. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore what benefits, challenges, and opportunities exist in tutoring initiatives from a practitioner point of view.

By interviewing university students about their experience as tutors in the rollout of a K–12 high dosage tutoring initiative, I gathered examples of their in-the-moment decision making, pedagogical strategies, and responses to challenges. Additionally, many newly implemented tutoring programs are population specific. That is, they pair tutors with students who are deemed most at risk, usually by their lower academic performance. My aim was to explore and describe unintended consequences of placing tutors with academically vulnerable students, as well as offer information about how tutors are viewing, understanding, and potentially misunderstanding students.

Through my research, I have not found any studies that center tutor's experience as a focal indicator of program impact. As an interdisciplinary critical scholar concerned with marginalized voices and the blind spots created by unchallenged dominant narratives through this research study, I address a gap in the literature, that is, tutors' stories of their experiences as part of high-impact tutoring initiatives. My goal as a practitioner–scholar was to capture tutor's perceptions about the benefits of the tutoring program to students, and to expand our conceptualization of what indicators of learning can look like beyond our current preoccupation with, and reliance upon, standardized test scores. Specifically, I sought to (a) capture stories that demonstrate the challenges and opportunities of tutoring; (b) broaden the scholarly conversation around the potential benefits tutoring relationships have on K–12 students and (c) consider how insights from tutor's could serve as a valuable means of formative assessment for intervention programs targeting K–12 students identified as academically vulnerable.

The research questions guiding this study helped to frame my collection of insightful information from participants. By putting that data in conversation with research on what experts advise (e.g., following specific program models), this study contributes a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary challenges and opportunities involved in implementing tutoring programs with similar features (e.g., high-dosage, in-school, employing university students as tutors, urban districts, at-risk students). By taking a close look at the processes, experiences, and relationships developed in one such program, I hope this study can provide insights to help policymakers, district leaders, and practitioners reflect on underexplored considerations to keep in mind when creating initiatives for the students they are intended to support.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How, if at all, did tutors perceive holistic development in students?
2. Based on tutors' experiences, what are the key factors impacting successful tutoring in a high dosage tutoring program?

Background

To provide background for this study, in this section, I summarize the national discourse around learning losses accrued during the pandemic and share what I believe to be myopic limitations of conversations excluding the nonacademic toll the pandemic has had on school-aged youth. Nationally representative samples have found significant performance declines across grade level assessments since the onset of the pandemic (Hammerstein, 2021). In a study of more than 400,000 students across 37 states, researchers found significant gaps in early literacy skills among K–12 students (and elementary students in particular), placing students at risk of not learning to read and effectively widening academic achievement and opportunity gaps

(Amplify Education, 2022). Further, K–12 students enrolled in high-poverty schools test scores in both math and reading are showing steep drops (Kuhfeld et al., 2022).

In response to these and similar indications of learning losses observed during the pandemic, school districts received unprecedented federal support of $122 billion through the American Relief Funds (ARP) to address the educational inequities exacerbated by the pandemic (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). To put this burst of funding into perspective, $122 billion is over seven times the usual rate of annual Title I fund allotments. In July 2022, the Biden-Harris administration released a statement urging schools to use the ARP funds to "provide high-quality tutoring, summer learning and enrichment, and afterschool programs that are proven pathways to helping students make up for lost learning time and succeed in school and in life, including by supporting their mental health" (White House Briefing Room, 2022, para. 2). Additionally, the Biden-Harris administration joined with leading organizations to "launch the National Partnership for Student Success (NPSS) to provide students with an additional 250,000 tutors and mentors over the next 3 years" (White House Briefing Room, 2022, para. 2). In response to the COVID-19 schooling ruptures, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have a renewed interest in tutoring.

Promising findings in several randomized field experiments suggest that tutoring, when provided to students using proven pedagogical theories and practices, has a greater impact on student achievement than other education initiatives, such as extended school days, summer school, and teacher evaluation interventions (Fryer, 2014, 2017). Many districts, with their newly allocated federal budgets, are exploring whether tutoring could help address the widened educational gaps for historically marginalized and academically vulnerable students.

The COVID-19 pandemic shifted many aspects of daily life for almost everyone, but young people from marginalized groups were disproportionately impacted both in and outside of their classrooms. When schools deemed it unsafe to continue meeting in person, some students were well-prepared for the shift to virtual learning, setting up shop in their parent's home office or their designated learning space. For other students, the shift created tremendous barriers to learning and social development. One group of students particularly challenged by the shift to virtual schooling were young people living with their grandparents. Approximately three million children and adolescents live with a grandparent who is their primary caregiver, and who struggled to help their grandchildren with homework well before it required digital navigation (Brunissen et al., 2020; Rapoport, 2020). These students were increasingly disengaged during the pandemic.

Another group of youth particularly challenged by school closures were those in low-income and rural communities whose access to internet connection was incorrectly assumed by school officials. The delayed engagement of these students "was a reminder of the lack of resources . . . and the social marginalization of students, where insufficient access and availability of the internet and the lack of latest technology affected organizational responsiveness and students' capacity to participate in digital learning" (Adnan & Anwar, 2020, p. 46). When schools were in session, the National School Lunch Program served over 30 million K–12 students per day on average (Billings & Aussenberg, 2019). Low-income and rural students experienced more instances of food insecurity during school shutdowns than before, in addition to technological barriers.

Black and Latino students were disproportionality impacted during the schooling disruptions as well because they were already more likely to be disadvantaged by having less

experienced or under-prepared teachers, less access to advanced classes, and more likelihood of being tracked into special education cohorts as compared to their white peers (Shores et al., 2020). The impact of COVID-19 exacerbated barriers for young people in ways that extend beyond test performance but are still tied to learning and functioning in schools.

Beyond Academics

The past few years have taken a devastating toll on young people's mental health. They have been exposed to unprecedented events such as school closures, parental unemployment, food insecurity, disrupted relationships, infection and illness, the loss of loved ones, and periods of forced quarantine and isolation. In a systematic review of 61 studies that included 55,000 children and adolescents, researchers reported increasing amounts of anxiety, irritability, depression, and anger with youth from marginalized groups at increased risk for psychological distress (Panchal et al., 2021). These studies point to the same conclusion: that exposure to environmental stressors is strongly related to decreased psychological health. Mental illnesses decrease young peoples' ability to problem solve and self-regulate, which also impact the ability to learn (Osher et al., 2020). Therefore, interventions targeting impediments to learning and learning losses would be misguided if they fail to combine academic and pedagogical support alongside an emphasis on increasing protective factors for mental health.

Although learning gaps have dominated the conversation on current intervention discourse, school personnel are concerned about the surges in the nonacademic impairments in student behavior. According to recent survey data, more than 83% of public schools reported worsened social, emotional, and behavioral development in students since the pandemic (NCES, 2022). The behaviors reported to have increased the most since the pandemic were classroom disruptions from student misconduct, rowdiness in the halls and other school spaces, and

increased disrespect toward teachers and staff. Although 51% of school leaders reported needing help with classroom management, 79% reported a need for more support around mental health. As one high school principal put it, “The needs are different than in a typical year because there’s such a high level of grief. . . . If they don’t have the opportunity to talk it out, they’ll act it out” (Belsha, 2021, para. 31). Available evidence suggests COVID-19 school closures and disruptions have significantly impeded the cognitive and socioemotional development of many children. Consequential behavioral issues could further disadvantage students if we fail to find holistic methods and approaches of support.

Research has illustrated ways in which declines in academic performance can be the result of structural factors that reflect the historic state of systemic inequalities impeding student’s “success” and opportunities (Ladson-Billings, 2006. Interventions that fail to consider the structural and social factors associated with student performance are not only misguided, but perhaps even dangerous in their omission of the nuanced issues marginalized youth are up against.

Why We Should Care About Tutoring

Tutoring is a well-established intervention that has the potential to reengage students in learning following the disruptions of the pandemic. At the same time, the relational nature of tutoring offers important developmental supports that build cognitive and noncognitive functioning, which are central to children’s learning and their general wellbeing. A concern with the stark declines in academic performance post pandemic is well warranted, but a socially just approach to interventions would involve considering the structural/external and socioemotional/internal factors impacting student’s progress in school. In reflecting on our current era, Roy (2020) writes that “Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with

the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next" (p. 3). As we start imagining the new world of schooling, the more personalized approach of tutoring holds great promise, especially when informed by the relational needs of young people.

Some scholars are calling for tutoring to be better informed by the holistic aspects of mentoring programs and frameworks. Kraft and Falken (2021) created a conceptual model for national-scale tutoring that integrates the research on mentoring and tutoring. They envision tutoring as a service that "provides students with sustained relationships with a caring adult or older peer who would serve as an academic mentor to support students' persistence and engagement in school" (p. 1). The relationship between mentoring and tutoring is evident in a recent mixed methods study with tutors from 25 programs across 12 states. Stilwell (2022) found that despite the programmatic emphasis on academics, tutors reported promoting relationship building and interpersonal connections as a higher priority than bolstering academic skills and outcomes.

Building on the holistic model of tutoring put forth by Kraft and Falken (2021), who argue that the central goal of scaling tutoring programs should be to "build a coordinated, team approach to support students' success in school where all students have someone who knows them and can be their academic advocate and role model" (p. 7), Stilwell (2022) made similar recommendations. She suggested that "we move toward a definition and implementation of tutoring more like it was practiced by Socrates and rest this on a refined understanding of what tutoring is, with the potential to support students in a reimagined, human-centered way" (p. 123). To the extent that effective mentoring, like tutoring, can increase educational achievement and attainment through relational bonds, there may be a benefit to reimagining a human-centered

notion of tutoring, and integrating the academic structure of tutoring with the holistic social developments addressed by mentoring. In this study, I explored the potential and challenges of a large-scale tutoring initiative in one urban district.

Theoretical Frameworks

I approached this study with a constructivist paradigm, meaning that I believe that social phenomena are subject to interpretation, and that reality itself is interpretive and therefore created and renegotiated socially through interactions. Bhattacharya (2017) described the difference between an objectivist and a constructivist as someone who sees a heart as a muscular organ, versus a space where love grows—or a table as a horizontal piece of furniture versus a place where one can share a meal or dance.

Constructivist studies examine how participants form socialized meanings and contextualized understandings and get as close to their experiences as possible. In this study, stories and experiences were essential to this work because they provide a rich description of how tutors actively construct their experiences and coconstruct the realities between themselves and students. Tutors' perspectives and experiences are not just of interest in their own right, but they also give us a glimpse into how tutoring is being conceptualized and enacted with students. If we care about students, we need to care about tutors too. The humanist nature of constructivism is well suited for a study exploring how tutors make meaning of their work, their process of engaging young people, and their impact on students.

For this study, I choose to draw upon the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP; Ladson-Billings, 1995) which offers insights into how tutors incorporated students' backgrounds, experiences, and identities into their instructional practices to create inclusive and empowering learning environments. CRP, as articulated by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), emphasizes

holistic perspectives by arguing for the importance of students' cultural heritage, language, and lived experiences as assets that can enrich their educational experiences. Culturally responsive teachers view students as whole individuals with diverse backgrounds and acknowledges that their cultural identities influence their learning styles, preferences, and motivations. By considering the whole child in educational practices and policies, CRP aims to ensure that each student receives the necessary support to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, preparing them for success in school and beyond. This framework can inform current approaches at addressing educational inequity following the disruptions of the pandemic.

Overview of Methods

In this dissertation, I used a qualitative approach that consisted of interviews and focus groups to explore the lived experience of graduate students working in a large urban district as K–12 tutors. In this qualitative study, I collected data through one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. According to Merriam (2009), researchers engaging in qualitative research explore how people attribute meaning to their experiences, how they interpret and understand their experiences, and how they construct their worldviews, beliefs, and values. Such elements of meaning, interpretation, and construction were essential to this study in which I gathered information from tutors about their vision for the work they do and their perceptions of successes and obstacles. As such, a qualitative methodology was best suited for the type of inquiries I had.

I interviewed graduate students working as K–12 tutors in a school-university collaborative model in a large school district in the southeast that had recently been taken to scale. The program grew from a handful of tutors to more than 30 over the course of a single semester through the availability of increased federal funding that allowed districts to expand

their tutoring programs. These tutors were graduate students from more than eight colleges and 26 academic departments within a large public university, with varying backgrounds in teaching and tutoring. The tutors were employed during the 2022–2023 school year, providing tutoring to address the learning disruptions accrued during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and they worked at schools in a racially and linguistically diverse urban district. This was an interview-based study, wherein I used a semistructured interview protocol to elicit participants' understanding of tutoring interactions, and to uncover, from their vantage points, were the challenges and opportunities of their work and the benefits to students. I also conducted two focus groups with participants to explore emerging themes and review findings with participants to check for accuracy via "member-checking" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

I recorded and transcribed the interviews and focus groups and analyzed transcripts using a multicycle model of inductive and deductive coding (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021). I selected this analysis process because the iterative nature allowed me to honor the emergent possibilities in qualitative data through inductive coding, while also ensuring focus and alignment by coding the data in relation to my research questions. The stages of Bingham and Witkowsky's (2021) coding procedure include sorting data into organizational codes by date, theme, and/or source category, then reviewing the data with regard to specific research questions and theoretical frameworks, while also engaging in keeping analytic memos throughout the analysis process. Using memos, I maintained and reviewed notes about the discussions being had, the way the tutor participants responded to questions and to one another, when they became animated or withdrawn, and other descriptive aspects of the sessions that aided in generating thick description (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Geertz, 1973). I also used memos to continuously reflect on my

positionality by documenting the feelings and reactions that came up for me as a former U.S. public school student, and former tutor.

My main source of data was interviews with tutors; however, I also analyzed documents, including policy briefs and program materials. These documents helped contextualize the study and broaden my understanding of the context and goals of the HDT initiative. I describe my methods in much more detail in chapter three.

Positionality

As part of establishing the foundation for this study, it is important for me to discuss my positionality in this research. The term positionality refers to the ways in which our many social identities affect our pedagogical behavior and influence our worldview as researchers. In a recent survey of literature on researcher positionality, Holmes (2020) wrote that positionality refers to:

> [an] individual's worldview or "where the researcher is coming from" [and] concerns ontological assumptions (an individual's beliefs about the nature of social reality and what is knowable about the world), their epistemological assumptions (an individual's beliefs about the nature of knowledge) and their assumptions about human nature and agency (individual's assumptions about the way we interact with our environment and relate to it). (p. 1)

The practice of stating the various ways in which researchers are socialized by our personal experiences and group memberships is one way to be transparent about how our perspective might influence our perceptions and analyses.

I came to this work as a scholar trained in studying the cultural foundations of education (CFE) from an interdisciplinary perspective. Housed under the umbrella of educational studies, scholars in the field of CFE share "a particular interest in the integration of social analysis,

cultural analysis, and praxis" (UNCG ELC program overview, 2018). The national council of foundations scholars, the American Educational Studies Association (AESA), distinguishes CFE scholars as those who employ one or more of the liberal arts disciplines (e.g., history, politics, sociology, philosophy, anthropology) to "bring intellectual resources derived from these areas to bear in developing interpretive, normative, and critical perspectives on education, both inside of and outside of schools" (AESA, n.d., para. 1).

Like my mentors in CFE studies, in my work I strive to develop interpretive and critical perspectives on education and to integrate social and cultural analyses with praxis. Such inquiries are rooted in paradigmatic beliefs that the social phenomena we observe can be understood by analyzing social, cultural, and situational contexts—the belief that reality itself is interpretive and therefore created and renegotiated socially through interactions. As a researcher, I approached this dissertation by looking at data in the form of tutor's descriptions of social interactions and subjective interpretations for clues to discover underlying meanings, dynamics, and functions of phenomena, events, or practices involved in tutoring.

Ontologically, I believe that the social world is constantly being made and remade and that it is subject to the decisions and actions of the social actors who inhabit it; in other words, I believe we create much of our own realities. Epistemologically, I believe that the meaning of social phenomena can differ at individual or group levels and is therefore subject to interpretation. In academia, these beliefs about reality and the social world are expressed in differing research paradigms, or "the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed" (Kuhn, 1962, p. 43). These beliefs oriented my qualitative research inquiry.

Positionality in a Racialized Society

Another aspect of positionality that I reflected on throughout this research process was how years of personal lived experience in K–12 schools as a formerly low-income woman of color shaped my interests in this study and likely influenced some of my interpretations. As a biracial woman living in 21st-century America, my racial identities are salient parts of how I see and navigate the world. I have often felt my Black West African diasporic roots to be at odds with my White Scandinavian and French diasporic identities. The salience of my racial juxtaposition was reinforced by growing up in a racially polarized society constructed in the aftermath of chattel slavery, racial subjugation, and the dehumanization of Africans and Black Americans by White Americans.

Due to my mixed heritage, I shift between identifying as a mixed-race Black woman and a woman of color (WOC). This ongoing shifting is a result of negotiating the cultural roots I feel in Blackness alongside the reality that my ambiguous features and tan complexion have led me to walk through the world as someone not often categorized as Black. Although I have certainly experienced hateful racist encounters, I am often presumed to be Samoan, Hawaiian, or South American, and as such, I have likely evaded some of the violent and aggressive projections of anti-Blackness.

This positionality complicates my insider-outsider researcher experiences, as I am never fully inside or outside many groups. I feel resonance with what W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) referred to as double consciousness—the "struggle African Americans face to remain true to Black culture while at the same time conforming to the dominant white society . . . a peculiar sensation . . . one ever feels his two-ness" (p. 2). As a mixed-race woman of color, I often feel tension around my identity–straddling two racialized worlds, but fully belonging to neither. I feel

implicated in conversations about what individuals with White privilege should do to create a more socially just society (carrying a sense of generational debt), while on the other hand feeling entitled to the self-liberation and sabbatical owed to Black women after generations of disenfranchisement. My identity is tied to this sense of two-ness—of navigating the intersections where my generational debt and my generational traumas meet.

My sense of duality, of existing both within and outside of, of being interwoven and in between has inspired curiosities about how other people navigate the world in accordance with their multiple, sometimes conflicting social identities. This research study was rooted in part in these curiosities about how positionality and senses of identity impact how we show up (and are received) in our teaching experiences. Tutors work in the in-between, balancing the needs and expectations of teachers and students, and while sharing affinity with both groups, fully belonging to neither. I was interested in the stories tutors told themselves about their identities (and how they influenced their classroom experiences) and where they feel their responsibilities lie when they are working with K–12 students from their own liminal vantage points.

Positionalities of Poverty

The research questions I ask throughout this study are also influenced by my working-class upbringing, and my gradual transition into higher education spaces historically reserved for middle- and upper-class people. Experiencing and observing the ways that poverty played out in my family and community inspired an interest in structural/systemic critique. Having grown up in a low-income household, I was exposed to many of the barriers associated with systemic poverty. Because we moved from apartment to apartment so often, I rarely spent a full year in a single school, and every report card I can remember had red stamped letters reading “chronic

absenteeism." My mom and my school officials seemed to constantly be in conflict, their accusations and her defensiveness never leaving room for any real communication to occur.

From district to district, I have more painful memories of the times I was in school than I do happy ones; however, the happy memories, usually involving a teacher who invited me to have lunch with them in their classroom, or who wrote me personalized and affirming notes on my writing assignments, gleam in my mind. Mrs. Forrester in fourth grade who told me about how much she moved around as a kid too, while we secretly ate McDonalds on the reading rug during lunch. Mr. Manchester who told me my writing was dynamic and impactful, and who took me to a poetry festival even though I was flunking his English class due to absenteeism. Marlana, Andrea, and Carla at the planned parenthood teen center who hired me for all the jobs imaginable (babysitting, office assistant, recruitment "specialist") to get money/autonomy while in high school. In doing deeply reflective autoethnographic work the summer before this research, I realized the most meaningful moments I had in my P–22 education were with teachers or staff members who *showed* me care beyond their obligatory duty or professional distance. I learned more from them than from any other teachers.

My own childhood learning experiences share connective threads to my interests in education, and in education as a space where students from disadvantaged upbringings can be both intellectually and emotionally nurtured. I realize that these experiences are uniquely my own and may not characterize what other students, educators, or staff have experienced. As I mentioned earlier, reflecting upon and naming positionality can help us to be transparent about some of the biases we may hold and must navigate throughout the research process; yet, it can also help highlight instances when our connections, lived experiences, and personal investments in a topic can be strengths that uniquely situate researchers with insider status. In qualitative

research, it is important to approach data collection and data reporting with empathy, and I bring deep reservoirs of empathy to this work due to barriers I encountered in my own education.

In addition to having been labeled as a student at risk for noncompletion, like many of the students targeted by the rise of in-school interventions like the tutoring initiative I studied, I also share insider status as a tutor who spent a summer working in the district that is the site for this study. Sharing this experience helped me establish rapport with the tutors when asking about their experiences and feelings. My experiences also contributed to bringing certain assumptions into the work which I tried to address by employing three methods of trustworthiness: triangulation, member-checking, and adopting a multistep reflexive data analysis procedure. I will elaborate on each of these efforts in Chapter 3 when I discuss the trustworthiness of my research.

A Window Into Tutoring

Because of how my positionalities influence my worldview, and consequently this study, it is useful and important to share how I came to this endeavor. As part of a summer tutoring intervention, I spent time working with 6th and 7th grade students as a one-on-one and small group tutor. I worked with students who the district identified as academically vulnerable. Students were classified as such if they failed one or more of their state exams in English Language Arts, Science, or Math the previous year. The majority of students I tutored had individualized education plans (IEPs) which indicated their diverse learning needs. My work in the program helped me see the need for individualized instruction and the potential for tutors who could offer support in more ways than I expected.

I witnessed how burnout manifested for teachers trying their best to manage classes of 20 or more students who nearly all had IEPs. Additionally, I observed how when tutors worked with

students in small groups, it created slightly more manageable environments for teachers. Students also had another person they could ask for help. It became clear that there were a range of ways our presence as tutors could provide much needed support in postpandemic school environments. One example of an unanticipated chance to offer support came when mitigating a negative interaction with an eighth grade student whom I call Kiki.

Kiki is a 13-year-old African American student who used she/her pronouns. In class, Kiki regularly had side conversations with her classmates during lessons and was easily distracted even after being redirected. Some teachers appeared very frustrated with Kiki's disruptions, and they consequently sent her out into the hallway or to the assistant principal's office during class.

In the wake of one particularly tense interaction between Kiki and her English teacher, I realized that at times the value of individualized relationships with tutors superseded academic tutelage. Based on the rapport I established with Kiki, I was able to deescalate an emotionally distressing situation and help her return to a calm state that was not only more conducive to learning, but also essential for her physical health and wellbeing.

On a sticky hot day in summer school, Kiki asked, yet again, to go to the bathroom. Her teacher, Mrs. T replied, "No! I said not right now" 3 or 4 times after multiple interruptions from Kiki and other students in the crowded class. Kiki stood up and yelled "It's my right to go to the bathroom! What's your problem with me, why can't I go to the bathroom?!" As a tutor I worked one-on-one with students, and I also would tutor small groups of students during class time. When working inside the classrooms, I observed that Kiki frequently asked to be excused to go to the bathroom, or to get a snack from the vending machine, or to go talk to the guidance counselor in this class and others.

These disruptions appeared to be frustrating for most teachers, but they are not an anomaly to this setting. According to data gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), more than 83% of public schools reported that the pandemic has negatively impacted student's social, emotional, and behavioral development (NCES, 2022). Many teachers have indicated that the return to school has led to more disruptive behavior leaving teachers to "do a lot more conflict resolution," during an already stressful time (Belsha, 2021).

In this instance Mrs. T seemed to be experiencing the sense of being overwhelmed that teachers across the nation described. She retorted, "You walk out that door and go to the bathroom if you want to, and it'll be your last day in this program, I promise you that!" Kiki responded, "Good, I don't care about this stupid program anyways!" and began to pack up her things to prepare to exit. Mrs. T's face was flushed. The other students had begun to whisper and chatter, and Mrs. T shouted, "Good! I hope you *do* leave so you get suspended, and we don't have to deal with this! This isn't what I signed up for!" She walked over to Kiki and took her school-issued Chrome Book off the desk. "You won't be needing this anymore either!" Mrs. T said, and Kiki stormed out of the room.

A few minutes later I excused myself from the small group I was working with in class to look for Kiki, since it was not clear based on that interaction where she would or should go. I found her in the girls' bathroom sobbing on the phone with her mother. Kiki and I had built up a rapport in our tutoring sessions, and when I saw her, I gently put a hand on her shoulder, and took some deep breaths hoping she would follow my lead. She told her mother her "nice teacher" who "liked her" was here now, and I explained to Kiki's mother that I wasn't a teacher, and that Kiki just had a confrontation, and I wanted to check on her. Her mother wanted to speak to an administrator, so I told her I would walk Kiki to the principal's office and ask the principal to

call as soon as possible. Kiki's mother sounded relieved. She talked briefly about being tired of issues coming up at school, thanked me, and hung up. I asked Kiki if she wanted a hug, and still crying, she stepped into my arms.

As we walked to the principal's office, I was flooded with memories of an almost too similar encounter with an elementary teacher when I ended up in altercations over going to the bathroom as well. At the time I attended an all-White school in a rural district. While standing in the corner at my teacher's direction, I peed my pants. I was 6 years old. When my mom heard my account of what happened and brought me a replacement pair, she was livid, not unlike Kiki's mom. In a fury of curse words my mom expressed her frustration that my teacher had gotten into a "power struggle" with me about a bathroom break, and the principal told her she would not be allowed back in the building if she didn't lower her voice. I was so embarrassed. My mom wasn't polite or civil, but she was understandably upset and standing up for her child as she felt a mother should. Seeing how the school reacted to her, and to me, left a lasting imprint of the school as an unsafe place for us, and I carried that skepticism toward my schools and teachers for a long time.

After some journaling about this interaction, how I responded, and what influenced my response—I realized that these responses were uniquely tied to my positionality and schooling experiences. These experiences positioned me to tap into a deep, raw, empathy that laid the ground for me to see this little girl, as disruptive as she was, as a whole person bringing a lot of baggage into school with her. Most educators know that students who are disruptive in schools usually have childhood adversities impacting them well beyond the school building. However, it can be hard to know what a student has going on in their personal life with so much to manage in the classroom. In my role as a tutor, I had the time and opportunity to learn about students in

ways that that classroom teachers are, unfortunately, not always able to. Since then, I've wondered how other tutor's might also be leveraging this unique opportunity in ways that fosters students' connection and success in school.

Prior to this encounter in which Kiki was nearly suspended, I had been tutoring her for 4 days a week for several weeks, and early in our sessions she confided in me that her father was out of the home most of the time, and her mother didn't have a job right now, although she was taking classes online at the community college. Kiki was proud to tell me that when her mom did get a job again, she would have a house key of her own so that she could let herself and her little brother in after school and be in charge until her mom got home from work. She was very good at cooking ramen not too soft, not too chewy, she shared with me. Kiki assumed she'd have that responsibility most evenings because her mom had always worked second shifts in the past. Kiki also described her neighborhood to me as a place where girls were always getting in fights, and you had to be a "real good fighter" to live on her side of town. These are just snippets of Kiki's world, and the types of responsibilities, adult expectations, and normalized violence she was exposed to.

I do not think it is realistic that teachers or tutors attempt to do an evaluation of the emotional or psychological state of students, but to teach all students well, we need to be curious and learn about the experiences our students are exposed to, how those experiences culturally or generationally differ from our own, and how these different perspectives might be influencing students' behaviors as well as our reactions to certain behaviors. Tutors may be in an ideal position to spend time building rapport and relationships that can then enable them to intervene with challenges to school performance and success in a myriad of ways. As one principal stated in an interview, "Don't we all sometimes just need a safe person to walk with? . . . A lot of our

kids need that right now" (Belsha, 2021). Studying the ways in which school-based tutors are understanding and making sense of their work, and the students they work with, is important, especially given the growing discourse around expanding tutoring interventions.

Significance of the Study

By exploring practitioner experiences during efforts to scale tutoring programs as an education intervention, this study contributes a richer understanding of the strengths and limitations of growing tutoring programs. Closely examining the experiences of tutors through an exploratory qualitative study also provides insights that can help scholars and practitioners to identify opportunities for program refinement. The resultant information can be used to inform the recruitment, training, and retention of future tutors as these programs continue to grow and undergo formative assessments.

Overview of the Chapters

I organized this qualitative dissertation into six chapters, including this first introductory chapter, which I follow with a literature review chapter, methodology chapter, two data chapters, and a concluding chapter. Below I briefly describe each chapter.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this first chapter, I provided an overview of the research around tutoring, as well as background context that promoted the need for this study, in part due to COVID-19 related schooling disruptions. I also shared some background information about previous attempts to deploy relatively large-scale tutoring programs as an intervention on U.S. educational inequities. I also included my problem and purpose statements, research questions, a positionality statement, and a brief discussion of the methods I used for this study. I concluded this chapter with a description of the study's potential implications and significance.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In Chapter 2, I provide the foundation of my study on tutoring interventions by reviewing the literature and research on these initiatives. I define key terms such as high-impact and high-dosage tutoring, which are the models employed by the site under study for this dissertation. I provide more in-depth context by reviewing, analyzing, and synthesizing relevant literature about the characteristics, features, and outcomes of previous tutoring programs as well as the implications and recommendations that have been made by researchers who have evaluated prior attempts to scale tutoring programs. I also review literature on the benefits of mentoring programs, as the relational mode of tutoring and mentoring share many characteristics. I conclude by describing some future directions of how to design, revamp, and scale tutoring programs in ways that holistically promote the wellbeing of students.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In Chapter three, I detail the methods I use to conduct this study. I discuss the usefulness of qualitative study methodologies for this research, describe my research paradigm, my data collection methods, and analysis procedures. I share how I addressed ethical concerns and trustworthiness in my study, using techniques such as member checking and gaining IRB approval through the university. I also share some strengths and limitations of the research design and reintroduce my research questions, describe the setting of the study, and conclude with an overview of how I report my findings in two subsequent findings chapters.

Chapter 4: Relational Experiences With Students

Chapter four is the first findings chapter. Although several significant findings emerged from my interviews with tutors, one shared commonality among many stories and experiences was the prevalence and importance of relationships. In this chapter, I report tutors' experiences

with students, and also highlight the different types of orientations tutors had toward their relationships with students (personal mentors and professional instructors). I also describe the ways that tutors, regardless of their orientation to tutoring, predominantly approached their work using culturally responsive teaching practices to reengage students with school and learning.

Chapter 5: Relationships With Structures and Schools

In this chapter, I expand on my findings, looking more deeply at tutors' experiences. Here, I share tutor's descriptions and experiences of the influence school culture, structural and leadership factors, and systemic inequities played in shaping how they tutored, and even if they got the opportunity to tutor in the ways they expected which, as I will show, many did not. Nearly half of the tutors in this study were not able to tutor with integrity to the practices suggested in high-impact tutoring models, and this chapter provides insight into what some of the underexplored barriers and facilitators were.

Chapter 6: Analysis and Recommendations

In my final chapter, I discuss my findings and put them back into conversation with the scholarly literature on tutoring initiatives. I also include suggestions for tutor-practitioners, program-administrators, site coordinators, and policy makers, as well as recommendations for future research. Some of these suggestions are a result of my analysis and synthesis of tutors experiences, and some are suggestions from tutor-practitioners themselves.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Tutoring is not a novel approach in education; however, our understanding of what tutoring does, how it works, and why it matters has evolved over time (McFarlane, 2016; Mozolic & Shuster, 2016). Historically, tutoring has been primarily used by economically privileged students, yet advocates for educational equity are increasingly working to find ways to expand and sustain tutoring programs for students from marginalized groups (Mozolic & Shuster, 2016). However, tutoring still is not equally accessible for students from lower-resourced communities as compared to students who have the means to pay for private tutors. Internationally, private tutoring is a $124 billion industry (Global Industry Analysts, 2020). The number of private tutoring centers in the United States has grown from 3,000 in 1997 to over 9,000 in 2016, and this growth has been concentrated in high-income areas (Kim et al., 2021). The rapid expansion of programs could indicate beliefs around the effectiveness of tutoring in helping students get ahead. The discrepancies in location of tutoring facilities highlight that individualized instruction is more accessible to affluent students with families who can afford it (Saadvera et al., 2020).

As part of the effort to expand access to tutoring, the Annenberg Institute at Brown University established the National Student Support Accelerator (NSSA) as a research and resource hub for high-impact tutoring (now part of Stanford University). The NSSA operationally defines high-impact tutoring programs as "those that either have directly demonstrated significant gains in student learning through state-of-the-art research studies or have characteristics that have proven to accelerate student learning" (Robinson & Loeb, 2021, p. 7). More specifically, the NSSA identifies the most common qualities of high-impact tutoring programs as those provided 3 or more times a week, by tutors with formal training, using

ongoing formative assessments, and focused on tutor-student relationships. In a review of tutoring evaluation studies, NSSA researchers Robinson and Loeb (2021) found that when these best practices are adhered to, tutoring "leads to substantial learning gains for students by supplementing (but not replacing) students' classroom experiences [and it] responds to individual needs" (p. 7). Depending on the situation, high-impact tutoring may help students learn skills, provide academic enrichment opportunities, and minimize gaps in post-COVID-19 learning inequities.

In Chapter one, I explained some of the myriad of structural and socioemotional factors that impact students' school performance and capacity for learning. In further reviewing studies about what makes tutoring a promising intervention in the first section of this chapter, I also review literature on the interconnected aspects of youth-mentoring relationships, which are demonstrated to improve youth's educational outcomes. Because tutoring is a deeply relational method of instruction, in the second section, I review research on the role of relationships in learning and development. Because the tutors I will be interviewing work for a structured tutoring program that was recently grown from less than 10 tutors to over 30, in the third section I review literature on the programmatic aspects of implementing and scaling tutoring initiatives. My proposed study is interview-based, and as such, in the final section I review contributions and limitations of previous qualitative studies with tutor-practitioners to identify how my proposed dissertation builds on previous research. More specifically, the structure for the rest of this chapter is split into four major topical areas, each with corresponding subsections. The main sections are (a) studies on tutoring, mentoring, and their intersections; (b) studies on relational elements of learning; (c) studies of the challenges and opportunities in implementing and scaling tutoring initiative; and (d) a review of previous qualitative studies with tutor practitioners.

Tutoring and Mentoring

Although tutoring and mentoring may be distinct practices with unique purposes and approaches, there is considerable overlap in the scholarly literature on their effects. Traditionally, tutors' roles have been specified toward improving students' immediate performance in a particular subject area, however, as Kraft and Falken (2021) noted, "the pandemic has forced us to reconsider long-held norms and practices in public education, creating a rare opening for fundamental and structural change" (p. 7). Kraft and Falken's conceptual model of tutoring calls for a deeply holistic consideration of tutoring that integrates some of the relational aspects of mentoring, in place of an overly heavy reliance on standardized grades and testing cultures as the primary marker of the success of tutoring. They point out that progress in student learning is also demonstrated by factors like student's persistence and engagement in school. Instead of preparing tutors to think of their primary role as content delivery or remediation agents, research shows that it would benefit students to infuse the public education system with tutors who can act as academic advocates and motivators, especially for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the following subsections, I review literature that defines tutoring and mentoring, and then synthesize research findings associated with each type of intervention.

What Is Tutoring?

Tutoring refers to an individualized educational relationship between a teacher and student, and it is an instructional approach that dates as far back as the teachings of Socrates and Plato during 5th century BCE (Alesksandrovna et al., 2015). The role of the tutor is to facilitate instruction for the tutee by explaining material, offering examples, demonstrating skills, and providing strategies for learning (Topping, 2000). In its broadest definition, tutoring refers to "a situation in which one or more persons serve as the instructional agent for another, usually in a

specific subject or for a particular purpose" (Schunk, 2012, p. 158). Although both tutoring and teaching aim to support students, improve skills, achieve goals, and expand knowledge, tutoring is distinct from classroom teaching in several ways.

Teachers often educate students with a range of academic needs and strengths, and they focus on generalized knowledge about a subject. Tutors, however, might be able to teach a topic with greater depth because they have fewer students and more flexibility with their lesson plans. Also, tutoring can take place in a range of environments and is generally one-to-one or with small groups of students. Due to smaller instructor to student ratios, tutoring provides space for more individualized attention and learning, is generally more student-centered, and personalized to students' current level of comprehension as compared to classroom teaching (Topping, 2000). Moreover, tutors can employ a variety of pedagogies and curricular approaches, whereas teachers are often bound to the testing culture of K–12 education, making them less likely to deviate from the curricula associated with standardized tests (Robinson & Dervin, 2019). Although researchers are increasingly exploring tutoring as a strategy to address learning losses and support students as individual learners, initiatives may face the same limitations of classroom teaching if they are primarily evaluated in terms of standardized performance measures.

What Is Mentoring?

Anderson and Shannon (1998) defined mentoring as "a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a . . . less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and/or personal development" (p. 40). A mentor can generally be defined as "an influential individual in your environment who has advanced . . . experience and knowledge and

who is committed to providing upward mobility and support" (Scandura & Williams, 2001, p. 349). In mentoring, the agenda and goals for the relationships are usually aimed at supporting the mentee in multifaceted ways, and the focus can range from academic, career, wellness, or social goals.

Research shows that having a caring relationship with at least one nonparental adult in their school, neighborhood, or community is generally associated with various forms of positive outcomes for youth such as improved socioemotional wellbeing (Hurd et al., 2013). As part of a survey of 219 mentoring programs in the United States., Zand et al. (2009) collected pre and post mentoring outcomes and found that mentored youth exhibited increased family bonding, better overall relationships with adults, and increased sense of school-connectedness. Through close and enduring ties, mentoring relationships have been associated with increases in scholastic competence and perceived social acceptance as well (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

There is a well-established body of research examining correlations between access to mentoring relationships and educational outcomes. For example, in a longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample of young adults, DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) found that youth who reported having a mentor of some sort during adolescence exhibited significantly better outcomes regarding high-school completion, college attendance, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and gainful employment as compared to their peers who lacked mentoring. Increasing access to mentoring relationships is evidenced to improve educational and socioemotional outcomes for youth. In another study, researchers ran statistical analyses on data from 2,409 young adults collected in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and found that youth who reported having different types of mentors (kin-, community-, or school-based) also reported having better school attachment, reduced risk behavior, and higher academic

achievement during and after high school than nonmentored individuals (Fruiht & Wray-Lake, 2013). The positive academic outcomes associated with mentorship may be a result of interactions with mentors that allow children and youth to acquire and refine new ways of thinking and get exposure to different perspectives, which all contribute to increased cognitive functioning (Miranda-Chan et al., 2016; Rhodes et al., 2006).

The benefits associated with mentoring can occur in both formal programs (Collins et al., 2010) and naturally forming informal mentor-relationships (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Miranda-Chan et al., 2016). However, research indicates that youth only derive significant advantages from the relationships when the mentor and youth forge a strong connection that is characterized by empathy and trust.

Exploring the importance of trust, in an interview-based study with 31 participants from a community-based mentoring program, Spencer (2007), found that the demise of mentor-mentee relations was most frequently due to deficiencies in mentor relational skills, inabilities to bridge cultural divides, perceived lack of protégé motivation, and feelings of abandonment, all of which tarnished trust in the relationship. Findings from this study also indicated that the relationships which offer the most benefits to youth had long duration and consistency. This aligns with calls for high-dosage models of tutoring that would occur throughout an entire school year, multiple times per week.

Mentoring and Tutoring Intersections

Historically, a limitation of community-based mentoring programs has been their lack of structure (Gershenfeld, 2014). Researchers have suggested that to be consistently effective, mentoring programs should be grounded on a clear conceptual foundation that includes a definition of the relationship, goals of the mentorship activities, and ways to assess the mentoring

outcomes (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Spencer, 2007). One way that mentoring has developed programmatically has been to shift toward school-based models. School-based mentoring programs aim to provide a blend of academic and socioemotional support, specifically, and as such move away from more ambiguous goals of building connection that were common in other mentoring programs, for example in Big Brother, Big Sister programs (Herrera et al., 2007; Rhodes, 2020). There is potential for symbiotic benefits in the conjoining of mentoring and tutoring approaches. Although mentoring programs may benefit from the structural elements found in high-impact tutoring models, tutoring may be of greater benefit to students if program models were informed by the holistic sociorelational aspects of mentoring. In fact, scholars have argued that relationships are at the heart of teaching and learning, including in both classroom settings and in tutoring sessions.

Relational Elements of Learning

Literature on teaching, learning, child development, and cognition all point to a similar conclusion: the process of teaching and learning, in any context, requires integrating academic instruction and attention to social and emotional development (i.e., relationships). The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development is a council of distinguished scientists at the Aspen Institute working in medicine and neurobiology, economics, psychology, and education. In 2017, the council published a groundbreaking report "calling for the full integration of social and emotional learning within academic instruction" based on evidence affirming that social, emotional, and cognitive domains are imperative elements of the learning process (Jones & Kahn, 2017, p. 6). In subsections that follow, I look at the importance of relationships for child development, relationships in formal educational settings, and relational aspects of tutoring.

Relationships for Child Development

Human development is a multifaceted process. It involves a combination of gene sequencing, chemical hormones, and social and cultural ecologies. When it comes to learning—developing behavior patterns, skill acquisition, and adaptive capacities—the secure attachments of relationships that create ecologies of consistency, cognitive stimulation, trustworthiness, and responsivity play an integral role (Bornstein, 2015; Center on the Developing Child, 2016). In contrast, insufficiently supportive and culturally incongruent environments can exacerbate stress levels that hinder foundational development milestones, such as coping skills to manage stressful conditions, regulate emotion, and sustain attention capacities—all of which are essential in learning and the ability to engage in and accomplish goals (Bornstein & Leventhal, 2015; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

In a meta-analysis of case-examples, Li and Julian (2012) synthetized the results of four types of empirical studies documenting findings on developmental relationships across multiple settings. They define developmental relationships as "reciprocal human interactions that embody an enduring emotional attachment, progressively more complex patterns of joint activity, and a balance of power that gradually shifts from the developed person in favor of the developing person" (Li & Julian, 2012, p. 157). Developmental relationships have also been characterized as those which provide emotional security, compassionate communication, and behavior modeling that supports the development of age-appropriate skills (Thompson & Goodwin, 2016). Li and Julian concluded that the types of relationships evidenced to support healthy human development most frequently consisted of these activating characteristics regardless of the setting in which the relationship occurred.

Relationships have been shown to have significant impacts on children and adolescents' cognitive and noncognitive skill development. Cognitive skills refer to an individual's intellectual capacities such as thinking, memory recall, reasoning, and pattern identification (Schunk, 2012). Noncognitive skills, sometimes referred to as soft skills, include motivation, self-efficacy, temperament, and attitudes (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001; Kautz et al., 2014). Both types of skillsets are essential to the learning process and are outcomes of nurturing and stimulating developmental relationships (Li & Julian, 2012; Thompson & Goodwin, 2016).

In a meta-analysis of 82 empirical studies of correlations between relationships and student's cognitive and noncognitive skillsets, Korpershoek et al. (2019) found that students from diverse ethno-racial and socioeconomic backgrounds exhibited higher order skill development when they reported having feelings of belonginess in school. In another recent meta-analysis, Osher et al. (2020) synthesized the literature on 2 decades of research on the role of relationships in childhood development. In addition to this extensive review, they triangulated findings by member-checking with experts in the field. The research team determined that not only were relationships important, but they are also the very crux of human development. Regarding learning, the researchers showed evidence that "relationships and contexts, along with how children appraise and interpret them, can be risks and assets for healthy learning and development, and their influence can be seen across generations and can produce intra- as well as intergenerational assets and risks" (Osher et al., 2020, p. 7). These findings are consistent with other widely referenced studies on the correlations between learning, development, and relationships (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Roorda et al., 2011; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Quin 2017).

Relationships in Formal Education

Given what we know about the role of relationships in the process of human development, it makes sense that there is a growing interest in investigating the interconnectedness of relationships and schooling. In 1984, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) established a Special Interest Group (SIG) on Learning Environments, laying the foundation for a subfield aimed at studying the role interpersonal relationships play in educational outcomes and experiences (Wubbles et al., 2012). According to Wentzel (2012):

> Hypothesizing connections between secure attachments and children's motivation for school-related activities is fairly straightforward. A positive sense of self, curiosity, and willingness to explore, and trust in others can be viewed as central precursors to children's beliefs about emotional connectedness with others, efficacy to learn and interact socially with others, personal control, and intrinsic interest in classroom activities. (p. 23)

In educational studies, learning theorists have begun to consider relationships as serving a range of functions that contribute to students' competence at school. Some scholars have suggested that teachers-student relationships may be as crucial as factors like curriculum and school poverty levels when it comes to predicting students' academic achievement (Martin & Collie, 2019). In a in a mixed methods study, Kiefer et al. (2015) collected survey responses and interview data related to relationships from 209 students in an urban and ethnically diverse middle school. They found that positive teacher-student relationships were characterized by students as those which provided autonomy, choice, support, and respect.

Learning environments play a critical role for students. Schools are dynamic contexts for human development, and when schools are not designed and organized in ways to support

student growth, they can cause short and long-term harm that spans beyond academic outcomes. Learning environments that are characterized as having negative, critical, or uncaring climates are more likely to result in a range of poorer outcomes such as decreased peer relations, more aggression, lower academic performance and motivation, and increased levels of student withdrawal (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Jones & Khan, 2017; Ursache et al., 2012). The importance of relationships between students and the adults who support them in school contexts cannot be overstated.

Although researchers have found associations between relationships and student outcomes and behaviors, more research is needed to understand the potential didactic correlations between the two. In other words, "A central problem in the study of interpersonal relationships in education is the question of causality versus reciprocity. Do interactions influence a relationship or vice versa? Are student attitudes caused by teacher-student relationships, or do they help determine them?" (Wubbles et al., 2012, p. 10). Qualitative approaches that capture nuances of teacher-student (or tutor-student) relationships might provide insights in the directional nature of these interactions.

Relational Aspects of Tutoring

Tutors, when provided with the proper resources and support, can provide access to individualized learning opportunities for students who may lack certain foundational skills that create access barriers to the classroom content. Recently, Nickow et al. (2020) performed a systematic review and meta-analysis of the experimental evidence for 96 preK–12 tutoring programs. Notably, skills include relationship building, scaffolding content, and providing rapid feedback were highly associated with improved student outcomes.

Researchers have found that tutors deem good relationships to be one of the most essential parts of their work. In a recent study of 211 tutors, Stilwell (2022) found that K–12 tutors perceive relationship quality as an essential component of "successful" tutoring, sometimes more so than training or academic improvement. Through qualitative interviews, Stillwell (2022) captured tutors' sentiments that "one of the most important aspects of tutoring is the ability to form meaningful and lasting relationships with students and authentically connect materials to the lives of students" and that "how close tutor-tutee relationships is one of the best parts of tutoring" (p. 101). In another study with 220 K–12 virtual tutors, Raviolo et al. (2020) tested a survey tool designed to identify the types and frequencies of skills tutors employed in their work. Tutors indicated that communication and pedagogical skills were more impactful than disciplinary competence in planning and carrying out lessons with students. Raviolo et al. also found that tutors reported their pedagogical skills were primarily developed through direct experience, reflection, and access to a community, formal or informal, that offered ongoing guidance and support for novice tutors. This is significant because it highlights that not only are relationships essential for facilitating learning and improving student engagement, but relationships are critical for tutors learning, skill development, and efficacy as well.

Given the bodies of research establishing connections between the quality of relationships, child development, and student achievement outcomes—professional development on pedagogical strategies for tutors must incorporate relationship-building skills and some foundational knowledge of social, emotional, and cultural insights on which relationships are built. Undoubtedly, relationships are critical for tutoring as well. Saga, a leading national provider of high-impact tutoring, published a self-paced tutor training program that includes modules on lesson planning, growth mindset, and building relationships with students (Saga

Education, n.d.). The focus of training materials used by one of the country's largest tutoring organizations further evidences the importance of social and relational ecologies in influencing academic achievement outcomes. As we learn more about the centrality of relationships and school climates in the development of young people, some scholars have called for increased integration between the academically inclined field of tutoring and the relationally inclined field of mentoring to deliver the broadest benefits possible to students.

Implementing and Scaling Tutoring Initiatives

As the federal government calls on schools to use their substantial new funding "to provide students with an additional 250,000 tutors and mentors over the next 3 years" (White House Briefing Room, 2022, para. 2), and as schools and districts, such as the large urban district where this study took place, answer that call, it is important to understand and study past attempts to scale up tutoring programs. Although the effects of tutoring on student learning are promising, it is important to note that there were two previous attempts to scale tutoring programs with federal support. One attempt was funded and the other was not, however both failed to deliver their anticipated outcomes. In 1997 the Clinton administration launched the America Reads initiative which sought to marshal one million volunteers and college work-study students as tutors to support early literacy. Without funding, the program lacked structure and the means for data collection. Tutors' roles came to resemble that of teachers' aides more than tutors (Worthy et al., 2003).

In 2001, the Bush administration signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law and provided $2 billion to lower-performing schools for Supplemental Education Services (SES) in the form of tutoring. SES programming suffered from high costs and high student to teacher ratios because the funding structure was based on a per-student ratio which led to recruiting the

highest number of students possible for maximum reimbursement, effectively undercutting opportunities for individualized learning (Good et al., 2014). SES programming also suffered from limited coordination between external contracted providers who supplied tutors and schools. The lack of a collaborative partnership is also referenced as having contributed to the program's implementation oversights and meager impacts on student outcomes (Heinrich et al., 2010, 2014). Both programs and the evaluation studies that followed, have provided a wealth of information on the challenges of implementing and growing tutoring initiatives.

Having identified the challenges of previous iterations of tutoring models, researchers have established best practices to guide new models. For example, my proposed project is set in a district which uses the NSSA quality standards to guide recruitment, training, data collection, instruction, safety, and cohesion (NSSA, no date). Therefore, another important consideration in the successful implementation of tutoring programs is the implementation fidelity to best practices. Implementation fidelity refers to "the degree to which programs are implemented as intended by the program developers" (Dusenbury et al., 2003, p. 240) and is sometimes also referred to in terms of program "integrity" (Dane & Schneider, 1998). Implementation fidelity functions as a potential moderator between interventions and their intended outcomes. As Berman and McLaughlin (1976), noted, "the bridge between a promising idea and its impact on students is implementation; however, innovations are seldom implemented as planned" (p. 349).

It would be incorrect to treat tutoring as a standardized practice applied in the same way to all students; however, fidelity to certain program features, such as those previously described in the section on high-impact tutoring (e.g., frequency, duration, level of tutor training), is a way to mitigate risks of programs being haphazardly successful, of no consequence, or inadvertently harmful.

The Scholarly Contribution of Prior Qualitative Studies

Qualitative researchers help to contextualize peoples' experiences, and understand the processes within a setting, group, or phenomena. The existing qualitative literature suggests that professional learning opportunities and the ability to work with diverse students in strengths-based ways are important protective factors that decrease the likelihood of tutors doing inadvertent harm. The literature also suggests that mentoring, promoting student's aspirations, and cultivating safe relationships are important aspects of the tutoring experience. In this section, I review qualitative studies related to the intersections of tutoring, relationships, and mentorship.

In a mixed method study framed by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning and differentiated instruction, Booth (2019) evaluated a reading intervention program provided to 425 middle school students in a high-poverty school district. The qualitative arm of the study included interviews with 11 teachers and intervention tutors about the program's strengths and challenges. The semistructured interviews inquired about program organization, professional development, instructional delivery, and student engagement.

Booth identified four major themes in participants responses: the importance of hands-on instruction techniques tailored to the needs of the student, the need for on-going professional development, tutors' feelings of insufficient time to effectively work with students, and lastly the correspondence between increased confidence in reading and enhanced reading skills. For example, one participant in the study described differences seen in students' reading performance and behavior, stating "I have seen an excitement in the students as they increase their reading comprehension. I have seen them go to the library and check out more books" (p. 48). In addition to traditional instruction methods, the tutors in this study perceived that building

confidence and a sense of pleasure around reading were important foci for improving students' general literacy skills.

Furthermore, the tutors in this study were certified Language Arts teachers and their desire for professional development, despite their level of specialization, could create a foundation for future qualitative studies about tutor effectiveness. The need for professional development (PD) obvious, as even certified teachers report it as essential to being able to work effectively with students. Tutoring programs that employ paraprofessional tutors, such as university students, could save time wondering "if" PD is needed and investigate the challenges tutors are experiencing, and the types of skills that would be most useful for their settings and contexts in order to develop for more timely and meaningful support. Paraprofessional tutors, such as the tutors in this study, would likely benefit from professional learning opportunities to effectively engage with students, and, as such, in this study I asked participants about the professional development opportunities and experiences they had been offered and that they took part in.

In a yearlong ethnographic case study, Liou et al. (2016) used observations and interviews to capture the impact of classroom-based mentorship for high school students of color with academic challenges. The interviews with 36 high school students and 12 teachers captured that teachers hold preconceived notions and low expectations for academically struggling students. Additionally, the interviews revealed that a critical factor to succeeding in school was whether or not students had access to caring teacher-student relationships that focused on student's institutional navigation skills and aspirational capital. Aspirational capital refers to "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). The investigators of this study concluded that there is a need for

increased access to school reforms that "go beyond . . . a compliance-based pedagogy that focuses on the technicalities of standardized testing" (Liou et al., 2016, p. 124) and incorporate a focus on building students' sense of self-efficacy and hope. Students and teachers in this case study reported that classroom mentoring improved students' motivation, engagement, and aspirations about going to college, despite having low grades and a range of academic challenges. As such, an integration of mentoring on academic processes, and in academic settings, could be an effective approach to increase marginalized students' sense of wellbeing and achievement at school.

The perceived value of trusting and caring relationships is echoed in a more recent study of K–12 after-school tutoring programs. Jardí et al. (2022) conducted semistructured interviews and open-ended questionnaires with 126 tutors and 238 teachers working in schools with after-school interventions in place. Guidance, support, and access to relationships with caring adults were most frequently mentioned as contributing factors to student success by tutor-participants. Although the supplemental learning program was put in place to address learning losses incurred during the pandemic, teachers and tutors emphasized that academic support was just one aspect of the program to them. Additionally, relationships for students experiencing challenges in school are especially important. One teacher reflected, "The most beneficial thing of this initiative is the attention, support and guidance that students receive because these students have often complicated family situations" (p. 745). The adults working directly with students perceived holistic advice, guidance, emotional bonds, and mutual respect to be crucial benefits provided by the initiative, in addition to the initial goal of academic support.

However, based upon an ethnographic case study, Kohls (2019) found that mutual respect, close bonds, and trust should not be assumed to naturally occur. In fact, data collected

through observation and interviews with three tutors and their tutees at an urban after school program in a predominantly immigrant neighborhood revealed that despite the best of intentions, cultural differences could hinder relationship building. Interviews with the tutors revealed that tutor attitudes, values, and reactions significantly shaped their experience of resistance in tutor-tutee relationships. Specifically, Kohls found that a tutor's linguistic, cultural, and social values influenced tutor's perceptions of tutees as being unmotivated or resistant. If students are framed as in need of help and remediation, tutors can also inadvertently enter the work with deficit-oriented perspectives that hinder the development of sensitive, patient, and culturally responsive relationship building. Given these sociocultural findings, Kohls advised:

> Programs need to teach tutors to think more broadly about the role resistance plays in tutoring, especially tutoring adolescents. Resistance is a form of adolescent identity development and may take many forms. New tutors, as well as veteran tutors, should be encouraged to think about what resistance and compliance mean to them and reflect what forms it might take in a tutoring context. This activity is a critical first step for tutoring programs to learn how their volunteers conceptualize resistance and compliance and to address any misconceptions they may hold. (p. 16)

These suggestions informed my proposed study protocol, and I incorporated several questions inquiring about tutors' perceptions of the schools and students they work with.

In addition to sociocultural differences that can influence the interactions between students and tutors, tutor's sensitivity and adaptability to student's ability levels are other important areas to consider, particularly when providing training and professional development opportunities for tutors. Because many tutoring initiatives are targeted toward students who have been identified as underperforming in their grade-level academic work, students with learning

disabilities may be overrepresented in tutee populations making it increasingly important that tutors without special education backgrounds have some initial preparation around supporting students' dynamic learning styles and needs.

In a qualitative case study of an eighth-grade student with learning disabilities and their tutor, Marita et al. (2019), captured some of the challenges and adaptations involved in working with students who have learning disabilities. Using observations, field notes, and interviews, Marita et al. analyzed a year's worth of interactions between the student and their one-on-one and small group tutor. They found that the tutor, who was also a preservice teacher, exercised skillful adaptations to the student's interconnected behavior and academic barriers. These adaptations included targeted intervention strategies such as building student's confidence for progressing onto new material by starting a session with multiple review-problems in succession. This study captured descriptive data about strategies and interactions involved in the tutoring experiences of a student with learning disabilities, and studies are needed to further explore how tutors support students diverse learning needs, especially tutors who may be volunteers or paraprofessionals, and may have limited experience with a range of pedagogical styles and strategies.

Personal experiences can provide valuable insight into the social processes that undergird our societal institutions. Tutoring, especially in school-based settings, consists of multifaceted social processes that warrant thoughtful exploration. Taken together, the studies reviewed in this section highlight that tutoring is a nuanced process, with as much potential for risk as for reward. The ability to work with diverse students, and to foster trusting, respectful, strengths-based relationships is essential to intentionally supporting students' aspirations, confidence, and holistic wellbeing.

Conclusion

For tutoring initiatives to successfully help curb educational inequity, the process of delivery should align with programmatic practices associated to be most effective, such as frequency, consistency, and professional development recommendations. That is, programs should be implemented with fidelity to our most up-to-date understandings of what works.

In addition to content, goals, and pedagogical methods, previous evaluations of tutoring and mentoring found that effectiveness for both is highly contingent on the quality of the relationship with students (Jones & Kahn, 2017; Miranda-Chan et al., 2016). Therefore, it is important to research the variety of ways in which tutoring is understood and implemented so that researchers and policymakers have evidence-based insights into the supports needed to foster relationships between tutors and learners. Qualitative research that captures how tutoring is understood could offer insights into how varying approaches are prioritized and enacted. These critical aspects of tutoring implementations may contribute to differential student outcomes that warrant closer attention.

Research that contributes to the quality of, and expanded access to, tutoring programs could be a crucial part of enacting transformative justice for students who have historically been excluded from individualized learning opportunities and mentor relationships that are associated with greater social capital, educational attainment, and upward mobility (Bourdieu, 1977; Gowdy et al., 2022). Although tutors' roles have traditionally been specified toward improving students' academic development and immediate learning needs, as Kraft and Falken (2021) noted, "the pandemic has forced us to reconsider long-held norms and practices in public education, creating a rare opening for fundamental, structural change" (p. 7). School-based equity initiatives could

be an avenue to bridge youth's opportunity gaps and holistic wellbeing, but we still don't know enough about how.

My review of the literature leaves me with unanswered questions. How can we make sense of the qualitative data from tutors that demonstrates their preference for attending to children's social and emotional well-being over academic improvement in juxtaposition with programmatic assessments and evaluations that prioritize standardized grades as the primary measure of impact? Can cognitive skills, such as academic performance and noncognitive skills such as self-efficacy and academic persistence, be simultaneously facilitated through school-based tutoring? Is that currently what is happening now? I enter this proposed research with these curiosities, and an air of hopefulness about the ways in which schools and schooling may be reimagined and restructured to be spaces that promote the wellbeing, learning, and upward mobility of students like Kiki and myself.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of tutors working in a district-wide high dosage (HDT) program, and to understand their perceptions about working with students identified by the district as low-performing. The aims of this study were to (a) capture stories that demonstrate the challenges and opportunities of tutoring, (b) broaden our understanding of the potential benefits tutoring relationships have on K–12 students, and (c) consider how insights from tutor's could serve as a valuable means of formative assessment for intervention programs targeting K–12 students. Gathering information from tutors using qualitative approaches allowed for descriptive and contextualized illustrations of what was working well and what programmatic adjustment may be needed to equip tutors to best support students.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How, if at all, did tutors perceive holistic development in students?
2. Based on tutors' experiences, what are the key factors impacting successful tutoring in a high dosage tutoring program?

Setting

The tutors in this study were graduate students at a high research, doctoral granting, Minority Serving Institution (MSI) in the southeastern United States. Tutors were employed as graduate assistants in a school-university collaboration model, and they worked 20 hours per week at a single school site in the community. The collaboration model was funded in part through federal money allocated to states and districts under the American Relief Plan (ARP). The school district put out a request for proposals in 2022 looking for university partners that

could supply “a diverse group of graduate students who would be paired with a teacher, to collaboratively provide support to students . . . in mitigating learning loss due to the closing of schools because of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The school district where tutors worked is one of the largest in the state and operates approximately 25 high schools, 25 middle schools, and 70 elementary schools. There were approximately 68,000 K–12 students enrolled, and the ethnic composition of students is 7% Asian, 18% Hispanic, 5% Multiracial, 27% White, 42% Black, and less than 1% American Indian and Pacific Islander. The district is linguistically diverse with over 115 languages spoken by students. As of 2021, the student poverty rate was 63%.

Participants

I collected qualitative data from graduate students, over the age of 18, working as K–12 tutors in a HDT program during the 2022–2023 school year. I worked with the university partners responsible for recruiting, hiring, and providing ongoing support for tutors to recruit participants. Specifically, the program administrators read my interview protocol and proposed methods, and subsequently sent an invitation to their listserv of 33 tutors, to which 24 responded and participated in this study. The majority of tutor participants were international students (71%), predominantly at the master’s level, and were enrolled in eight colleges and over 26 departments across a large public university, ranging from engineering to the humanities.

The 33 tutors employed in the school-university partnership program when I began this study were placed in elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools throughout the district. I used purposeful sampling to select as many of these tutors who were interested in participating in this research. Purposeful sampling involves selecting participants based on criteria that align with the research questions of the study (Ezzy, 2002). As such, my recruitment

method was to sample participants who were implementing tutoring in a program identified as a "high dosage" model (HDT). More specifically, I employed maximum variation purposeful sampling which "selects cases that cut across some range of variation . . . [and] searches for common patterns across variation" (Glesne, 2016, p. 51). The tutors themselves came from a diverse range of nationalities, grade level placements, and fields of study. I increased my variation sampling by recruiting participants who worked in all three major grade bands (elementary, middle, and high school), who were both domestic and international students, and who came from various fields of study to explore for common patterns that may be tutee-population specific. The participants included 7 domestic students, 16 international students who came to the United States for graduate school, and one international student who came to the United States in high school more than 8 years ago. Nine of the graduate student tutors worked in elementary schools, 7 in middle schools, 7 in high schools, and one in a combined middle-high school. Other demographics of the graduate students were: 54% from humanities and social sciences, 54% identified as male, 58% were in a master's program, 71% were international students, and 83% identified as people of color. I summarize information about the tutors and the sites where they worked in Table 1

Table 1. Research Study Participants

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Field of Study	Degree	Poverty Level of School Site [1]	Grade Band	Regularly did HDT [2]	Gender
Ishmael	Indian	Data science	MS	Mid-low poverty	K-5	No, irregularly	M
Timmy	Korean	Music ed	PhD	Low poverty	9-12	No, at all	M
Anam	Nepal	Economics	PhD	High poverty	9TH	Yes, irregularly	M
Sonny	Indian	Data science	MS	Mid-high poverty	9-12	Yes, regularly	M
Amit	Indian	Data science	MS	Mid-low	6-8	Yes, irregularly	M
Maryam	Iranian	Interior design	MS	Mid-high poverty	1-4	Yes, irregularly	F
Serena	Indian	ITS	MS	Mid-low poverty	K-1	No, irregularly	F
Sarah	U.S. White	Music	MS	Low poverty	K-5	Yes, regularly	F
Charlotte	Senegal	Edu eval	PhD	High poverty	6-8	No, irregularly	F
Frank	U.S. White	Music ed	PhD	Mid-high poverty	9-12	No, at all	M
Leopold	U.S. White	Music	MA	Low Poverty	9-12	No, at all	M
Dali	Indian	ITS	MS	High poverty	6-12	No, at all	M
Josè	Peruvian	Sociology	MS	High poverty	6-8	Yes, irregularly	M
Kingsley	Cameroon	Data science	MA	High poverty	6-8	Yes, regularly	M
Malcom	Guyana	Special edu	PhD	High poverty	K-5	Yes, regularly	M
Mya	U.S. Biracial	Human dev.	PhD	Mid-low poverty	6-8	Yes, irregularly	F
Dan	U.S. Black	Accounting	MS	Mid-low poverty	9-12	No, at all	M
Passion Yahya	Israeli	Peace studies	PhD	Low poverty	K-5	Yes, regularly	M
Jan	Indian	Nanoscience	PhD	High poverty	K-5	Yes, irregularly	F
Tiana	U.S. Black	Sports manage	MS	Mid-low poverty	9-12	Yes, irregularly	F
Daisey	Nigerian	Applied math	PhD	High poverty	6-7	Yes, regularly	F
Peace	Nigerian	Peace studies	MS	High poverty	K-5	No, irregularly	F
Ashley	U.S. White	Rhetoric	MA	Mid-low poverty	6-8	No, irregularly	F
Jane	Chinese	Education	MS	High poverty	K-5	No, at all	F

Note. 1. Poverty Rate: This value was determined in accordance with the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2021–22; and Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE), "Public School File," 2020–21 who define low-poverty schools as public schools where 25.0% or less of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL); mid-low poverty schools are those where 25.1%–50.0% of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-high poverty schools are those where 50.1%–75.0% of the students are eligible for FRPL; and high-poverty schools are those where more than 75.0% of the students are eligible for FRPL.

2. Regularly did High Dosage Tutoring: This value was determined based on Tutor's self-reported averages of: tutoring session length; 15 minutes or less (no), 16–29 minutes (no), 30 minutes or more (yes); and number of weekly small group or 1:1 out of class instruction; (not at all, 1–2 times per week or on occasion (irregular), 3 or more times per week (regularly).

Data Collection Methods

I interviewed 24 tutors for approximately 1 hour each and held two focus groups for approximately two hours each, to discuss my initial findings and interpretations with tutors, as well as to collect additional data. According to Merriam (2009), researchers engaging in qualitative research "are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). Such elements of meaning, interpretation, and construction were essential to this study of tutor's perceptions of the benefits, challenges, and opportunities of the work they do. As such, a qualitative approach was well suited for this work.

To begin, I conducted interviews using a semistructured protocol (Appendix A) to capture participants' experiences working with K–12 students and what, from their vantage point, contributed to successes and challenges in tutoring work. I conducted and recorded interviews on Zoom, which generated a first draft of transcripts. I then went through each of the transcripts individually while listening to the interview audio to correct or comments that were not accurately transcribed. I updated the interview transcripts and analyzed them using a multi-cycle analysis strategy developed by Bingham and Witkowski (2021). I will explain the features of this strategy in greater detail in the following section titled "data analysis," and I will further elaborate on my rationale for selecting this coding procedure in that section as well.

Primary data consisted of interviews with 24 of the 33 tutors in the collaborative and focus groups with 8 participants. I collected, recorded, and transcribed about 50 hours of data. My data collection included:

- Individual interviews with 24 tutors lasting between 1–1.5 hours.

- Document review of program descriptions, requests for partnership proposals, and programmatic literature used by the program.
- Two focus groups with four tutors each (eight tutors total) lasting approximately 2 hours each

I describe each of these data collection methods in more detail next.

Interviews

Using a semistructured protocol (see Appendix A) to elicit participants' perceptions about the benefits, challenges, and opportunities of their work, I captured thick descriptions of their experiences through individual on-on-one interviews. Using semistructured interviews allowed me to ask questions that build on previous literature and research, while also allowing for flexibility so as not to "limit the field of inquiry" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 653). I interviewed tutors working in different grade bands (elementary, middle, and high school) to explore whether specific experiences seemed to be present depending on the age group of the students receiving tutoring. After having participants view their transcripts for accuracy, I uploaded them into Quirkos, a Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) that I describe more below.

Focus Groups

I used a semistructured focus group protocol (see Appendix B) to share and discuss my preliminary findings and interpretations with tutors. I shared copies of their transcripts and a word cloud of recurring phrases with participants prior to the focus groups for member checking (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I conducted the focus groups on Zoom and each lasted approximately two hours. At the beginning of the focus group, I provided a brief reminder about the study purpose and aims, and I projected a document on our shared screen listing some of the initial

findings and emerging themes that surfaced during my preliminary analysis of interview transcripts. I asked participants whether or not they saw their experiences reflected and invited them to share examples that illustrated or differed from what was listed.

Focus groups are a generative method for collecting qualitative data because they engage "participants' synergy that often leads to the unearthing of information that is seldom easy to reach in individual memory" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 903) and they "allow for the proliferation of multiple meanings and perspectives as well as for interactions between and among them" (p. 904). Conducting focus groups was useful in this study because they offered an opportunity for sharing multiple perspectives, which helped highlight early instances of when stories and experiences converged or diverged (Glesne, 2016). These group discussions contributed to the trustworthiness and representation of this study by helping me to identify instances where the data required more consideration and/or broader representation before any final reporting.

During the focus groups, I also took field notes about the discussions being had, the way the tutors appeared to respond to one another, and other descriptive aspects of the session. To help identify emerging themes and categories, I began my analysis by coding, categorizing, and analyzing my observation notes that I took during the group meetings, along with the focus group transcription data.

Document Review

As part of gathering background information on the tutoring initiative in a large urban district, I also looked at all available program documents which were provided by the program administrators. The documents I reviewed were policy documents from the school-university partnership that employs tutors, and included labor contracts, requests for partnership proposals

issued by the district, responses to proposals from the university, and recruitment literature used to identify tutors for the program. The document review was supplementary to this study because the program is new and there were limited documents available from the district and the university partners. Reviewing these documents helped generate a more comprehensive understanding of how the current tutoring initiative was described and advertised.

Data Analysis

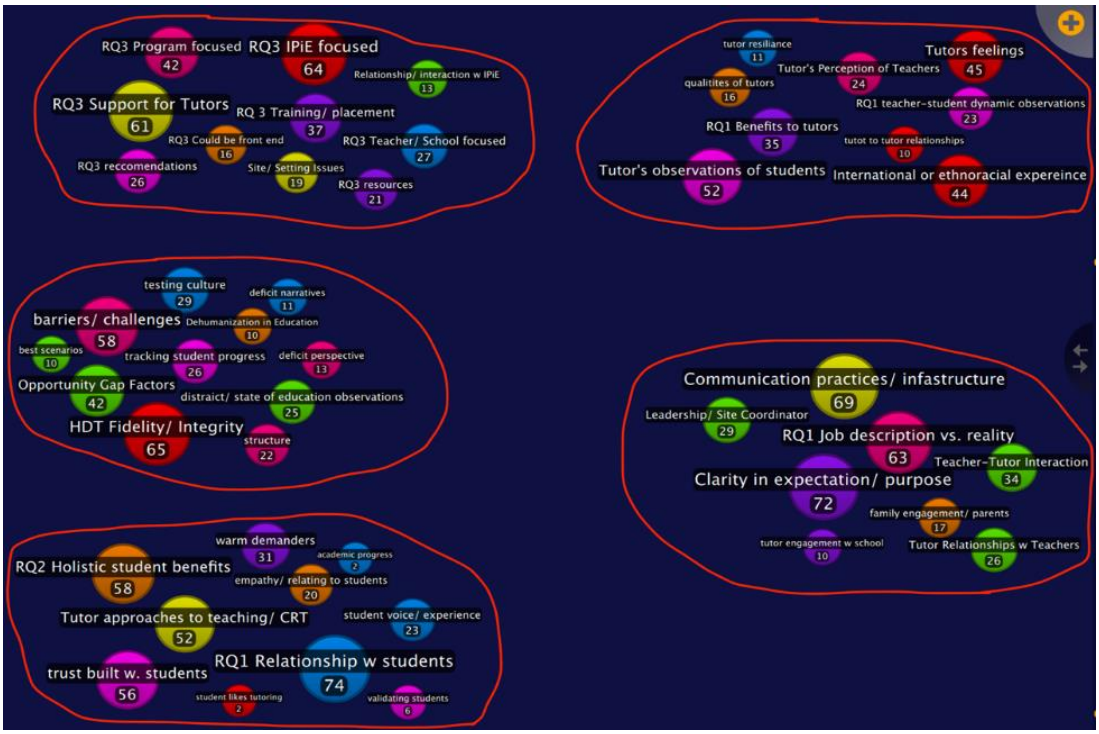
I recorded and transcribed interviews and focus groups on Zoom and analyzed transcripts using a five-cycle model of inductive and deductive coding (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021). The stages of this coding procedure are 1) deductive attribute coding: sorting data into organizational codes by topic, theme, and/or source category; 2) deductive topical coding: reviewing the data with regard to my specific research questions; 3) inductive open coding: in vivo coding to identify emergent ideas and to develop code definitions; 4) inductive pattern coding: condensing codes and establishing patterns and theme development; and 5) deductive and inductive theoretical coding: applying culturally responsive teaching as a theoretical framework to the data to develop possible explanations about the findings in ways that engage existing research conversations. Each of the five stages also involved analytic and reflexive memos which I kept in a hard copy research journal.

This five-cycle model of iterative coding was developed for graduate student researchers by two faculty who specialize in qualitative research. The benefit of using this model to guide my data analysis was that it has clear steps for employing inductive and deductive coding, which allowed for a rich analysis of the data. This organizational structure also allowed me to identify narratives that emerged from the data from different vantage points, allowing me to uncover patterns that may not be easy to see without an iterative coding process. I coded the data into

categories, then grouped like categories to identify themes in a Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) called Quirkos, as seen in illustration 1. I entered each transcript into Quirkos, and did line by line coding, cycling through the five stages of analysis described previously.

Creating space for stories to emerge from the data ties back to socially constructive paradigms in that "one of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 202). At the same time, guidance for data analysis is important for novice researchers, and alternating between inductive and deductive coding, although time consuming, allowed me to engage in an iterative process of checking the codes and themes alongside my research questions and study aims to create focus and alignment during the analysis process of large amounts of textual data. I reviewed my themes with my chair and two of my committee members on several occasions during the analysis stages, and drafted several possible outlines for reporting the data, ultimately deciding on a two-chapter report as there were too many findings to write in a single chapter.

Illustration 1. Quirkos Categories



Trustworthiness

Taking steps toward trustworthiness means creating checkpoints throughout the research process to ensure that the information being captured, transcribed, and interpreted is an accurate representations of what was communicated by participants. Trustworthiness is incredibly important to this study, as participants experiences and perceptions were the primary source of data. I took several steps to ensure trustworthiness in this study, including employing a methodology that epistemologically and paradigmatically aligned with the type of data being collected, employing a data analysis strategy that was multifaceted and iterative, and keeping a log of memos about my feelings, observations, hesitancies, and other personal reactions. Identifying these reactions helped me assess if I saw them projected onto the data or unduly influencing my interpretations. I also addressed trustworthiness by using member checks, which involved sharing the data and preliminary findings with participants to check that I accurately

captured their stories and if my analysis resonated with their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

The methodology that I selected for this study was a good fit for the research questions in that quantitative methods would not provide information that could help me understand, as closely as possible, participants' reality (Merriam & Simpson, 1984). By selecting qualitative approaches in the form of interviews, focus groups, and document analyses, I intended to gain insight into how participants made sense of what was happening around them, and what they perceived to be influential factors impacting their experiences of enacting high-impact tutoring. I used the member check technique in the form of a focus group where I shared initial findings and checked for clarifications from tutors (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). During the focus-group member-check, I provided participants with excerpts of preliminary coding summaries to check the resonance of my interpretations and to identify tentative findings that required further consideration and elaboration.

As an additional trustworthiness strategy, I kept memos describing my reactions, impressions, key ideas, and questions during all phases of the data collection and analysis stages using "thick description" (Geertz, 1973). Thick description refers to a popular technique in the social sciences that "does more than record what a person is doing. . . . It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). In qualitative studies, thick descriptions can act as another form of triangulation to offer "enough information/description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred" (Merriam & Simpson, 1984, p. 103). Using thick description, member-checking, and reviewing my

findings with participants and cross-checking my findings with supervising faculty on my committee all contributed to the trustworthiness of this study.

Ethical Concerns

All participants were over the age of 18 and were provided an electronic consent form (see Appendix C) prior to the start of data collection. I used a standard recruitment script in inviting participants (see Appendix D), and I reviewed the consent form with participants at the beginning of each interview and focus group and answered any questions. I only began collecting data after participants gave verbal consent. Because the nature of what tutors shared may be sensitive, and because I will share findings with the tutoring program staff, no real names were be used for the participants, working to ensure they could honestly answer my questions without worrying about what program staff might think. I offered all participants the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to be used in transcripts and final products, and I assigned a pseudonym for anyone who did not select their own. I created a separate document correlating names to pseudonyms and then replaced real names with pseudonyms in the transcripts and all other documents.

There were no anticipated risks to participants for taking part in this study. I provided participants with a consent form that clearly stated their rights to discontinue at any time. The benefits of participating in this study were that the findings may inform future training and retention efforts, and interviews provide a space for participants to talk about their participation in the program, which tutors indicated that they both valued and appreciated. Additionally, participation in the focus groups provided a space for professional learning and sharing information between novice and experienced tutors. I also shared results from the study with the administrative staff so that they can be used to inform training, brokering support and advocacy

with school sites, and the start of a coaching program for tutors. Finally, I stored all data on a password-protected computer to which only I had access. I had a second level of protection by storing data in BOX, a password-protected database.

Strengths and Limitations

A significant strength of this study was my insider status as a former tutor which helped me establish rapport with tutors. The tutors confided in me about details of their experience which they indicated they had not talked about with school or program administrators out of fear of potential consequences. The most commonly disclosed details all involved how infrequently tutors were interacting with students on a regular basis, often due to no fault of their own. I do not believe I would have captured such transparent reflections from tutors if not for the relational container I created as part of the interview process. My insider status not only facilitated rapport but also provided me with an in-depth understanding of the nuances and intricacies of the tutoring experience in this particular program, thus allowing me to capture the subtleties potentially overlooked by external researchers.

One significant limitation of this study is rooted in the dynamic nature of the program being examined. As a newly scaled program continuously striving for improvement, it was in a state of flux during the study period. Many issues highlighted by tutors may have been addressed or modified by program staff before the final reporting of the data for the academic year. Consequently, the findings of this study may not be fully representative of the program's current state or its long-term efficacy. The evolving nature of the program limits the generalizability of the study findings to other contexts or similar programs, as the specific challenges and solutions identified may not be applicable in settings with different structures or stages of development.

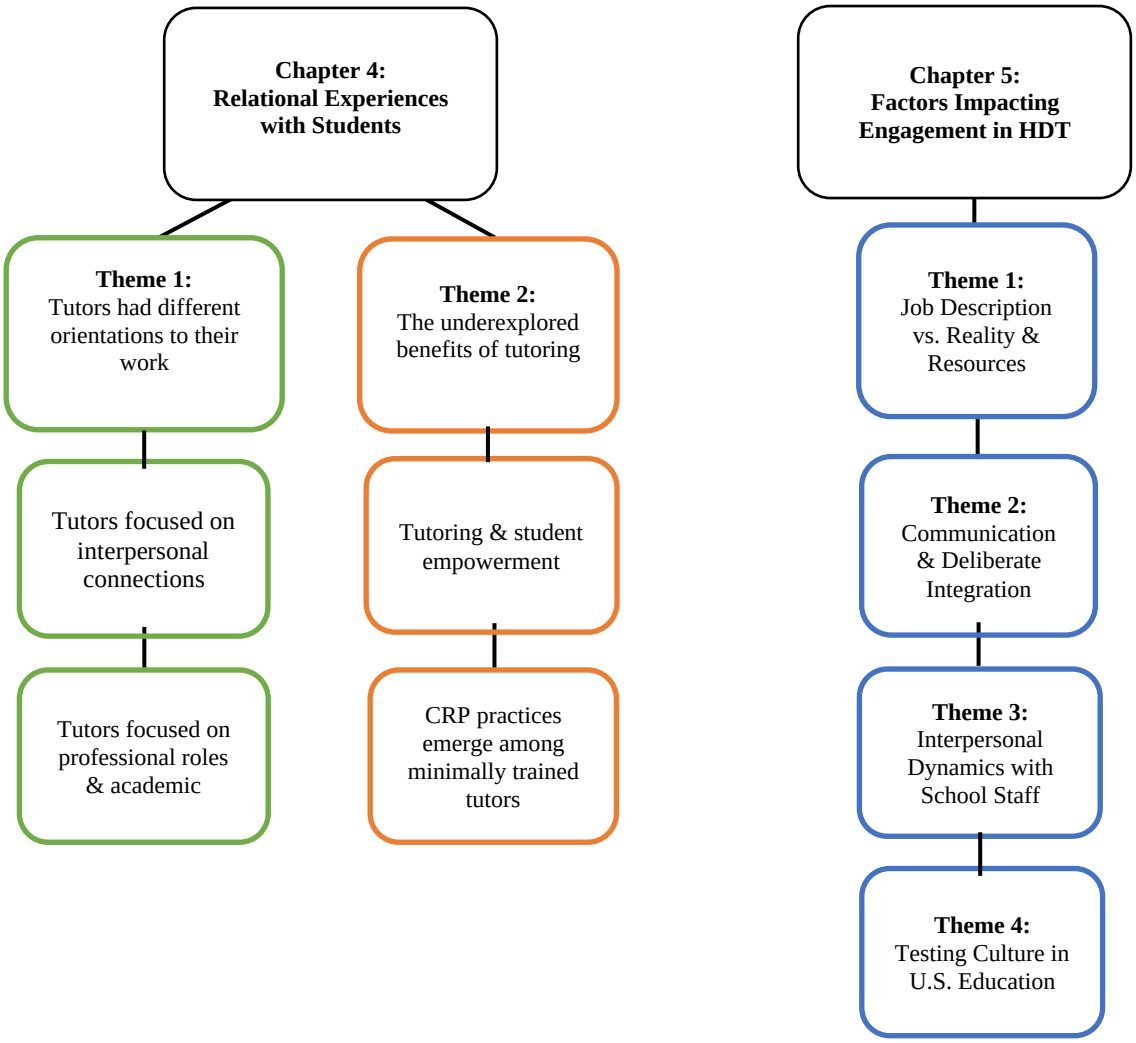
Another notable limitation is my reliance on self-reported data and observations from tutors alone. Although these perspectives offered valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of tutors within the program, they provided a limited view of the overall tutoring dynamics Perspectives from teachers and students who interacted with the tutors regularly could have offered additional insights, alternative interpretations, or discrepancies in experiences that would have enriched the data analysis and provided me with a more holistic understanding of the program's impact. Additionally, a limitation of self-reported data is the possibility of bias and subjectivity in participants' accounts. Tutors may have been influenced by personal biases, social desirability, or the desire to portray themselves or the students in a favorable light. Tutors provided valuable insights into the nature of growing tutoring endeavors, but these limitations underscore a need for caution in generalizing the findings and highlight avenues that future research should include triangulated data sources for a more comprehensive understanding of tutoring.

Sharing Findings

I share the findings from my study in the next two chapters, which I organize into multiple themes and sub-themes. Following iterative stages of data analysis, I drafted several possible outlines for reporting the key findings. Although each outline narrowed the scope of what I was learning from the data, relationships and relationality came up as a central theme in every category. After reviewing my outlines, categories, and themes with my chair we noticed that the theme of relationality seemed to fall into two primary areas: interpersonal and micro (tutor and student) and systemic and macro (tutor and school cultures). With many ways to report the data, I choose to divide the chapters into their respective spheres, one focusing on tutor's experiences with students and one focusing on tutors' experiences with the structures and

cultures they worked within. I outline the organization of each of the findings chapters in the concept tree below.

Illustration 2. Findings Concept Tree



Conclusion

Qualitative studies are a useful method for capturing textured aspects of a program, phenomenon, or group. As this tutoring program is similar to other federally funded programs being implemented across the nation, a deeper understanding of how tutors make meaning of and approach their work with students provides critical insights for practice, research, and policy around the recruitment, training, and retention of tutors despite the study limitations. As a

cultural foundation's scholar, I believe the stories and experiences of practitioners are meaningful data that can inform scholarly conversations on education reforms and school-based interventions. By capturing stories about contemporary efforts to intervene in learning inequities through tutoring, this study contributes to a fuller understanding of the strengths and limitations of implementing tutoring programs, thereby helping people working on initiatives to better support tutors and the students they intend to serve.

CHAPTER IV: RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES WITH STUDENTS

A central theme throughout intertwining all the significant findings in this study is the importance of relationships. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze and synthetize tutor's reflections of interpersonal experiences with, and observations of, students. I organize this chapter into two themes and four categories. Under the first theme, I explore the different orientations toward relationships that tutors brought into their work; I highlight how these different orientations mattered when it came to working with diverse learners. The two common orientations tutors describe are (a) relationality as central to tutoring and (b) professional distance as central to tutoring. The second theme in this chapter is about different social and emotional benefits that tutors associated with having a personal tutor/mentor. Specifically, unpacking the second theme, I highlight how tutors engaged in culturally responsive teaching in a variety of ways despite having minimal pedagogical training on this approach, and regardless of their orientation toward tutoring (relational or professional leaning), and how they felt this approach benefitted student learning.

Tutors in this study were placed in a variety of school settings. As illustrated in Table 1, the tutors were dispersed across low-, medium-, and high-poverty schools—all of which had varying school cultures, resources, and student demographics. The majority of tutors, regardless of their setting or school type, talked about tutoring as work that was grounded in tutor's capacity to build relationships with students. Fourteen of the 24 tutors focused on the interpersonal connections and rapport they had with students when asked to describe their typical experiences during a work week. Of the 10 tutors who did not emphasize relationships in their reflections on tutoring, seven explicitly stated that relationships were not the focus of their job; they felt that not emphasizing relationships or social connection with students helped maintain

professional boundaries and reduced the chances of experiencing behavioral issues with students. Out of the 10 tutors who did not prioritize relationships in their work, three were unable to participate in high-impact tutoring. Due to their limited interaction with students individually or in small groups, they felt they couldn't speak to the importance of relationships as they never had the chance to get to know the students.

Tutors Differential Orientations to Their Work

Examining how tutors approach their work and the degree to which they perceived building relationships as a responsibility is deeply intertwined with the relational theories of teaching and learning that I reviewed in Chapter 2 (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Osher et al., 2020). Relational theories emphasize the significance of interpersonal connections, trust, and rapport in ideal learning environments. Tutors who prioritize fostering relationships with students demonstrate an understanding of the pivotal role relationships play in facilitating meaningful learning. I found it particularly interesting that many of the tutors knew this on an implicit or intuitive level; the majority of tutors in this study did not have a background in education or learning theories, yet 14 of the 24 were inclined to approach their work relationally. By exploring tutors' perspectives on relational approaches to tutoring, I offer valuable insights into relationship-building dynamics among tutors, shedding light on potential areas for training and professional development. I also highlight challenges and worries that tutors associated with adopting social and relational approaches to tutoring. In the following section I describe tutors who held these two different views, personal- and professional-orientations in greater detail to understand the factors that influenced those orientations. Additionally, I examine how these orientations may have impacted tutor-student investments in learning.

Tutors Who Focused on Interpersonal Connection

The majority of tutors in this study discussed their role and approaches to tutoring as critically grounded in relationships with students. The distribution of tutors holding a relational orientation toward their work was notable as it was divided evenly between domestic and international graduate students, despite the study's sample being predominantly composed of international students (71%). Among the 14 tutors in this group, six were graduate students from the United States, two were international students who had relocated to the United States during their high school or undergraduate studies, and the remaining six were international students who had come to the United States for graduate programs. Of these six, their durations of time spent living in the United States ranged 1–4 years. The majority of these tutors worked in middle schools in sixth through eighth grade (6 tutors), and the rest were evenly split between high schools (4 tutors) and elementary schools (4 tutors). Although women are often associated with care-work (Ismael, 2021), women were not overrepresented in the relationship-focused group of tutors in this study. Gender was evenly split between 7 tutors who identified as men and 7 as women. There were no tutors who identified as nonbinary.

These tutors talked about relationships as essential for creating a foundation for teaching and learning to occur. Mya, a biracial American tutor, had the most work experience in youth development settings of all the tutors in this study. For nearly 8 years she worked in after school, summer, and experiential learning programs for adolescents. In her words, "if you can build that relationship, you can really build on other things that are necessary for them [students] to feel like they're competent and that they can be successful." Given her long history of working in positive youth development, and her advanced doctoral study in Human Development, Mya's views on relational approaches to working with young people suggests they may have merit.

Other tutors also talked about relationship building as essential to impactful tutoring. Dan, an African American male with a background in Mathematics and Accounting was tutoring ninth through 12th grade math. He viewed relationality as more important to impactful tutoring than content expertise. He offered, "having an expert may be fine, but having someone who has a relationship with students is better because students may not share with the expert that they're struggling, or the extent which they're struggling . . . they may not feel comfortable." Ideally, individualized instruction and tutoring are about meeting students where they are and tailoring the teaching to them. However, to understand where a student needs support, tutors need to ascertain student's challenges. Test scores are one indicator of student's academic standing, but they don't always provide useful information of foundational skills and knowledge that students need to strengthen. This is because there are also so many variables that can impact student's test scores such as absenteeism, cultural misalignments with the test-design, and/or test anxiety. Engaging students in their own learning can empower them, and developing a relationship first might be an important step for students to be vulnerable about their goals and needs with tutors.

Some tutors in the program defaulted to solely focusing on relationships and disregarding academic goals altogether. Sometimes, they made this decision after encountering the extent to which students were behind grade level, which seemed overwhelming to address as a part-time tutor. Leo, a White U.S. high school English and Social Studies tutor, described how he went home and cried on the phone with his retired-teacher-mother about how students had been passed through schooling without meaningful intervention, to the point where they were barely literate. During his first weeks at the high school, his partnering teachers warned him that many students had fourth and fifth grade reading levels, and that it would be best for him and the students to be aware of that before engaging in tutoring sessions. Initially Leo thought the teachers were

exaggerating and he criticized them for their lack of belief in students, however it did not take long for Leo to reconceptualize his role with students entirely from one focused on academics to one exclusively dedicated to providing socioemotional support. He described this shift, saying:

> I realized in the first few weeks there were so many structural factors unaddressed that a focus on academic content as the priority just didn't make sense in that space . . . after deep reflection, feedback from the kids, and [learning] what they were most responsive to and seemed to be yearning for, I had to pivot, like okay, my goal is no longer to focus on academic content. If I can build some type of relationship where these kids have someone in the building that they don't hate or feel hates them, that they don't mistrust, and that they like enough to be receptive to talking to about respect and social expectations, then that's the goal for the rest of my time here.

Tutors often felt that the systemic issues they observed in schools (and that impacted students) prompted a need for a more relational focus. For example, Leo worked with a student that semester who was experiencing homelessness. When he learned this, talking to the student about important names and dates to memorize regarding the conflict between Northern and Southern states during the Civil War felt futile given the student's material reality.

Another high school tutor, Tim, talked about a similar dilemma of feeling like academic work often took the backseat to the issues the students brought to the tutor. If a student during a session starts opening up, Tim says, "There's nothing you can do in that situation but listen, and ask, 'how can I help?' and later grab a teacher . . . if the student is willing to talk to you about certain things, allow them space to open up." Some of the students Tim worked with came from low-income households, and they were balancing work, school, and caring for younger siblings.

These responsibilities seemed to take a greater toll on students learning than academic content gaps. Tim described some of his students saying:

> Some of these students come from extremely difficult backgrounds and settings where they have to jeopardize or sacrifice their personal lives to make their family's lives better. So, they have zero time for themselves. . . . Some students come into class, and they will just have a mental breakdown, which I absolutely do not blame them for. You know, and they'll be like, "I just can't." And then some of these students are not even living with their parents! They're living with relatives or guardians. So, in many ways they really do have to support themselves.

Some tutors like Leo and Tim encountered students who opened up about very difficult personal issues such as homelessness, familial obligations, and mental health. In response, tutors assumed a supportive role and met students with encouragement, empathy, and sometimes with advocacy to school staff in the hope of getting additional personal support. Tutor's observations of the challenges students face and bring into school with them significantly impacted their orientation to their role and sense of purpose as tutors. At the end of the academic year when I conducted these interviews, Leo reflected on his experience as a tutor saying:

> At the end of the day, there's been some tutoring, but it's been social, emotional, and relationship building more than anything . . . which I think was more beneficial than anything I could've offered as a tutor because I just feel like there were a lot of students truly not getting those needs met. So yeah, I think that's been the function. I feel like that's what I've done more than tutoring.

Of course, even within the group who identified relationality as central to their work, there was variance in the extent to which tutors found a balance between socioemotional and

academic priorities. For example, Yahya, an international PhD candidate in Peace and Conflict studies, talked about how he felt responsible for addressing personal and academic needs, and not focusing too much on one at the expense of the other. Yahya tutored fourth and fifth grade math and he would regularly initiate sessions by asking students about their day, weekend, or family. He described his approach as one in which he "tries to build that kind of trust with them . . . I want them to understand I am not only here for numbers, and fractions, and multiplication." At the same time Yahya was only given 15 minutes at a time to work with students on their math, and he explained that "you cannot give them 10 minutes to talk about their life. It's 1 or 2 minutes and then provide the material and give them the skills."

A sense of obligation around striking a balance between focusing on lessons and connecting on an interpersonal level was shared by other tutors as well. Ashley, an energetic master's student who grew up in the southeastern United States, also felt tension around how to balance a relational and academic skill-building approach in her role. When trying to focus on helping students catch up in their science and math, she was met with self-deprecating comments from students that caused her to pause and reflect on the purpose and responsibility that came with student support work. She described some of the encounters that left her wondering about the distinction between being a coach, mentor, and tutor and said:

> These kid's will be like, "they're gonna put me in summer school and I'm gonna repeat anyway." You know, it's stuff like that where I was like, "let's reevaluate, let's see why you think that . . . let's take time and sit with why you feel that sad and angry and frustrated and maybe reflect on it a little bit" because, you know, it's really hard to hear them saying that when you're their one-on-one tutor, but you're only in there for one class and you're not there every day but you're trying really hard to help them overcome

> that. And you wonder how you can help kids to not feel like this. . . . It's really saddening to have somebody who's only in sixth grade counting themself out so early.

Tutors did not see students as one-dimensional; they saw them as young people with complex and emerging self-identities. Consequently, tutors perceived their role and responsibility as pertaining to more than just academic coaching.

In their conceptual framework of tutoring, Kraft and Falken (2021) posited that most equitable and impactful tutoring programs would facilitate "a coordinated, team approach to support students' success in school where all students [would] have someone who knows them and can be their academic advocate and role model" (p. 7). Many of the participants in this study worked to embody this multifaceted role model/ advocate/ mentor/ tutor presence for students. The tutoring program in this study did not emphasize socioemotional training or expectations in their tutor onboarding process. Yet, tutor's experiences navigating their position as a tutor, along with their felt sense of obligation to be role models, mentors, and advocates for students, suggest that whether trained and framed as a mentor or not, many tutors organically take on this multifaceted role. As I will discuss in my final chapter, program administrators and leadership might do well to normalize, inform, and prepare their tutors for the range of support they may end up providing, including emotional and relational support, as part of offering high-impact academic support.

Although most tutors who identified as having a relational orientation to tutoring talked about supporting students in with interpersonal issues and development, one tutor talked about a sense of responsibility working with youth from a more global perspective. Charlotte, an international tutor who had been in the United States for 7 years, felt obligated to encourage students to think about what it means for them to be members of a democratic society. Charlotte

talked at great length about her strategies for teaching math, but on multiple occasions she returned to reflections on the current generation of students and the ways she observed them interacting with their teachers and one another. In one instance she recollected:

> I feel like some kids . . . they're thinking "I'm doing good in this class." or "I have an A or a B, yeah!" instead of thinking: am I learning, am I being tolerant of others? Am I open minded? Am I thinking about how my actions are impacting others? Am I thinking about minimizing any negative impact I might have on my peers? Those values don't seem to be actively taught, or at least it's not what this school is emphasizing. So, I try to bring those into our conversations . . . to help them think about learning as having a community mindset. I think it's broadening their sense of self.

Although tutors are primarily trained and evaluated in regard to academic instruction, they may potentially be playing a role in the psychological and sociological development of the youth they interact with. For Charlotte, the disrespect toward teachers and one another that she witnessed was a pressing issue she felt called to address as a near peer tutor (as she was relatively young) with whom some of the students could culturally identify. The professional development for this program consisted of informal check-ins over Zoom and asynchronous modules on different topics related to teaching. Charlotte confided that she desired more opportunities to talk about strategies for incorporating holistic development and reflection into her tutoring, because it felt so intertwined with what she did on a regular basis. However, she was never sure how to bring it up in informal check-ins because it felt beyond the scope of the work she was hired and directed to do. Charlotte and another tutor talked about being directed to say no if asked to do any work that fell outside of the parameters of tutoring, which further complicated seeking support around how to work in these dynamic roles.

Frank, a high school English tutor also echoed the dilemma between the job expectations and directives, and what tutors actually do and/or are asked to do in schools. He said:

> There were certain barriers where like, I'm not supposed to do certain things, [the program] actually told me if they [the schools] ask you to do something other than tutoring, tell them no. And I'm like, I'm not gonna do that, you know. I'm gonna help them however they need me to help them. I have to work with them day in and day out, so I'm going to support how they say it's most helpful to them. That was kind of weird.

Frank also shared that when in private, many of the other tutors also felt conflicted about what they felt they should be doing versus what they actually were doing, and that hindered them from being able to find support to navigate the challenges they faced. He explained:

> I also thought it was interesting that when I got into the [tutor program] meetings . . . when we went into a breakout room alone, it was totally different what was being talked about then with the staff. I started hearing the other tutors talk, they were expressing similar things, like, "I'm confused a lot and I don't really know what to do, or where I belong." A lot of them were like "I didn't say it in the main room, but I've been kind of doing the class assistance thing too." But being so focused on the intensive tutoring, I think tutors are afraid to tell them when it's something else because they're like, well, I don't want to get fired, you know, or something like that. And that's where I think comments like, "don't do anything unless it's tutoring" . . . I think that's counterproductive to tutors honestly expressing what is happening, how they are using us, or not using us, in the day to day.

Tutors could benefit from opportunities to work in cohorts, and to have semistructured dialogues about the competing, conflicting, and complimentary roles they find themselves filling in schools

because regardless of the distinction people make between tutoring and mentoring, the reality is that tutors will likely find themselves doing a bit of both. As Mya succinctly explained, “I don’t see tutoring and mentoring as separate things because ultimately you’re an adult who they’ve put trust into . . . you can develop not only relationships with them, but you’re in a position to work with them growing academically, socially, and emotionally.” Although the majority of participants in this study (14 of 24) had very relational orientations to their work with students, there was a smaller group of tutors who felt quite opposite. I discuss their rationale and experiences in the next section to contextualize the challenges tutors face in balancing relationships, academic instruction, and a desire for behavior management strategies.

Tutors Who Centered Professionalism Above Relationships

Ten tutor participants did not emphasize personal relationships with students as central to their experience, and instead talked about maintaining professional distance with students. Of these, three tutors did not regularly engage in high impact tutoring (which means they did not work at least thre times a week with no more than four students at a time) and therefore did not have significant experiences regarding relationships with students. Tutors who were not allowed to engage in high-impact tutoring did not speak highly of relationships with students, or with teachers. One such tutor, Anam stated “I’m just making the best of it.” Although Anam did not have the opportunity to pull students out for individualized instruction, the teacher occasionally allowed students to work on homework with him in the back of the room for the last 10 to 15 minutes of class. Perhaps because Anam did not have the opportunity to develop relationships with student in the ways Dan, Tim, and Leo did, for example—he held strong opinions about not being overly close to students. He said:

> I can be knowledgeable and encourage their learning, but I'm not buddies with them. I'm kind of closed off still. So, when I explain the topic I'm loose and limber sure, but every other time I'm straight faced. And, so basically the students who have once interacted with me will say, "Hey, what's up, tutor?" But beyond that, I don't really want talk to them, you know.

One of the other tutors who did not discuss relationality in his experience also had very limited opportunities to bond with students. Sonny, a master's student in Information and Technology tutoring at a high school, did not believe tutoring relationships provided much added value to students. He told me, "It's just random who comes for afterschool help there. I don't even know whether to expect people coming. . . . There's no way to measure impact with the limited number and random assignment of students I saw 15 minutes at a time this year." The third tutor who indicated feeing ill-equipped to talk about their relationships and impact with students was Jane, an Education major working in an elementary school. Jane, shared that "The first-grade teacher I worked with, she kind of like wants me to work as a teaching assistant but she, um, refused to, um, let me pull students out." The additional 7 tutors who did not emphasize relationality as central to their experience did engage with students on a more regular basis, but still held a distinctly different view from the first group. They saw their role as having more of a professional purpose and foregrounded that their focus was to work with students on academic content, not become buddies, friends, or confidants.

The divergence in perspectives on relationships in tutoring underscores the diverse approaches people take to working with students as well as the varied understanding of goals and priorities that they have. In much of the literature on high-impact tutoring I reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2, cohesive program goals and the appropriate professional training to equip tutors to meet

those goals were cited as being instrumental to the impact a program will have (Markovitz et al., 2014; NSSA, n.d.; Schueler & Rodriguez-Segura, 2021). Although researchers in Education and Psychology have found that relationships are fundamental to meaningful learning encounters (Osher et al., 2020), tutors who did not center relationships had valid concerns about why they choose to maintain a certain level of emotional and social distance from students. Leo described one of the friendly first-year teachers as being "eaten alive" by students for being too nice. Other tutors described their sense that a certain amount of emotional distance from students would help them maintain an air of intimidation, which they hoped would mitigate problematic student behaviors and disrespect.

When asked about his relationships with students, Frank, an American high school English tutor, captured this sentiment of taking a professional orientation as a defensive measure particularly well. He shared:

> some of them [students] will talk to me about things like video games or, being into cars, but again, I try not to get too close to that friendship level with them, you know? I am on the younger side of the teachers that are there, so I feel like there's also that age thing where I kind of have to keep the wall up that I am a tutor. A professional. Not a peer, not a student, you know what I'm saying?

Beyond a tactic for behavior management, several tutors who did not foreground relationality simply did not feel that their role required relational obligations. They were there to provide a professional service to students who should be prepared to receive that service, and nothing more. Although maintaining professional boundaries can aide in establishing appropriate interaction norms with students, one tutor in this study projected professionalization expectations onto the students she was willing to work with in ways that seemed potentially

counterproductive. This tutor, Serena, an international master's student in Information and Technology, felt strongly that her job was to work with students who exhibited interest and proper conduct, otherwise she would swap them out for other more "civilized" students. Because Serena worked in an elementary school and given the developmental stages of youth in grades, k-5 as well as the behaviors students might exhibit as a symptom of learning challenges, her selection criteria regarding who received tutoring could create barriers for the students who would benefit from academic support the most. Serena described some of the elementary students as "arrogant" saying "some were like 'no, I'm not interested. I don't wanna read this.' Okay. So, I let them leave. Go to the next one." This perspective is not aligned with cultural responsiveness, and tutors who lack competency in that area could inadvertently end up harming the self-esteem or wellbeing of students. Because many international students in the United States come from very different school cultures in their home countries, often places where teachers are afforded much more deference and respect, it is important to note that they may require more targeted training that helps orient them to the historical and structural issues impacting students, to help develop their awareness and empathy for seemingly disruptive or unprofessional students.

Serena also indicated that she observed multiple students in the school who were "mentally weak," and she described one fifth grade student in particular whom she struggled to work with. Serena was perplexed by the child's unique personality. She said:

> I have a student in fifth grade, actually I forgot her name, but she acts little bit, sorry to say this, but strange. I have seen many students, but I feel she's especially strange. I don't know what's wrong mentally or else in the house or something. She behaves . . . like when everyone was playing, she was standing separately and staring at something off

> alone. Very strange. I can say that. That's what I've observed recently, and she's still stuck in my head all the time. . . . and she doesn't listen to me and then when I give some math problems, she doesn't, she's not able to do it.

It is difficult to surmise whether this student was potentially an introverted child, or a neurodiverse learner; however the way she used the label "strange" had a very unambiguously negative connotation. Because many tutoring programs aim to increase access to individualized instruction for struggling learners and marginalized students in particular, it seems important that tutors, regardless of their level of education, be provided opportunities to reflect on their own biases and cultural sensitivities. Not doing so could expose students to harmful stereotypes or demotivating interactions with the very practitioners who have been sent to support them. I return to the importance of cultural responsiveness in Chapter 6.

Some tutors described professional boundaries as a mechanism for behavior management; others dismissive descriptions of relationality seemed to be a result of cultural disconnects and deficit perspectives that made it hard to connect with students. Serena's approach, characterized by a tendency to label students on the basis of their behavior—as "arrogant," "mentally weak," or "strange"—underscores the potential harm that can arise when tutors lack competency in asset-based cultural responsiveness. Whether tutoring or mentoring, whether professional or relational, some of the negative ways in which tutors talked about students suggest that it is important that tutors who are working with diverse students have some degree of competency in asset-based cultural responsiveness. Of the 24 tutors, Serena held the most starkly deficit-oriented view of students, but it was also clear that others did not have a good sense of the kinds of behaviors they might encounter in schools, and how they are connected to, and a sometimes of consequence of, larger structural inequities such as legacies of

racism and poverty. Taken together, although the tutors in this study had minimal formal training on issues of equity in education, teaching, and pedagogy, most still described engaging students in ways that align with the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), as developed by Ladson-Billings (1995). This included tutors who did not specifically identify as being close or relationship oriented when it came to working with students, as they still incorporated students interests and strengths into their teaching methods. In the next section, alongside discussing how CRP emerged among tutors, and I highlight some of the holistic benefits tutors observed among students who received tutoring aligned with CRP principles.

Underexplored Benefits of Tutoring

As I discussed in my review of the literature, researchers have captured the positive academic outcomes for K–12 students who received high-impact tutoring, as defined by meeting 30 minutes or longer, 3–5 times a week, and with no more than four students at a time (Fryer & Howard-Noveck, 2020; Robinson & Loeb, 2021). Building on this existing literature, my exploratory qualitative inquiry extends scholarly conversations by examining other important and holistic outcomes that may be associated with tutoring, as reported directly by tutors. In addition to identifying the holistic outcomes of tutoring, I aimed to better understand the facilitators and barriers to implementing high-impact tutoring programs, according to the firsthand accounts of the tutors working within them. The findings presented in this chapter add qualitative perspective to both the inputs and outputs of high impact tutoring programs and enhance our understanding of their multifaceted dynamics.

In the field of education, the pursuit of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP; also referred to as culturally relevant teaching interchangeably) has become a widely undertaken approach to teaching students in our increasingly diverse schools. Educators who embrace CRP

recognize the rich diversity of students' backgrounds, experiences, and identities and incorporate them as assets into the learning experience (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In this section, I present and interpret research findings concerning the holistic benefits of tutoring, as observed by tutors. I also describe the practices and experiences of tutors who incorporated CRP approaches in their tutoring sessions. By providing a deeper understanding of how CRP can foster inclusive and impactful individualized instruction via tutoring, these findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective educational practices. I divide this section into two subsections: 'culturally responsive teaching emerged among minimally trained tutors' and 'tutoring and student empowerment.'

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Emerged Among Minimally Trained Tutors

Teachers who center a culturally responsive approach emphasize the importance of building interpersonal relationships with students to facilitate impactful teaching and learning (Gay, 2018). By acknowledging, respecting, and building upon students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and identities, educators can establish trust and rapport with their students. A sense of connection can help to enable supportive learning environments where students feel valued, understood, and empowered to engage actively in their own learning. This empowerment is an essential and foundational step in students' developing the independent thinking skills necessary for meaningful learning (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Culturally responsive educators prioritize building authentic relationships with each student, recognizing that meaningful connections are an essential part of facilitating cognitive development.

Culturally responsive teachers also recognize that every student is unique and brings their own cultural assets, strengths, and learning styles to the classroom. As such, educators who ground their work in CRP advocate for individualized instruction that considers students' diverse

backgrounds and needs (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Educators who practice culturally responsive teaching tailor their instruction to meet the individual needs and strengths of each student to the best of their ability, by incorporating culturally relevant material and examples that resonate with students' lived experiences. This personalized approach to instruction ensures that all students have an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the content, especially through acknowledging and building upon the many diverse learning and comprehension styles that exist. The impacts of CRP have been established in numerous studies, including Byrd's (2016) study of 316 middle and high school students who experienced culturally relevant teaching. Byrd found that "When teachers use real-life examples and try to connect to the interests of the students in the classroom, students are more engaged and feel more connected to their schools" (p. 6). Of the 24 tutors who participated in the present study, only 5 had backgrounds in the field of Education, yet 19 of the tutors described their practices and approaches for building on students' cultural knowledges and individual interests. These descriptions revealed that tutors either experienced CRP themselves as students or discovered the principles of CRP and found them pedagogically effective through novice trial and error. In the larger realm of educational studies, the fact that untrained educators engaged in practices that align with CRP could support research on its effectiveness.

Most tutors talked about making connections between the lessons they were teaching and student's personal interests and backgrounds, even though most were not familiar with CRP as a pedagogical approach. Kingsley, a middle school math tutor described his approach to facilitating meaningful learning saying:

> I try to tie in what they're interested in. And a lot of the times those tangents they went off on when they were trying not to do work were really helpful for doing that. So, I

> could be like, oh, you wanna talk about NASCAR or whatever, but do you know what energy they're using? And a lot of the times they know more about that stuff than I did, so they could sort of talk at me for a little bit and get that out of their system. And I could validate their interest in that, then sort of use it as a springboard to build on what concept we were learning.

Ashley, a middle school science and math tutor described her approach very similarly saying she tries "tying it [the lesson] into their interests and into the material world they live in." She felt it doing so was an effective way to foster student learning, further sharing, "that was sort of the easiest way to get them interested in things again . . . you sort of had to be like, okay, what are some ways that I can make this integral into their life?" These are just two instances where tutors named the process of individualizing their instruction, however it was commonly described by 19 of the tutors as part of their regular way of engaging students. Byrd (2016) also found that "while some argue that culturally relevant teaching, with its focus on academic success through valuing students' interests and existing knowledge, is just 'good teaching . . .' in practice, unfortunately the reality is that culturally relevant teaching is often simplified and relegated to little more than occasional group work or celebrating different cultures in ways that disregard individual interests" (p. 2). Although CRP may be understood and practiced at superficial levels in teaching, tutors were uniquely positioned to home in and build on individual students' strengths and interests in deep capacities, particularly given the small group or one-on-one settings in which they work.

Tutors recognized that working with individual students and small groups allowed them to individualize instruction in ways that teachers could not. Though tutors did not know the name of the approach they were enacting, they observed that this type of teaching (i.e., CRP) was

much more difficult to accomplish in the average classrooms which had high student-to-teacher ratios. Dan reflected:

> I'm sure there's probably tutors who just go in and just tutor the math, but we have this flexibility that teachers don't have to connect the lesson to the kid's life, and we can take advantage of being able to have that relationship-centered teaching approach as an option, because it's honestly really effective.

He went on to elaborate that by engaging student's interests and perspectives into the teaching and learning, he noticed positive developments in students' sense of confidence and motivation when it came to doing the academic work. For example, after describing his CRP approaches to teaching, he talked about his perceptions of the impact this type of instruction. He is worth quoting at length as his comments are so insightful. He said:

> It just connects them and kind of engages them more because you're tying it into their life versus it just being a problem that has nothing to do with them. And then I'll ask questions afterwards, like, "did that help you? Did it help you connecting your family to it and seeing it that way?" And I'll see them light up in a sense because it's this moment of like, "wow, math really isn't that hard. It's just, I'm not learning it in the way that I need to, or it just wasn't being taught in the way that is helpful for me." I noticed that before I even started explaining a problem, students had this apathetic vibe. But once we got through an example that made sense to them, there was almost like this, "what's next?" attitude like, "I want to move on and try the next problem," and it just seemed like they wanted to tackle the problems more than they did before. And students even shared, "that was really fun," "can we do it again?" Or "can we do more?"

In addition to most tutors enacting CRP approaches, several also made connections between that style of teaching and positive developments they observed in students. One common development that was brought up was tutor's perception of an increased sense of confidence and fewer instances of negative self-talk among students (i.e., "I'm stupid," "there's no point," and "I can't do math"). Tutors also observed that students' relationships with learning seemed to be influenced by their negative experiences with teachers. Helping detangle this association between teacher and topic was another form of positive impact on student's schooling and learning. Some tutors suspected that students had been told or made to feel they were not competent in the past, or that the emphasis on getting things right had contributed to student's resistance to putting in substantial effort and attention to schoolwork. Tutors helped improve students' relationships with schools and learning through their use of engaging and empowering CRP practices, as evident in Dan's comments, and through direct conversations that prompted students to further develop their logic and empathy skills.

A prime example of the value of CRP came from Kingsley, a middle school tutor who shared how students' negative interpersonal experiences with teachers are sometimes connected to their dislike of certain subjects. He said:

> A challenging part is when I get a student and they come into my class and the first thing they say is "we hate our math teacher!" And they don't even want to see past that person to relate with the subject. What I try to get them to do is to talk about the importance of math in daily life . . . and to see past the teacher and focus on the subject . . .to just get them slightly more engaged and also help them understand the possible challenges for the teacher, and to be more empathetic. For instance, they'll say "when you teach us you take it slow, but in class it's quick and she doesn't care." And I'm like, "yeah, but at the same

> time in class there are like 20 of you guys there, here is just 4. So, you can see why I have enough time to dedicate to you. Whereas in class it's not the same case." Gradually they start coming around. But some of them, especially the eighth graders, they're so far in bad relations that they cannot come around it and see the math as separate from the teacher.

As evident in Kingsley's experiences, tutors can serve as role models for students by demonstrating empathy in their interactions, encouraging students to understand and relate to others' perspectives, and modeling compassionate behavior in their tutoring sessions.

Another underexplored benefit of tutoring with near-peer and adult tutors is that in addition to incorporating student's interests into the learning, tutors also can share their own interests and expose students to their passion for learning and diverse topics. A primary example of this exposure to passion was described by Dan, a high school tutor who criticized the teaching mathematic concepts through what he described as "rote memorization that lacks conceptual understanding" and an "over-reliance on calculators and functions instead of rules and principles." Dan described how he viewed and discussed math with students saying:

> I always tell people, math to me is not about you being able to solve the Pythagorean Theorem. It's about you being able to think critically and create a toolbox: Taking things that you learn, skills and formulas, and being able to solve any problem you're faced with by thinking critically, using the toolbox that you've been provided. And when you come across a problem that you've never seen before, whether that's how to cope with your emotions or self-care, and you have to go into the toolbox that you've gotten over the years, with all the different tools and things that you've learned as you've grown up . . . you're going to be able to manage. I feel like a person who knows how to think critically,

> to think on their feet, and who learns math . . . I feel like it can translate in their lives. So that's kind of how I explain it to them.

Dan had a strong passion for math and talked about how math helped him cope as a young African American child growing up in poverty. His passion for math, and his belief in its capacity to provide a sense of stability to students living in unstable situations was a perspective of math that is not a standard in teacher preparation programs. Having graduate students with passionate interest in their fields and topics provided an opportunity to role model self-directed learning for students. Furthermore, given that the demographics of teachers (primarily White, middle-upper class, women) does not reflect the demographics of most public-school students (Boser, 2014), having tutors who reflect the identities and lived experience of students is another way student's confidence and motivation might be positively impacted by this relationship.

Ashley, who worked primarily with sixth and eighth grade students also noticed how tutors might be a positive influence on student's developing healthy relationships with schools and learning. She said:

> You know, it's a lot of, "well I'm not talking in class because if I say something wrong then everybody's gonna think I'm stupid and I don't wanna get made fun of." That was another aspect of a social benefit I saw: helping them consider that it's okay not to care what people think or say about you. I was like, "you know, you can be excited about things right? You don't have to pretend to be too cool for everything" because sometimes they'd start talking about something and you could tell they were beginning to nerd out and get excited and then all of a sudden they'd sort of shut down. And I'd be like "no, keep talking about it! That sounds cool!"

Childhood and adolescence are critical times in human development when peer acceptance has a big influence on self-image and behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Erickson et al., 2020). Tutors have the ability to make learning fun and engaging by incorporating creative teaching methods, interactive activities, and relevant examples that capture students' interests and imagination. Tutors can increase students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning by making learning both enjoyable and relevant; by modeling positive attitudes and behaviors tutors can inspire students to adopt similar attitudes and behaviors toward learning.

Taken together, these examples I shared in this section demonstrate how culturally responsive teaching was enacted by tutors, and how this approach may have contributed to underexplored benefits regarding student learning and engagement. Although tutors demonstrated an ability to organically implement culturally responsive teaching practices somewhat intuitively, as I discuss later in this dissertation, their uneven understanding and experiences with CRP point to the importance of more formal training in culturally responsive education. The reason training in CRP is essential is because not all tutors adopted this empathetic and asset-based approach to working with diverse learners. Tutors who lack cultural responsiveness risk causing emotional, psychological, or epistemological harm to students. While the examples I have shared in this section evidenced that CRP practices and benefits are taking place, but formal training could serve as a critical avenue for continuous growth and development in tutor training and preparation, ultimately enriching the educational experiences of tutors and students alike. Building on these insights, in the next section I delve deeper into other important holistic benefits that tutors observed in students throughout the academic year, particularly related to students taking ownership over their own education.

Tutoring and Student Empowerment

In Chapters one and two, I reviewed several empirical studies that demonstrated some of the positive academic outcomes associated with high impact tutoring (Fryer, 2014, 2017; Kuhfeld et al., 2022; Robinson & Loeb, 2021). Although the positive academic outcomes of tutoring are well documented, tutors in this study described observations of other important, and more holistic benefits to students, which may be associated with having access to a tutor and/or mentor. Although primarily hired to provide individualized academic instruction, many tutors found that their work encompassed providing a range of social and emotional support as well, or sometimes primarily. This support led to holistic benefits that were shared with them, such as students pursuing college applications when they had previously considered higher education unrealistic, taking pride in their work, actively seeking tutoring assistance to showcase problem-solving efforts, and potentially experiencing improved social skills through meaningful conversations in smaller, secure settings with tutors and peers. Tutors also encouraged and cultivated students' growth mindset, which is a belief in their ability to succeed in specific tasks, handle challenges, and accomplish goals (Dweck, 1999). In the following section, I share some of the tutors' reflections on their interactions with students, highlighting the diverse ways in which they experienced tutoring playing a crucial role in empowering students.

The tutor participants in this study shared numerous accounts of the ways they provided validation and affirmation to students, many of whom had disengaged attitudes about school, and negative perceptions of their own scholarly identity and capabilities. For example, Daisy, an elementary math tutor, observed that the students she worked with seemed to have negative experiences with math that often resulted in students feeling too insecure, or too certain they

couldn't do the work, to even initiate trying to solve the problems. She described this phenomenon she observed quite thoughtfully, saying:

> There're some students I could sense are actually feeling scared, not because of the academics, but because they don't believe they can do it. I think, you know, because I'm a math major, I like to analyze stuff. I noticed for some students what is missing is just the belief that they can do it. I've seen big shifts from them getting things wrong before compared to the way they talk about it now . . . they're getting used to the process of learning from mistakes. With less focus on fear of the right answer, they're understanding the nature of problem solving . . . it is not about getting things right, or keeping up the image getting it right, because whether you are right or wrong, you are still getting somewhere. I realized that sometimes all they need is for someone to just get excited about the process and to just believe that they can do it . . . And now the students are the ones who actually say "Look at my work miss" and they bring it to me to show, excited.

Daisy described an improvement in these students' confidence in their ability to find the correct answer, without being overly concerned about making mistakes, which is commonly known as a 'growth mindset.' Growth mindset is a psychological concept that refers to the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed and improved through effort, perseverance, and learning (Dweck, 1999; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). In contrast to a fixed mindset, where individuals believe that their abilities are stable and unchangeable, those with a growth mindset embrace challenges, see failures as opportunities for growth, and are more likely to persist in the face of setbacks. This concept originated from research on motivation and achievement in educational settings, wherein Dweck (1988, 1999) found that individuals' beliefs

about their own intelligence influenced their approach to learning and ultimately their academic success.

Several tutors recognized that students seemed to have a fixed mindset when it came to math in particular. They would tell tutors "I'm just not good at math" or "math isn't my thing." Tutors, especially those who studied math in their graduate programs, observed that students' perceptions of math ability as something static and unchangeable was an issue. In the process of tutoring math, tutors also engaged students in ways that they hoped would build their sense of confidence and growth mindset. Daisy's descriptions capture the shift in students' focus from being preoccupied with right and wrong answers to becoming excited about the learning process, including the inherent mistakes within it.

Tutors across various disciplines and grade levels also promoted a growth mindset in various ways. Timmy, a high school tutor who spent most of his time working with juniors and seniors shared how he saw his interactions with students increasing their sense of college-readiness. He said:

> I think based on what the students have said and also what I have been observing, I think that "tutor" is just a big title but under that title, they're just so many elements that happen, like socially and with student's personal lives. First of all, when they realize that yes, they can learn, and they can excel in academia, they start having confidence in all these other parts of their lives. Like, they have more confidence to actually try something that before they said they were scared to do. I've had kids eventually apply to colleges they initially told me they'd never get into. Because I'm in college, I think me telling them like "hey, you're absolutely good enough and can make it" encouraged them to believe enough to apply.

Although it is not possible to know whether students' motivation to apply to colleges has any direct correlation with tutors or tutoring, comments from the tutors suggest that students were encouraged, motivated, and even empowered by their relationships, which likely had a positive impact in other areas of their lives. It is plausible that those interactions could have increased confidence and growth-mindsets among students, ultimately impacting some of their academic outcomes and successes including but not limited to their academic performance, testing performance, and the goals they set and pursued. Future research with students on how they experienced high impact tutoring could help to illuminate this.

Describing some of the holistic benefits of tutoring, Ashley noticed that among the middle school students she worked with, after some time in tutoring sessions, "they got more in tune with the subjects, and even if it wasn't like, you know, suddenly they were getting A's on their science tests, the nature of the questions they were asking was different." Another area of improvement she and other tutors observed among students was in their classroom behavior. Sarah, an elementary reading tutor described these shifts in student's behaviors. She observed:

> Because a lot of the younger ones have had behavior issues . . . if they aren't participating or if they're goofing off, they're not gonna get better with their skills. They seem to know that coming to our room is a privilege and they don't want to get sent back or miss out, so their self-control has improved a lot since the beginning of the year.

In addition to focusing more in the small group setting, other tutors noticed students' behaviors toward each other had also improved. Charlotte, a middle school math tutor reflected, "they seem like they're nicer to each other. They weren't necessarily mean but just weren't talking to each other. Now, they're joking more with each other during tutoring sessions, like if a

student jokes, they actually respond now." Sarah, the elementary school reading tutor, also observed improved peer-to-peer socialization occurring in her small groups over time. She said:

> I had a few students, particularly my fourth and fifth graders who had gone to school through COVID and came in not really knowing how to talk to each other. In the beginning of the year, it was really weird like, "why are you guys not looking at each other, what is happening?" . . .being in that small group and being able to work on not only math, but on games and talking to each other and seeing how now they're friends now is just wild. They love coming in and seeing each other. And hearing them ask for favors [of each other] or ask for a pencil, that's huge. Seeing that has been awesome.

Although the transformation of a few students from initial awkwardness to friendship and camaraderie within small groups may appear modest, it holds immense significance for overall youth development.

The interactions described by tutors illustrate that beyond academic improvement, tutoring may promote other positive habits and dispositions that can influence learning, such as social development, confidence, excitement for learning, and interpersonal skills among students. By fostering a supportive environment for interaction and collaboration within small groups, tutoring could facilitate the cultivation of essential life skills such as communication, cooperation, and relationship-building. Ultimately, although the primary focus of tutoring may be academic, the tutors who participated in this study observed an array of holistic benefits from promoting social and emotional growth, contributing to the overall development and well-being of students, improving school behavior, and increasing growth mindset and confidence.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I explored the multifaceted dynamics of tutoring by examining the perspectives and observations of tutors to shed light on some of the less obvious (and less researched) benefits of student-tutor interactions and their potential impacts on student development. Collectively, the experiences of most of the tutors in this study support the value of tutoring, not only in enhancing academic achievement but also in promoting holistic growth and well-being for young people. Additionally, those tutors who incorporated culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) approaches in tutoring sessions described how tutoring can foster inclusive and supportive learning environments, contributing to the ongoing discourse on effective educational practices.

I also explored the role of relationships in tutoring and how tutors perceived the impact of these relationships on students. First, I showed that some tutors prioritized relationality as the cornerstone of their work, emphasizing the importance of building strong connections with students. Second, I discussed how a small sample of tutors adopted a more detached and professionally distanced approach to their interactions with students. Third, I explored how culturally responsive teaching approaches were prevalent among most tutors, irrespective of their formal educational training, highlighting the potential significance of culturally responsive pedagogy in tutoring practices. Finally, I discussed tutors' valuable insights into the underexplored holistic benefits experienced by students who worked with a tutor. I provided detailed accounts of many relational experiences' tutors had, yet it is noteworthy that not all tutors shared this experience. Ten out of the 24 tutors did not have the opportunity to engage in one-on-one and small group tutoring as intended, for reasons that I will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V: FACTORS IMPACTING ENGAGEMENT IN HDT

Although high-dosage tutoring (HDT) was implemented to provide supplemental high-quality instruction to students, nearly half the sample of tutors in this study were unable to work with students as intended. One key reason for this was lack of resources, such as: not having a physical space to work with students, organizational tensions within schools that lead to a lack of clarity in responsibilities, an education system preoccupied with standardized testing, and other structural issues, such as absenteeism among staff, and tutors being asked to fill work in other areas in the school. Barriers also included interpersonal factors such as tutors' relationships with teachers and administrators, and their relationships as outsiders within the school ecosystem. I begin this chapter by summarizing the design principles of high dosage (used interchangeably with high impact) tutoring to contextualize the differences between the program's aspirational goals and tutor's day-to-day experiences enacting the program, highlighting the many unanticipated barriers tutors found themselves up against. I then share findings in two thematic areas related to the day-to-day realities of tutoring, and interactions between tutors and other educators in their buildings.

High Dosage/ High Impact Tutoring

High-dosage tutoring (HDT) generally has several defining features that distinguish it from traditional tutoring approaches. Some of the unique characteristics of HDT include scheduling sessions during the school day; prioritizing lower-performing students; formatively assessing the program and student learning gain; focusing on in-person delivery; following the curriculum used in classroom instruction; and consistently assigning the same professionally trained tutor, with no more than four students at a time, in sessions lasting 30–60 minutes, and occurring 3–5 times per week (Robinson et al., 2021). There is no single authority on this

approach, but the National Student Support Accelerator (NSSA) has become the leading research and resource hub for HDT. They established these guidelines based on extensive reviews of randomized control studies on different supplemental education approaches and outcomes.

To accurately distinguish the nuances with which tutors in this study practiced HDT with fidelity to the guiding principles, I organized the participants into four groups to help categorize their experiences and compare across them. Per the NSSA guidelines, I asked tutors about the frequency of their tutoring sessions with the same students, the duration of their tutoring sessions, their small group sizes, and the types of curricular materials that guided their sessions. I rated the consistency of tutors' engagement in HDT based on their responses about whether, how, and how often they provided HDT. The group categories were: Yes, regularly (n = 6); Yes, irregularly (n = 7); No, irregularly (n = 5); and No, not at all (n = 6). Tutors in the "Yes, regularly" group engaged in individual or small group sessions with the same students for 30 minutes or more at least 3 times per week. Tutors in the "Yes, irregularly" group worked with the same students each week but did not follow HDT guidelines regarding the length of sessions (HDT guidelines are 30–60-minute sessions). Tutors in the "No, irregularly" group occasionally did individual or small group tutoring following the 30-minute guideline, but sessions were inconsistently provided to different students. Lastly, tutors in the "No, not at all" group did not engage in HDT tutoring and acted more as classroom assistants, rarely ever interacting one-on-one with students.

Given the unprecedented federal funding allocated to scale HDT programs, findings about the irregularity of enacting HDT practices prompt important follow-up questions about the unique local barriers that prevent tutors from carrying out the evidence-based guidelines. In addition to this major finding, four notable themes emerged from interviews with tutors that

helped illuminate the factors that impacted HDT engagement (and its absence). Under the first thematic area, "Job Description Vs. Reality," I discuss the range of tasks tutors were asked to do that were beyond the scope of tutoring and which took away from valuable small group or individual engagement with students. The second thematic area, "Degree of Conscious and Deliberate Integration of Tutors in Schools," is about the significant role of building leaders and tutor's supervisors (referred to in the interviews as site coordinators) in bridging the top-down district mandate and promoting collaborative environments for tutors and teachers. The third thematic area, "Interpersonal Dynamics with Staff," reflected how relationships between tutors and teachers played an unanticipated but critical role in tutors' engagement in HDT with integrity to the design principles. In the last theme, "Testing Culture in U.S. Education," I discuss the contrast tutors noticed in the push for personalized instruction amid an education system that prioritizes standardized learning objectives.

Job Description Versus Reality

Tutors performed a range of tasks in the school including grading student work, general classroom assisting, behavior management, and proctoring exams. In some of the more extreme cases, tutors had minimal to no direct contact with students during their year as tutors. As just one example, Anam offered:

> Most of my time is used up just sitting in the room during the instructional phases itself without having any communication with students . . . if I were being honest, I would like to tell tutors that whatever you expect in the initial pitch for this job, things are going to be very, very different.

The tasks tutors ended up performing differed significantly from the type of work they anticipated doing. Some tutors described feeling devalued and resentful about this discrepancy;

others talked about their unexpected roles in thoughtful ways, providing any help that they could to support understaffed schools and overworked teachers. Despite any sentiments tutors may have harbored regarding their unmet tutoring expectations, it is crucial to note that out of the 14 tutors who did offer some form of tutoring, the discovery that only six consistently adhered to the design principles of high dosage/high impact tutoring points to a significant concern about implementation fidelity, as well as areas where this new program could be improved. In contrast to the description of HDT in the ideal, Dali conveyed his tutoring experience by stating:

> Like my "tutoring" is sometimes the teacher keeps giving lectures and asking students to do stuff in the workbooks and the students start opening their phones and playing and I generally go around and say like, "okay, you have to start working on your work." The teachers don't have time to look at every student, so these are the things I do . . . not like we give subject help, but it's mostly helping them to focus and things like that.

Leo was another tutor who had minimal opportunities to actually tutor. He shared, "The issue is there's been a lot of teachers just never allowing me to pull students out or work with groups or anything. So, there was a lot of me sitting around like, what do I do?" Similarly, Frank was matter-of-fact about how he perceived his role saying, "I think of myself more as a classroom assistant than a tutor . . . going around, checking in. . . . I also do some grading which I think is helping the teachers a lot."

Some tutors did not take issue with playing a general support role in the classroom, like Mya who explained:

> I'm basically like the school's little Bee to be wherever you want me to, and I'll do what I can . . . even when they have testing; on those days I'll come in if teachers need like a

> bathroom break or I'm like helping distribute paper or things. So, it's just whatever the school needs.

Working as a classroom assistant or all-around school helper is not inherently bad, but it is not the same as providing the type of individualized instruction correlated with high-impact tutoring and improved student outcomes. For example, some tutors did not get the chance to build rapport with students or triage their needs when tutoring was only allowed to be done in the larger classroom context. Sonny explained:

> I felt like if I would have had a certain group of kids where I could be more focused on what they're doing . . . or if I had more time to know them one-to-one, than it would be better because in the classroom it's a different story. I can't really conduct any one-to-one interaction with them because I can't sit there and have that personalized talk when the class is going on in the background. I can't disturb other students.

Several tutors referred to themselves as classroom assistants or described only working within the larger classroom settings. In addition to this limiting the tutor's ability to carry out HDT with integrity to the principles of the program, being unable to tutor also took a toll on some tutors' sense of morale.

As an example of diminished morale, Anam talked about how he lost sight of a purpose in his role, and in tutoring programs generally. He confided:

> In doing this work I would like to be able to think about what's actually happening here . . . what's the bigger picture that I am active in, you know? Right now, I'm just a man, at a table, listening to 9th grade math lectures for 90% of my time. Is that helping anyone? Is that in service of anything?

Tutors' lack of enthusiasm and engagement can affect students' attitudes toward learning, potentially leading to disinterest or disengagement from tutoring sessions, which concurrently can reduce learning outcomes and academic progress. A decline in tutor morale can also impact the overall reputation of the tutoring program, potentially deterring future participation from students and teachers, and could result in retention issues for dissatisfied tutors.

The discrepancy between expectations and reality also created tension between tutors and teachers. Although some tutors, like Mya, found their versatile role in the school meaningful and supportive, others experienced conflict regarding filling staffing gaps, for example, substituting for an absent teacher or proctoring an exam. Although this assistance was beneficial to the school, it diverged from their primary responsibility of working with students. Ashley captured this tension explaining, "Sometimes I think I'm not supposed to do this [referring to nontutoring related tasks]. But you know, everything is so underfunded that if that's how you're using my time, if I say no, where are these kids gonna go? . . . It's kind of that balancing act." What is important to note here, is that whether teachers did not allow tutors to work with students independently, or whether structural issues led to tutors being used for roles other than tutoring, the goals of the tutoring program were often undermined when tutors did not engage in the work they were hired to do. Some tutors observed that their perspective of teachers and schools became more negative over time, which created additional barriers to enacting this inherently collaborative teacher-tutor partnership. Dan shared, "I feel like I've started to kind of, not dislike teachers, but I guess I'm offput by them just because I feel like they can be making so much more of an impact if they just utilized us." This growing sense of disdain was also captured in the tone with which Leo talked about the differences between tutors and teachers saying of tutors, when he said:

It doesn't matter who it is, if you can read and you're willing to help, it's gonna help. That's all there is to it. It's someone who's not sitting at their desk and handing out packets as the primary method of "teaching" and therefore that's automatically a benefit.

At the start of our interview, when asked what inspired Leo to apply as a tutor, he talked about his personal experience having grown up with a teacher as a parent, and how rewarding he found substitute teaching work in the past. He described teachers as people with the potential to make life-changing impacts on children's lives. This is in stark contrast to his later description of tutors not needing to have many credentials beyond basic literacy skills, and of teachers whose teaching he added air quotes to describe because so little of what they did in class reflected what he considered teaching. This shift in his language about teachers reflects the tensions that emerged for Leo during his experience pushing into classrooms.

A significant takeaway from the way the job and program description did not match the day-to-day experience of tutoring was the realization that there may be structural factors that can help mitigate these negative outcomes. One of the most influential factors dictating tutors' experiences revolved around their relationships and integration with the teachers and school culture. In the next section, I make connections between the conscious and deliberate efforts to integrate tutors into the school (actions) and the ways in which tutors felt part of the classroom and school culture. I describe a spectrum of relationships that emerged between tutors, teachers, and school administrators (the results) to increase our understanding of how to leverage the success of future iterations of well-intentioned tutoring partnerships.

Degree of Conscious and Deliberate Integration of Tutors in Schools

One of the key issues that impacted the experiences of tutors was the influence that building leaders had on establishing the tone for relationships between tutors and teachers.

Conscious and deliberate introductions and collaboration efforts were key implementation enablers that influenced whether or not tutors got to tutor as intended. By fostering a positive and supportive environment, building leaders can enable tutors to carry out their roles effectively and contribute to the intended outcomes of the program. Conversely, a lack of conscious and deliberate efforts in establishing relationships between tutors and teachers can hinder the implementation of the tutoring program and diminish students' access to individualized instruction. The involvement and leadership of building leaders in supporting the tutoring initiatives is integral to their success and to ensuring a positive experience by tutors.

Tutors with the fewest opportunities to work with students and provide high-dosage tutoring described feeling like interlopers at their placements. For example, they talked about having to sign in with security and furnish their ID to be entered into the visitor log, despite being a regular fixture at the school, or consistently being left off of important communications regarding school events and scheduling changes. On the other hand, tutors who described feeling like valued members of their school community were more often than not the tutors who also had more positive experiences providing HDT. In this section, I present thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of tutor's experiences with meaningful integration into the fabric of the school community through conscious and deliberative efforts from site coordinators. I also share experiences of those who struggled to feel connected at the schools where they worked.

Peace, an international tutor working in an elementary school described her initial introduction to the school as "surprising and disappointing." On her first day, she had dressed up and prepared a satchel of notebooks, colored paper, crayons, and stickers, unsure of what she might need in her individualized sessions with students. Peace did not have a positive experience tutoring, and though she worked with the same students regularly for the most part, teachers

would only allow her to take students out for 15 minutes at a time. She said, “I can never complete the day’s activities with that duration of time . . . we always have to pause. . . . So, we’re spending so much time on something that we could have done maybe once or twice.” At the same time, Peace (and HDT to her knowledge) was never formally introduced to the teachers at the school where she worked, which she suspected could have impacted teachers not trusting her to take students out of class for any meaningful length of time. Peace described her first day sharing:

> I didn’t get introduced to the teachers. Not even the teachers I was gonna work with. They [the site coordinator] just gave me a list, they put the name of teacher, name of the room, the number of the room, and said I should just go there and pull the students out myself. I don’t think that introduction . . . uh, I mean, I just feel it could have been better if you had introduced me to the teachers and said, okay, this is this tutor she’s going to be helping these kids – and not just that I’m going to pull those kids by myself. I believe it would have helped things.

The fact that Peace was never formally introduced to the teachers she would be working with hindered the development of collaborative rapport between tutors and teachers. This lack of introduction may have contributed to a lack of trust and understanding between the Peace and the teachers at the school, impacting the coordination and effectiveness of the tutoring collaboration.

On the other hand, Daisy, one of the tutors who regularly provided high-dosage tutoring in alignment with the HDT principles of practice, had a near opposite experience when starting at the middle school she worked in. Daisy noted the impact that her site coordinator’s introduction had on setting the tone between her and the teachers in the school. When asked what she felt contributed to her positive experiences with teachers she reflected:

> You know, that just reminds me of my first day. I'm so grateful for my site coordinator because the first day I got there he took me to the Math department and as we're walking there, he would introduce me to all the people! He said, 'Hey, this is Miss, blah, blah, and she's gonna be helping us with Math, she's gonna be helping our students!' And they were like, 'oh, it's nice to have you here!' Then he introduced me to all the Math teachers in the school. So, on my second day when I saw people, they already knew me. Now, when I'm in that environment, you know, they're not like, 'oh, who's this extra person?' It's more like they know me so it's normal for me to be there. That was really helpful. I felt like we were a unit working together.

Daisy's experience shows the value of being integrated into the school community from the onset. By being introduced to teachers and establishing familiarity with her role, Daisy felt more accepted and welcomed, which positively impacted her ability to work effectively with students and teachers alike. These seemingly small approaches to introductions had surprisingly big impacts on the tutor's experiences.

Tutors who did not have a site coordinator with the time and capacity to support their integration meaningfully and deliberatively into the school community had fewer positive experiences overall. Frank tutored in a high school English class, and although most of his time was spent doing what he referred to as "classroom assisting," he did occasionally work individually with students; however, he was never provided a space to do so, which was a challenge several of the tutors faced. He would take students who seemed to be struggling out into the hallway, and they would sit on the floor as he tried to explain writing conventions, grammar rules, and literary devices. Frank described some of his frustration tutoring on the floor of the uproarious 9th grade hallway by sharing:

> I mean, I just kind of stopped trying with the coordinator. Anytime I would go to the office with a concern or a need, like they told me I should come here and ask about a room or to get a lanyard, you know, it just never happened. Every day I go in, I scan my license, and I put on the little visitor sticker. I went back a couple times, but nothing. Then I just stopped trying. You're not really integrated into the school, even though you're there for a full year.

Anam echoed the sentiment of feeling unsupported by his site coordinator and frustrated that there were not more proactive efforts to set tutors up for success. He lamented:

> Just having like a few resources in place, like definitely give the tutors a room or something! I think the school coordinators who we worked with probably shouldn't have questions about, "Hey, so how are we going to do this? How can we use you?" You know? Like, I'm not an educator, I don't know how the schools work, I don't know, and they don't know so, then what?

Anam's frustration points to the disconnect that can occur between well-intentioned district innovations and facilitating them on the ground, particularly when teachers and staff in some schools seemed not to have much information about the tutoring initiative or how it was being used in their schools. The majority of tutor participants indicated that their partnering teacher was unaware about the program's goals and guidelines, and in some instances, this created a major barrier to tutors' engagement in HDT and created tension between tutors and the school.

Communication is not explicitly discussed among the guiding principles for high impact tutoring, though it is an issue that came up regularly for the tutors in this new initiative. The findings from this study highlight how communication is an underappreciated factor that when overlooked can result in severe unintended consequences. Unintended consequences refer to

outcomes that diverge from original intentions or preferences (Das & Teng, 2000). These outcomes often manifest as surprising, unexpected, or in direct contradiction to the initial objectives or desires of the actors involved (Jian, 2007; McKinley & Scherer, 2000). In this study, the tensions tutors experienced were so significant that in some cases, they prevented any tutoring from occurring for the entirety of tutors' yearlong contract. Tiana, a high school math tutor, shared, "there's just a lot of not knowing what's really going on" and she described how that resulted in the unintended consequence of teachers and tutors not being on the same page as collaborators saying:

> I haven't even really had the opportunity to do the number of small groups that I've wanted. And it's because the teachers aren't ready. . . . Or does the school even want a tutor? I remember when I originally started, I ended up at a school that already had a tutor and when I went in for the first day, the teacher was like, we actually don't even need you. There needs to be a lot more work on that end so that when tutors come in, precious time isn't being wasted or weeks aren't passing by before a teacher feels comfortable even letting the tutor do tutoring on their own. I remember when I was asking the teacher how can you incorporate me more? They said, "honestly, I've never had a tutor before. I don't know. I don't know how to manage this and teach my class." And then they were like, "can you ask other teachers and then get back to me and let me know what they said?" Like there's just a lot of not knowing what's really going on.

Frank echoed Tiana sentiment, offering that teachers' confusion made him more confused as well, compounding his ongoing tensions and causing him to question what his purpose at the school was. He said, "what even is the main goal of tutoring? Because I never know what I'm walking into . . . which is unfortunate, but that's how it is here." Overall, both Tiana and Frank

had challenging experiences partnering with school staff throughout the year, however even tutors who established collaborative relationships with teachers still experienced organizational communication breakdowns that impacted their day-to-day experience. For example, there were miscommunications that let to wasted time, particularly when there were school events or test days that meant the tutor was not needed or wanted at the school, but no one informed them of that.

The conscious and deliberate integration of tutors into the school is not just a matter of etiquette or politeness. The absence of doing so led to deeply fractured relationships between tutors and teachers, and in some cases, a serious divestment and disengagement of tutors. For example, Dan, an African American tutor was given instructions from his site coordinator much like how Peace was—a list of teacher's names and room numbers, and he was instructed to make his way there to the specific classroom and to work out the details of tutoring with teachers himself. The passive introduction had consequences that impacted Dan's relationships with teachers for the rest of the year. He confided:

> To just share a little bit of my experience, I actually had a situation which really kind of hurt me, not physically, but emotionally. I was in a class and one of the teachers, I think it's worth noting that she was a White woman, she saw me in the class and then instead of even speaking to me she went out and got security, and the principal came in like, "who are you, what are you doing in here?" Maybe it's not a very climatic experience, but the way that it impacted my emotions, I saw it in more of like a racial way. And I felt like, wow, I'm in a school and the teacher I'm assigned [to work with] doesn't even know who I am. And I'm trying to calm down cause I don't wanna cry about it, but it just kind of like really hurt my feelings because I've never felt that way before, like incriminated

> or like I was a threat. And I really didn't feel comfortable after that. I feel like there needs to be a better introduction process. Who has ever started a job and not been introduced to their coworkers? It's the 101 of onboarding.

This disheartening experience was also one that was easily avoidable, as evidenced by the experiences of other tutors like Daisy who were deliberatively integrated into the school and classroom cultures from day one. These intentional actions (and inactions) set the tone for the tutor's relational experiences with teachers, and their relationships were a crucial part of the tutoring collaborative.

In summary, the experiences of tutors like Peace, Frank, and Dan sheds light on the critical importance of deliberate integration and support structures for tutors. Peace's initial disappointing introduction to the school, contrasted with Daisy's positive experience facilitated by her site coordinator, illustrates the significant impact of proactive integration efforts on tutors' relationships with teachers and overall success in their roles in schools. Furthermore, Tiana, Frank, and Anam's frustrations highlight the necessity of supportive infrastructure, such as dedicated tutoring spaces, ongoing programmatic leadership, and proactive engagement from school coordinators to ensure tutors feel valued and equipped to navigate their roles in schools effectively. The absence of such integration not only fractured relationships between tutors and teachers but also, as evidenced by Dan's experience, could lead to intense and triggering encounters, creating long-term feelings of alienation. Deliberate integration can shape tutors' relational experiences and enhance the success of tutoring programs designed to function with the support of teachers.

Interpersonal Relationships With School Staff

Although I highlight the importance of communication in my sections on "Job Description vs. Reality" and "Deliberate Integration into Schools," I dedicate a whole section to "Interpersonal Relationships" as a standalone theme because it was the most cited challenge to the program, according to tutors. In the following section, I first operationally define important terms such as tension, school-partnerships, and insider-outsider partnerships as part of sharing findings from my participants. Having previously studied organizational culture and belonging, I was particularly interested in how tutors talked about their sense of belonging or lack thereof in the school sites where they were placed, and how communication issues impacted their perceptions. While analyzing the data, as I read over tutors' expressions of communication breakdowns and barriers, I turned to the academic literature on school-university partnerships and organizational psychology to contextualize these findings. This theme is interrelated to the first two thematic areas on job expectations and deliberate integration, however what I try to highlight here is the ways tutors took initiative and benefitted from relationships with staff despite not having administrative support. Although tutor's experiences with communication breakdowns align with findings in existing academic literature on school-university partnerships and organizational psychology, this study revealed that the program design did not seem to be informed by this research, as evidenced by the number of tutors unable to engage in HDT due to interpersonal and communication barriers.

Organizations are complex social systems characterized by dynamic interactions among multiple stakeholders, competing goals, and diverse perspectives (Putnam et al., 2016). Within organizations, contradictions and paradoxes often emerge, shaping dynamics and influencing outcomes. In exploring the experiences of tutors working in a high-dosage university-district

partnership, understanding tensions within organizational contexts is crucial for comprehensively uncovering and analyzing the challenges and dilemmas they encounter in their roles. Some of these tensions are inevitable, however merging tutors from higher education with K–12 teachers had unique insider-outsider dynamics as well.

School-university partners are those working "to design and implement curricular changes, instructional designs, school improvement programs, and evaluation systems" together (Clift & Say, 1988, as quoted in Phelps, 2019, p. 4). Partnerships between schools and universities have increasingly been promoted as a strategy to narrow outcome gaps in education. Partnerships can help integrate research into practice, but challenges can arise due to the complex dynamics and power differences between school and university partners. These difficulties frequently stem from the intricacies in relationships between school and university staff, making it a delicate undertaking that requires significant negotiation and collaboration. As there are so many overlapping labels and types of school-university partnerships (e.g., research-practice partnerships, collaborations, professional development models), Phelps (2019) suggested using the term "insider-outsider partnerships." Phelps used this construct to emphasize the need to bridge both the research-practice gap and the insider-outsider gap and to highlight the organizational, discourse, and power differences between school and university partners. More specifically, according to Phelps (2019):

> the term *insider* signifies members of the school organization (including the district) who partner with members of outside organizations (such as the university) . . . and this term has the upshot of focusing the reader's attention on the central message . . . that such partnerships face the task not only of bridging the . . . practice gap, but also of bridging

> the insider–outsider gap—the gap that lies between partners' differing organizational structures, discourse practices, and power relations. (pp. 5–6)

Tutors in this study experienced the insider-outsider gap firsthand as a source of tension in their work.

Tensions arise within organizational contexts when individuals encounter conflicts or dilemmas, resulting in feelings of stress, anxiety, discomfort, or a sense of constriction in decision-making and progress (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2014). These tensions often stem from frustration, obstacles, uncertainty, and sometimes, a sense of paralysis when dealing with contradictions and paradoxes (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Tensions most often manifest in conscious feelings and observations, and individuals make decisions about how to engage with and address them. It was evident from the interviews with tutors that they experienced organizational tensions in their partnerships with schools and teachers, and they explicitly cited communication breakdowns and lack of a shared vision as sources of these tensions.

One tension that was described several times by tutors was their sense that teachers were uninformed about the purpose of the program and their presence. Tutors indicated that teachers frequently were confused and sometimes stressed about the presence of tutors, because they did not know how to use them and it seemed like extra work to try and figure this out. When asked what tutors felt could help address this tension, they all stated more attention to communication infrastructure with teachers and schools before deploying tutors. There are various levels of leadership and decision making involved in the implementation of new or developing education reforms and initiatives. Tutors experienced the consequences of communication breakdowns between district leaders and university partners who selected the HDT model, and the school coordinators and teachers who were expected to help implement it. Frank experienced this

tension about which he said, “I definitely think there’s a disconnect between what is envisioned and what is actually going on in the schools . . . there’s a lot of like ‘oh, I’m sorry I don’t really know what to do with you today’ or whatever.” He followed up sharing, “I think really becoming clear about the purpose of the program would be helpful. It would solve a lot of these problems.” A lack of sufficient and sustained communication around program goals and expectations created tension, confusion, and ultimately led to fractured relationships between tutors and teachers, and the inability to enact the tutoring program as intended.

Maryam, a tutor at an elementary school confided, “I think communication is minimal at best. I don’t know what exactly gets communicated to teachers about expectations, or the structure of the program . . . I must say communication is an issue.” Similarly, Charlotte, a middle school math tutor, explained her sense of tension regarding communication gaps saying:

> When I go and meet up with the teacher, they’re not driving the conversation. It’s more me saying, “Okay, what are you doing this week? How do you think tutoring can come in and support that?” and they’re like, “I don’t know, just talk about these points maybe.”. . . education is not my field and it’s the first time doing this in-depth type of tutoring, and it’s supposed to be in conjunction with what they’re learning in class, but I don’t know.

The lack of clarity about role and expectations is connected to the first issue I discussed in this chapter, which is differences between tutor’s job expectations and the reality of their positions. When teachers are unclear about the purpose of a high-dosage tutoring intervention and how to use it with maximum effectiveness, and when program and district administrators are unclear about the priorities of teachers, this creates space for miscommunication and unanticipated consequences.

Mya talked about this disconnect between priorities and a shared understanding of needs and purpose, which is common in insider-outsider partnerships (Phelps, 2019). Mya shared:

> I have some teachers who are just burnt out. Like, very burnt out. So, when I come into this space, I can tell the energy that they're giving to the students is disengaged. And that can be hard because for me, I feel like my role is also supposed to support the teacher to a degree. I would hope that can kind of negate some of those negative circumstances that teachers might be having with burnout, just having another adult in there who's supporting them too.

Yet even though Mya was willing to adapt and change to support teachers who she felt were exhausted and burnt out dealing with the challenges of teaching in low-performing schools, she did not feel her presence was always welcome or desired.

Ashley had similar experiences of a disconnect between priorities and requests of the teachers she worked with, and the program goals and purpose, though she had a slightly different perspective than Mya. Ashley shared:

> I think having that liminal staff role was kind of odd. But I can't see any changes unless we sort of get broader educational reform. I mean, that was mostly my biggest barrier, just trying to be like, okay, we're here to work with students first and foremost in a particular way, but not being completely unsympathetic towards people who are asking me to do things like classroom management.

Several of the tutors in the program described how teachers understanding of the pressing needs in the school (and among students) differed from the needs the program was designed to address, and this disconnect was evident in their communication about expectations. The range of tutors' relational encounters with teachers spanned from tutors seeing the teachers who they were paired

with as “work friends” to seeing them in adversarial ways, particularly when it seemed like the teacher did not want them there, or know what to do with them, and was only putting up with them because they had to.

Some tutors made efforts to build relationships with teachers despite the communication breakdowns. Tutors’ relationships with teachers were sometimes influenced by their supervisor/ site-coordinators, and the nature of their introduction to the school, but not always. Another influencing factor was tutors’ sense of seeing developing relationships as a responsibility or facilitator of their work. When tutors were placed in the classroom with no notice or introduction to the teacher, they struggled to build collaborative relationships from the onset, and this significantly shaped their ongoing experiences. However, some tutors took it as their own responsibility to build a relationship with the teachers, in the absence of support and facilitation from school administrators. Frank, for example, did not have a formal introduction or an engaged site-coordinator, and he described his initial interactions with his partnering teacher as “cold,” and his sense that the teacher was “skeptical.” This wall was broken down after realizing the teacher’s misconception about his presence, and they ended up regularly having lunch and being what he described as “work friends” Initially, however, the teacher was cautious and suspicious around him. He explained:

> Once we got familiar over time, one of the teachers actually expressed to me that she felt like she was being watched, like on purpose. Like she thought I was sent there from the district to evaluate her or something like that . . . but once we got past that, it was totally fine. And I would say I’m friends with the teachers now. Work friends.

Frank was put into a somewhat awkward situation by being directed to go work with a teacher who had no idea why he was there, what HDT was, or how to use it to help support struggling

students. Although not set up well by his site-coordinator, that did not dictate the outcome of his relationships with teachers, which he cultivated into a collaborative and supportive dynamic on his own.

Collaboration between tutors and school staff is an essential part of engaging in HDT. Some school staff recognized this importance and helped to facilitate partnerships with tutors. Having clear guidance from school staff helped tutors make the best use of their time with students and helped them create and maintain accountability measures to evaluate the impact of tutoring. Mya, one of the tutors who regularly engaged in HDT, thoughtfully described her experiences with several school staff members who provided clear and helpful guidance. She said:

> I will say for me, I would've probably had a little bit of a confusion on how to effectively work in the school. But again, I think it's just the fact that my curriculum facilitator was just really clear and concise like, okay, these are how we're gonna meet these expectations. And then also having the school counselor being like, hey, this is how this needs to be done effectively to ensure that we're really seeing some effective results from this. So, they're the ones who really set me up to really be set for success.

Mya had administrative support that she credits for making all the difference in her tutoring experience. This experience is in contrast to Frank, who had to counter the negative assumptions teachers had about him on his own. Regardless, what both of these examples demonstrate is that tutors were cognizant of the critical role open and communicative relationships with school staff played in their experiences and in their ability to work well with students.

Another tutor who recognized the importance of proactively creating a collaborative bridge with teachers on his own accord was Yahya. He described the intentional ways he established rapport with teachers saying:

> It was very important for me to be a teacher for the students, but at the same time the teachers were the key in this process . . . I didn't put any walls between me and the teachers. . . . My role in the school with the teacher shouldn't be to compete with Teacher X, no, I am not there to compete them. I am there to facilitate the education process, to be easier. You have to be collaborative and to be collaborative, it's good to start by putting yourself inside and seeking feedback from everybody in the school. I talk to the teachers every day. I try to have a short conversation with them for five to 10 minutes if they have any notes, or if I have any notes. And every single week he [the site coordinator] gives me a sheet that includes much information about student's updates so I can talk to teachers about the progress. You know this is very important because I'm going there and I spend time, so I want to see if this place takes any benefit from my existence. So, that's how I made a good relationship with the facilitator, with the principal, with the teachers, all of them.

Close relationships were not only instrumental for impactful tutoring to take place, but they also contributed to tutor's sense of wellbeing and professional fulfillment. For example, Yahya's close relationships with his partnering teachers was evidenced by the support they provided him in his personal life as he completed his PhD as an international student. He described the impact of their relationships saying:

> I feel one of the greatest things that I experienced in this program is the teachers. I'm graduating this Thursday, and I don't have, you know, parents and siblings to go [to the

> graduation ceremony] with me. Yesterday, I found four teachers in the fourth grade waiting for me. They got a gift card for me, and they said, congratulations. So, when you are very accepted in their environment, and your work is obvious, and they can measure the difference between 1 year ago and now of what you did, it's good. And they wrote very nice words, we appreciate you, we cannot say thank you enough, and all of these kind words.

Emotionally, working and studying abroad can be a very isolating experience. If university-district partnerships continue to hire international students, the close relationships they build with teachers during the 20 hours they spend on site at a school, could provide holistic benefits for them as well as increase the impact of the work they are able to do.

Many of the international tutors in this study entered the K–12 school environment for the first time and were exposed to the intricacies of educational dynamics in the United States. However, without clear guidelines in place to support relationship-building with teachers and school staff, there's an implicit assumption that tutors inherently understand the significance of fostering relationships. This assumption was problematic given the different cultural and organizational orientations that teachers and tutors had, and because teachers often held divergent views on the school's priorities and how best to use tutors. For instance, while teachers sought assistance with classroom management, tutors were directed to conduct small group and individual pull-outs, creating an inherent misalignment due to no fault of their own. This lack of harmony, compounded by the absence of support in navigating these relationships, amounted to unintended consequences that undercut the mission and purpose of the tutoring collaboration: to provide high quality individualized instruction to students. In addition to the existing guiding principles of HDT, part of ensuring high impact tutoring should encompass having supportive

infrastructure in place to facilitate the success of tutors. According to tutors' experiences, that infrastructure would ideally include providing resources such as dedicated tutoring rooms and proactive efforts from school coordinators to ensure tutors feel integrated and valued within the school community, with ongoing guidance and accountability measures throughout the year. Ultimately, tutors experiences with communication and insider-outsider dynamics show that when there is a lack of clarity and support from coordinators, tutors feel ill-equipped to navigate their roles effectively within the school environment.

Testing Culture in U.S. Education

In the final thematic area of this chapter, I discuss the fundamental tension tutors observed between efforts to increase individualized instruction and the fact that they worked within within a larger unchanging education system that revolves around standardized learning goals. Testing culture impacted their experience engaging in high-dosage tutoring. For example, tutors were often prevented from working with students one-on-one because students needed to be kept in the classroom for testing, or because teachers were too nervous to send students out of class in fear that they would miss information pertinent to tests. This preoccupation with standardized testing also influenced tutors experience working individually with students in that they were sometimes asked to do test-prep or proctor exams instead of engaging in tutoring. These practices are a consequence of what some scholars refer to as "high stakes testing."

There is much at stake for teachers and schools in regard to high-stakes testing, as Merchant (2004) explained:

> In an effort to implement accountability measures for districts, schools, teachers, and even individual students, testing originally designed to provide information regarding individual student achievement and ability for diagnostic/prescriptive teaching efforts is

> now being used as the measuring stick for evaluating the success of students, teachers, schools, districts, and even states (p. 2).

For example, schools whose students do well on high-stakes tests may receive increased funding and public recognition, and teachers whose students perform well may receive bonuses and merit pay. Testing results can have impacts on hiring, promotion, and licensure decisions (Drew, 2023). Therefore, the stakes of standardized testing are indeed high.

One challenge with testing culture that several tutors observed is that test scores do not seem to be a reliable measure of students' aptitudes, as students have become somewhat desensitized to the stakes of "high-stake" testing. Sonny, a high school tutor shared his observation of how a testing culture manifested in schools saying:

> The testing is just, my god, you know . . . state testing is today, then county testing, then prep testing . . . I think really getting clear about what they want out of this [is important]. Is it to help test scores? Because you're over-testing the kids in the first place and they don't really see the point in even applying their best in these tests anymore.

Tiana, also a high-school tutor, observed that students seem to be experiencing a testing burnout which causes threats to the reliability and validity of test score data. She shared:

> When the fall started, the scores that were used to base which students were assigned tutoring were not, they didn't make any sense. The student's they assigned were in like the first percentile in reading and in AP English. It didn't make sense. When I asked them [students] they said they didn't take the placement test seriously, so they just clicked through.

Ashley, a middle school tutor, explained that standardized testing seems at odds with the fact that students had very nonstandard experiences with the school closures during the pandemic. Given

the unique learning needs of students and the general problem of disengagement with learning, she did not believe thrusting students back into a system that revolves around testing made good sense for student-learning. She explained:

> This emphasis on working to test and testing to standardize, I don't think, especially within this group of kids who had so many learning problems during COVID and who are coming back into the school system and are not really into it and not having a good time, it doesn't make sense. It's just been like, there's gotta be some sort of reckoning when it comes to what we're doing and how we're testing kids, but that's above my pay grade.

In addition to students experiencing burnout and disengagement with testing, tutors noticed several other factors that made them question the value, impact, and accuracy of these standardized assessments.

Jose, a middle school tutor, worked with a predominantly Latino/a student population. His students were often referred to him because they seemed disengaged and to be struggling, however he learned that their language barrier was typically the cause for this and not their knowledge about mathematic concepts. In addition to the inaccuracy of testing in this instance, Jose also noticed the negative toll testing culture on his students. He shared:

> They [the students] feel frustration. And I try encouraging them like, "no, you can do it. It is as a matter of practice, you're so smart." Because sometimes I ask them, you know, questions in Spanish and they are replying to me. I tell them "It is a matter of learning a new vocabulary, but you can do that! I mean, you are replying to me in Spanish and yeah, you are very smart. The only thing is that you are learning a new language, and that's okay because you know, it's a matter of practice, it's okay."

Although hired to help improve student achievement outcomes, many tutors felt that the very metrics for those outcomes had disheartening consequences on the students they were there to support. Tim noticed the impact testing culture had on the mental health of the high school students he tutored, saying:

> Students had to do so much testing throughout the school year. It is quite insane how much they have to do and in a way it's not helpful because they're literally testing, and not having as much time as to learn and practice what they're learning. They just kind of repeat the same things for the tests. And then the emotional stress that students have to go through because of so much testing, it's quite a lot.

Tim also highlighted that an emphasis on testing could hinder opportunities for meaningful applied learning. This is a consequence of testing culture that many tutors observed in their placements.

Another interesting experience that tutors shared was the counterproductive impact testing culture had on their ability to provide individualized instruction as the program intended. At the core of high-dosage tutoring is research on the well-established learning effects of low teacher-student ratios and culturally responsive lessons, as I discussed in Chapter 1. In "Teachers and Teaching: Testing Policy Hypothesis from a National Commission Report," leading education scholar, Darling-Hammond (1998), explained:

> We know that students learn best when new ideas are connected to what they already know and have experienced, when they are actively engaged in applying and testing their knowledge to real-world problems, when their learning is organized around clear goals with lots of practice in reaching them, and when they can use their own interests and strengths as springboards for learning (p. 7)

Tutors in this study often found themselves unable to engage in this kind of individualized culturally responsive teaching because of how frequently students were mandated to stay in class for testing. Frank explained how he would go into schools and find out when he arrived that he could not engage in tutoring that day. He shared, "sometimes she [the teacher] tells me, 'I don't really have anything for you to do today . . . there's testing blah, blah, blah.' And the testing is just, wow . . . it throws you for a loop, everything changes up so many times with all this testing." Many other tutors talked about their frustration of being unable to tutor, as well as not being informed of test dates beforehand. Yahya also described how the frequency of testing disrupted him from being able to work with the students identified as needing tutoring the most. He explained:

> You know, sometimes you arrive, and they tell you that they are testing so you cannot pull students out and you cannot push in. So instead of just like sitting and wasting time, I would go to 4th grade who has lunch and, I'd say, "Hey, I know it's a lunchtime, but if you feel any students who can work with me, I can just pull them out and talk to them."

Some tutors were unsure what to do with the unexpected time off prompted by testing schedules, however they had a requirement to be at their school site for 20 hours, so they found other things to do. Tutors like Mya would relieve teachers who were proctoring exams to give them a break, while Frank, Charlotte, and Malcom would fill time helping to grade assignments or make copies. Some tutors, like in Yahya's case, would go and eat lunch with other grades so they could still have some student interaction, which they felt was the most fulfilling part of their job.

For tutors who did get the chance to engage in one-on-one and small group tutoring, they described their observation of how instruction was influenced by testing culture. In Chapter 1, I discussed how standardized testing promotes "teaching to the test" in which specific test-material

is drilled—a fundamental shift in educators' role from 'teaching students' to 'teaching material' (Holloway & Brass, 2018). Tutors' private conversations with students revealed that teaching material (instead of students) sustained students learning gaps. Dan observed this in both his small group tutoring and in-class observations saying:

> I think using technology a lot, it's just really taken away from teaching in a more conceptual way, now it's about creating students who know how to just mirror what you're doing versus thinking about how to apply a concept to find answers. That's what I've noticed personally. We're teaching them in a very like, oh, this is how you do it in your calculator way, and that's fine, but I feel like students are leaning on that and then not really learning the how and the why for what we're actually doing in math. And the teachers are teaching at a very, very, high speed. And I understand that they have to get the curriculum out and don't want to be behind, but I feel like their speed is not giving students enough time to grasp the content. I mean, when I work with students, they'll tell me, "When I'm with my teacher and I feel like the reason why I'm not learning is because she doesn't give us enough time to do problems on our own." Or "when we're in class the teacher works through all the problems, and we just write them down and copy her, and when we get home by ourselves and we don't have her, we don't know how to do it." They'll share little things like that.

The urgency to cover curriculum content and to teach to the test created barriers that prevented tutors from getting to engage in the types of meaningful, culturally responsive instruction that the program intended. Ironically, testing culture created a loop where students access to individualized instruction designed to improve their learning outcomes (as measured by test

scores) was barred so that they could stay in class and take tests, without having had supplemental instruction, effectively stagnating their learning.

Through the voices of tutors like Dan, who lament the loss of conceptual teaching in favor of test-centric strategies, and Jose, who grapples with the discrepancy between testing outcomes and students' true abilities, we glimpse the human toll of a system fixated on standardized metrics. The urgency to cover curriculum content at breakneck speed, coupled with the perpetual cycle of testing, leaves students with little room to truly absorb and internalize knowledge, resulting in a curriculum that's shallow and riddled with gaps. Yet, amid the challenges and frustrations, as tutors like Yahya and Mya adapt to the constraints imposed by testing schedules, finding creative ways to engage with students even in the face of adversity. These tutors show they can still engage in meaningful and impactful work with students, even if the pervasive testing culture remains in place.

Conclusion

Despite encountering barriers in levels of support, school integration, and resources, tutors consistently succeeded in building relationships with teachers. However, many expressed doubts about the purpose of their presence due to challenges in carrying out tutoring as planned. Teacher-tutor relationships and communication were the most influential factors regarding whether tutors were able to carry out the program with fidelity. Despite what the tutors sometimes described as problematic implementation and practices in the overall tutoring initiative, it is important to also contextualize these findings. This was only the second year of the tutoring partnership, and the first year was much more limited in scope, with five tutors placed throughout the district. Challenges with communication, tension, shared values, and teacher-buy are all common occurrences in newly implemented programs (Shepherd, 2015).

However, these findings do highlight the subtle ways that clear communication, small acts of inclusion, and thoughtfully nurtured relationships matter. Without these factors in place, there are likely to be unintended consequences, of this otherwise well-intended initiative, including negative experiences and the under-utilization of tutors. One surprising finding from this study was how few of the tutors actually engaged in small group or one-on-one work with students on any regular basis; some never had the opportunity to engage in this work. Tutors expressed frustration over the lack of clarity and support from teachers and administrators, highlighting the need for improved communication channels, shared understanding of program objectives, and supportive structures for getting tutors integrated into their school communities. The experiences of tutors in this study show the importance of ongoing communication among tutors, teachers, school leaders, and program staff about program goals and expectations. One important strategy for bridging the gap between research and practice in education policy and initiatives is more carefully incorporating more stakeholders in the design and rollout process of an initiative. This could entail seeking input from practitioners about how they can best utilize tutors as a part of successful school-university partnerships, to sharing resources about incorporating the evidence-based practices that were selected by the program administrators.

Moving forward, it is essential for program designers and stakeholders to acknowledge and address the role relationships and communication play in ensuring that program designs align with the realities and needs of the teacher's helping to implement them. As I discussed in the fourth thematic area, the current structure of standardized testing is at odds with the type of individualized learning we are trying to increase students access too. Lastly, these findings suggest that it may be advantageous to explore additional face-to-face mechanisms of

communication between higher level administrators and school-level practitioners, to ensure that critical messages are not lost in the pipeline.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

For my research, I was interested in understanding the benefits and barriers associated with tutoring programs, which have become increasingly popular as a means of addressing 'unfinished learning.' The COVID-19 pandemic had a monumental impact on teachers and learners, and it disproportionately affected students of color and those from high-poverty schools who already face challenges due to structural inequities including institutional racism and underfunding. In response, many federal and state initiatives were launched to tackle these disparities. A particularly popular initiative has been evidence-based tutoring programs which researchers have found to be more effective than other alternatives, such as extending the school day or mandating summer school (Figlip et al., 2018; Fryer, 2017; Nickow et al., 2020). Although research has established the effectiveness of tutoring programs, there is limited descriptive qualitative research about tutors experiences and perceptions of tutoring programs. The National Student Support Accelerator (NSSA) is the leading research and resource hub for high-impact tutoring. They have a database of nearly 150 empirical studies, all of which employ quantitative approaches. There are no qualitative studies currently in this database, and to my knowledge, there are no qualitative evaluation studies of district-level tutoring initiatives that employ a bottom-up approach in general.

By investigating tutors' experiences in a high-dosage tutoring (HDT) program, I aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of their decision-making processes, pedagogical approaches, and responses to challenges. As an interdisciplinary scholar and formerly underserved urban student, it is important to me that education scholars broaden our understanding of the pathways, supports, and outcomes associated with "success." Echoing Aja Martinez (2014) who wrote, "Voices from the margins become the voices of authority in the researching and relating of our

own experiences" (p. 53), I sought to illustrate the challenges and benefits of tutoring from the on-the-ground and underexplored vantage points of practitioners. Using in-depth interviews and focus groups with 24 tutors who worked in a recently scaled HDT initiative, I collected descriptive data about their day-to-day experiences of working to enact HDT with fidelity were impacted. A notable finding was the irregularity with which tutors engaged in HDT, which was largely due to communication breakdowns between high-level administrators and school-level practitioners. Study participants' experiences revealed the negative impact that inconsistent introductions played in fostering collaborative relationships between tutors and teachers. For example, some tutors were personally walked to their assigned classrooms by the site coordinator and introduced to their teachers; others were never formally introduced. The latter group had fewer tutoring interactions and the more tense experiences with their partnering teachers.

My study had two distinct focus areas: to better understand the nature of tutoring program implementation and scaling efforts; and to learn if the benefits of tutoring transcended academic performance, and if so, how tutors engaged with students and articulated the myriad benefits of their work. Understanding how tutoring is enacted with students matters because the target population for tutoring is most often struggling and marginalized students. I asked study participants to describe their approaches in working with these students, all of whom attended public schools. For many of the tutors, this was illuminating because for many tutors this was there first time working with students from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds in a public-school setting. Interestingly, although the majority of tutors were graduate students in the disciplines of math, science, humanities, and social sciences—they embodied culturally responsive teaching practices, despite having little to no formal teacher-training and limited experiences with cultural responsiveness as a philosophy. Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP)

refers to a pedagogical framework that incorporates students' social identities, interests, and lived experiences into the teaching material and processes (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Enacting CRP on the ground looked like tutors who incorporated students' siblings into math equations, or who helped students bring in their interest in NASCAR or video games into writing assignments. Although the majority of tutors described their tutoring in ways that align with CRP, not all did. Because study participants highlighted how effective this approach was in building generative learning partnerships with students, it could be worthwhile for tutoring programs to offer brief trainings on CRP and examples of how to engage in it.

There was a clear distinction between some tutors who centered a relational orientation in their work, and others who saw tutoring as a professional service, which they felt meant that they should not focus on students' personal lives. Of this second group of tutors, many held this orientation as a behavior management approach to prevent the risk of students acting disrespectful toward them, which was something they saw occur with friendlier teachers who were "eaten alive." For example, one tutor noted that a novice partnering teacher left midway through the school year due to feeling ill-equipped to manage a range of behavioral needs and disruptions. Tutors need professional training that prepares them to redirect undesirable student behaviors in ways that do not negate the importance of social and emotional connectedness. The fact that not all tutors had a relational orientation to working with students was particularly interesting because relationality is at the core of what makes individualized instruction such a promising approach to teaching and learning.

As policymakers seek solutions to the education challenges exacerbated by the pandemic, tutoring initiatives warrant further exploration. Researchers in education, neurobiology, human development, and psychology found that individualized instruction significantly enhances

cognitive and social learning outcomes, fostered by close teacher-student relationships (Osher et al., 2020). However, as I mentioned, existing research on tutoring predominantly relies on quantitative measures like standardized test scores, thereby lacking qualitative insights into the human experiences involved. As part of this exploratory study, I asked participants whether they observed any holistic benefits among the students they tutored. Most tutors shared stories about providing socioemotional support to students and encouraging their prosocial behavior, which ended up being a major part of their roles. Study participants also described themselves as tutor-mentors in many instances, illustrating the blurred lines between these activities. My study helped to fill the gap in existing research by centering tutors' experiences as a focal indicator of program impact, and by exploring the holistic benefits might be associated with these relational school-based programs.

In addition to investigating the holistic benefits and tutor's perceptions of outcomes of tutoring and mentoring, tutors' detailed accounts highlighted a need to humanize the implementation process of school-based reforms and university-district partnerships. Communication and interpersonal dynamics were crucial factors impacting tutors' engagement in high-dosage tutoring, yet there was little to no infrastructure in schools or as part of tutor orientation to support those domains. Tutors found themselves underutilized and sometimes at odds with the teachers due to misunderstandings about the program expectations and the needs in the school and classroom. In addition to these interpersonal dynamics, tutors also discussed how the overarching background of high stakes testing culture in our current education system significantly impacted their experience enacting HDT as it was intended. Ironically, intensive testing schedules often prohibited tutors from being able to pull students out to provide the individualized instruction anticipated to improve their academic performance.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I discussed findings that illuminate why the educational landscape, particularly in the wake of the pandemic, calls for holistic interventions that address the multifaceted challenges facing students. Although academic-focused approaches have their merits, they often overlook the socioemotional and systemic factors that foster positive learning outcomes. By advocating for marginalized perspectives in research and broadening our understanding of success indicators, we can cultivate more inclusive and effective educational environments. Through initiatives like high-impact tutoring programs and qualitative research that captures the human experiences involved, we can strive to bridge the gaps in our current education reform strategies and better support academically vulnerable K–12 students.

In this chapter, I analyze and discuss the six thematic areas that emerged in the research findings. Those themes are: "tutors' differing orientations to their work," "underexplored benefits of tutoring," "job description versus reality," "deliberate integration," "interpersonal dynamics with school staff," and "testing culture in U.S. education." I have structured this chapter around the research questions that guided this study, and I discuss the thematic areas that correspond with each question accordingly. The two exploratory research questions that guided this study were:

1. How, if at all, did tutors perceive holistic development in students?
2. Based on tutors' experiences, what are the key factors impacting successful tutoring in a high dosage tutoring program?

Research Questions Answered

Research Question One

1. How, if at all, did tutors perceive holistic development in students?

I asked this question resonated with me because of my personal and professional experiences in the public school system, alongside my review of effective tutoring practices. In my family, we did not consider schools to be a safe place. Schools, and the adults inside them, were agents of the state waiting for opportunities to separate children from families—or at least that's how my parents saw it. My performance in school was low and my absenteeism high from the second grade until my sophomore year of high school. Although I generally did not have a positive experience in most of my K–12 schooling, there were invaluable moments that involved caring adults who took time to give me individualized attention and encouragement.

When I was placed in the at-risk high school program for chronic absenteeism as a sophomore, like three of my older sisters before me, I assumed I would leave school in my senior year, once I could legally stop going. However, during my junior year I met several young women working in youth development at the local Planned Parenthood office. Their mentorship inspired me to strive not only for a high school diploma, but also to go on to community college, like they had done. Unlike my teachers and other official school staff, I could be honest about my dating life, housing arrangements, and family stressors. I never had the feeling that it was not the time nor place to talk about my personal life with them, although I often felt that way in school with formal educators. My teachers rarely seemed to have the interest in, or time to unpack, what was behind my poor school performance. In school, I often felt written off, like a number. However, at the Planned Parenthood teen-drop-in center, I learned about the college application process, how financial aid works, and about sex and relationship education. When my academic and personal lives were seen as equally important, I was better able to look at my future and goals in a more concrete way. These personal experiences are part of what spurred my

curiosity about how the growing number of school-based tutoring and mentoring programs might be impacting disadvantaged youth in ways that standardized assessments could never capture.

My curiosity was further influenced by the summer I spent working in this high-dosage tutoring initiative before I started my dissertation research. During my few months working with middle school students who were placed in tutoring after failing one or more state exams, I observed shockingly tense interactions between the students and teachers. In Chapter 1, I recounted an altercation between Kiki and her teacher, one of the many instances where high stress levels and lack of personal connection were palpable. As a tutor pushing into classrooms, I experienced first-hand how teachers would look to tutors for support when student behaviors seemed all-consuming in the classroom, and I saw how some students looked to tutors for attention and validation at every possible opportunity to talk and be listened to. Tutors then, are in a precarious role where mediation and conflict resolution often become necessary parts of their job, and thus relationship building, and repair are essential skills to have.

Although educational inequities are not new, school closures and disruptions from the pandemic significantly hindered both the cognitive and socioemotional development among many students (Belsha, 2021). Although academic concerns have dominated policy-making discourse, educators are worried about finding ways to support the nonacademic challenges affecting students. Nationally representative survey findings indicate that over 83% of public schools have observed a decline in students' social, emotional, and behavioral well-being since the pandemic began (NCES, 2022). The problematic behaviors showing the most significant increase include disruptions in classrooms due to student misconduct, increased unruliness in school corridors and other communal areas, and heightened disrespect toward teachers and staff.

In this same survey 51% of schools expressed a need for assistance with classroom management, while 79% identified a pressing need for additional support in addressing mental health concerns.

Embarking on this study, I wanted to better understand how tutors perceived the schools as benefitting from their presence and multifaceted role, with particular attention to the benefits for children and youth. The first set of findings concerns the 24 study participants' observations and reflections of holistic developments in the students they worked with throughout the course of the year, and directly answers Research Question 1 with examples of holistic benefits as observed by tutors. Although tutoring is not designed to explicitly address behavior management nor mental health, the majority of study participants saw improved behavior in the students they worked and built personal relationships with, even as data related to these improvements were not systematically tracked. They described how students came to view their time with the tutor as a privilege that they did not want to lose. In the beginning of the year, tutors acknowledged that it was difficult to work with students, and that they would sometimes need to send them back to their main classrooms when they refused to engage or were being disruptive. As the regularity of sessions increased with some of the participants, so did students' apparent reverence for the time spent with their tutor, and that was reflected in their behavior. This was a benefit for classroom teachers as well. Mya, a middle school tutor, shared an example of how tutors' presence can be a benefit to addressing behavioral needs and challenges in schools sharing:

> I will note there has recently been a teacher going on maternity leave. She had a substitute teacher, and I could tell how the energy changed from their teacher who was consistent to the sub. I know that space, but I was like, okay, like this is a lot. So it became a thing where that class is on my docket every day to go in there and at least pull

one to two kids out to just kind of like calm the teacher and also the students. So that's not me saying things to redirect behavior, that's me just like doing my role intentionally.

Study participants used their position and relationships with students to help promote ideal learning environments in intentional and sometimes subversive ways, at least with the limited power many had in the schools where they were placed.

Tutors also described how students increasingly confided in them about many things causing them stress. This included talking about familial and economic stressors, dating, breakups, and peer-relationships, and also lesser-known details about their learning needs. All of these factors can take a toll on students' mental health. For example, when first diagnosed with a formal learning disability, one student conferred with her tutor about the pros and cons of letting her math teacher know the results of her testing. The tutor, Tiana, was able to help the student overcome a fear of embarrassment by highlighting how sharing this information could result in accommodations that would benefit the student in the long run. Another tutor, Tim, worked with high school students who did not see themselves as "college material" at the beginning of the year, but who ultimately applied and were accepted into college with encouragement from their tutor and teacher. In their roles working directly with students, tutors were in positions to influence the students who seemed to look up to them, and to help them navigate life stressors, hopefully contributing to better overall wellness academically, socially, and emotionally.

Aligning with findings by Tenebaum et al., (2017), who studied differences in effectiveness between teachers and near-peer (close in age) tutors, I found supporting evidence that the smaller age gap could be a factor in students feeling more comfortable asking for support, though given my sample size, this is something that would need to be studied more systematically. Affirmation and encouragement were the most commonly referenced forms of

support that study participants provided. Many of the tutors, especially in the math and science fields, noted that students learning barriers were related to a pervasive sense of self-doubt more than issues with the content itself. What study participants observed in students is referred to as self-efficacy in psychology. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish tasks and achieve goals, and it can have a significant impact on learners in various ways (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacious learners are more likely to persist in the face of difficulties. They approach obstacles as challenges to be overcome rather than insurmountable barriers, leading to greater perseverance and resilience in their learning journey. Tutors found themselves encouraging students to develop their self-efficacy as well as their growth mindset, even as many did not use these words to describe their roles. Individuals with a growth mindset believe that their talents and skills are not fixed traits but can be improved over time through practice, perseverance, and learning from mistakes (Dweck, 2015). Tutors saw this manifest in students who no longer made self-deprecating comments like "I'm stupid" or "Math just isn't my thing." Tutors like Daisy, Mya, Dan, and Ashley directly challenged students making such statements, and reinforced that learning is not about being smart, but about engaging in continuous effort. The tutors would reference their own education journeys as evidence that hard work and persistence pay off.

Reflecting on my personal and professional journey within the public school system, I am struck by the profound possibility for holistic development, as captured by study participants' day-to-day interactions and conversations with students. As I delved into the study's findings, it seemed likely that tutors may have played a role in not only supporting academic growth but also in fostering students' self-efficacy and growth mindset. It appeared that through their belief in students' potential and encouragement, tutors may have helped students to embrace challenges,

persist through difficulties, and possibly embark on a journey of continuous growth and learning. Additionally, tutors were able to leverage their positions and relationships with students to help address behavioral needs in ways that promoted more conducive learning environments. The reflections of study participants suggests that tutoring benefits extend beyond academic support and influence students' beliefs in themselves and their ability to succeed in various aspects of their lives. These are important insights to share as states and districts continue to enact education reforms with the ultimate goal of increasing student success, wellbeing, and educational equity. . At the same time, it would be valuable to corroborate tutors' experiences by also conducting qualitative research with students who received tutoring.

Research Question Two

2. Based on tutor's experience, what are the key factors impacting successful tutoring in a high-dosage tutoring program?

The second research question was also influenced by my experience working in and observing the newly scaled tutoring initiative I studied. What I saw, felt, and heard in the halls and classrooms informed my embodied understanding or 'theory in the flesh' (Anzaldua, 1990). The entry point to this second research question is firmly rooted in my constructivist qualitative paradigm and is in itself a political and scholarly endeavor. By centering my lived experience as the basis for my research, I am actively redefining the colonial and imperial dominant narratives about research as an objective, scientific enterprise. My exploratory question about the day-to-day experiences of tutors was guided by the notion that:

> No research can ever be objective, and all research has something at stake. We cannot separate what we experience as people from what we experience as researchers. In other words, the theorizing that we do to understand our life experiences is the same theorizing

> we will do in our research. As such . . . theory is always intimately connected to research, even before you begin to collect or analyze data. It is a part of our bodies and minds. Yet, our claim to embodied understandings of theory are often labeled as "subjective" or "anecdotal." These are not innocent claims. They come from a history of colonialism and imperialism—a history that has Othered us, distorted our versions of truth, [and] worked hard to teach us to believe that our ways of knowing, being, and understanding were deficient, colloquial and not scientific enough (Esposito, & Evans-Winters, 2022, pp. 25–27).

I drew from my personal experience as the basis for investigating how other tutors might be perceiving and navigating the school cultures and hierarchies they were placed into.

In alignment with my scholarly field of the Cultural Foundations of Education, I wanted to understand what implicit supports and barriers tutor practitioners encountered to "critically analyze current educational policies and practices at national, state, and local levels and their impacts on teaching, learning, and the assessment of P–16 students" (CASA, 2013, p. 111). The second set of findings helped to answer Research Question 2, as tutors had a lot to say about the barriers and opportunities of high-dosage tutoring programs that are offered through district-university partnerships.

To enact tutoring the way it was intended, study participants acknowledged several critical factors which impacted their engagement in HDT: communication (as well as its absence), relationships with other educators in the building, physical space and resources, access to the school curriculum, and the backdrop of high-stakes testing. All of these factors played a role in tutors' ability to enact HDT with fidelity and integrity to the guiding principles outlined by the National Student Support Accelerator (NSSA). The stories that study participants shared

echoed existing findings from implementation studies on program fidelity. Tutoring and mentoring are two scalable interventions with the potential to bridge opportunity gaps in schools when provided with some fidelity to what we know about best teaching and tutoring practices (Jardí et al., 2022; Liou et al., 2016). However, there are serious tensions when trying to scale or replicate programs in ways that are consistent with best practices due to contextual school and student factors, and very often, due to a lack of consistent management and oversight (Goldstein & Paulle, 2021).

Gersten et al. (2015) pointed out that "a loose coupling between often precise theoretical underpinnings of the best efficacy trials and the broad, often eclectic theoretical underpinnings of large-scale federal, state, or local initiatives . . . implementation is often carefully monitored in the controlled efficacy trials but allowed to vary widely in most of the large-scale evaluation studies" (p. 517). In the present study, tutors were placed at approximately 20 different school sites across the district, and echoing Gersten, study participants revealed that the implementation of the program was "allowed to vary widely." Study participants at different sites had dramatically different experiences tutoring, with some working closely with the teacher to deliver high quality instruction, and others spending the year sitting alone at the back of the classroom, unable to engage with students at all.

In direct answer to Research Question two, study participants reported communication breakdowns between district level officials and teachers as a primary barrier to their ability to enact HDT. Teachers often seemed uninformed about the purpose of the program or the tutors' presence, and this led to tensions which resulted in nearly half of the study participants being unable to engage in HDT. Additionally, site coordinators, a role often played by curriculum facilitators or assistant principals, were instrumental in helping to establish collaborative

partnerships between tutors and teachers. However, the degree to which the site coordinators helped to integrated tutors into the culture of the schools where they were placed varied significantly. Some of the tutors also described experiencing a lack of morale because of the ambiguity around the program mission, purpose, and goals, alongside challenging and negative day-to-day experiences, including having security called on them. Some of the tutors wished they had access to data on student performance, so they could better understand if their presence was having a positive impact on students' academic outcomes.

Findings around the barriers and enablers tutors encountered support previous studies which have found that a lack of data collection, guidance, and structure are key inhibitors to the efficacy of national and district-level tutoring initiatives (Fitzgerald et al., 2002; Worthy et al., 2003). While efficacy trials often prioritize precise theoretical underpinnings and closely monitor implementation, large-scale initiatives tend to exhibit a loose coupling between theoretical frameworks and implementation practices, leading to varying experiences and outcomes across different sites. This suggests a need for more consistent and carefully monitored implementation practices in large-scale educational initiatives to ensure equitable outcomes for all participants.

Policy and Practice Implications

Moving beyond narrow metrics like standardized test scores as the primary way of assessing student performance is imperative to holistic student success; as study participants revealed, high stakes testing cannot capture the breadth of a student's strengths or academic potential. These insights are essential for policymakers and researchers whose agenda should move beyond simply closing the achievement gap to providing the wide range of supports that students, especially those who are historically marginalized, need to be successful in life. Doing

so would help validate students' relationship with learning, while nurturing self-efficacy, growth mindset, and holistic wellness.

The implications of my research for policy and practice are clear: as students grapple with the ongoing disruptions caused by the pandemic, interventions must address the multifaceted challenges impacting their personal and academic success. Although academic-focused approaches are important, they often overlook the socioemotional and systemic factors crucial for positive learning outcomes. Quantitative-focused initiatives like high-dosage tutoring can be fully optimized by incorporating qualitative insights. By exploring how, why, and in what contexts proposed educational strategies work best, we can better support K–12 students.

The experiences shared by study participants navigating the testing culture within our education system point to the pervasive influence of standardized testing on teaching and learning. The focus on testing extends beyond assessment days, shaping the very essence of the education process. Tutors' stories illuminate challenges such as being sidelined due to testing schedules and witnessing a shift toward prioritizing teaching the regurgitation of material at the expense of nurturing students' comprehension. For example, study participants noted that although students succeeded in learning to use calculators to solve equations in their math classes, their lessons did not emphasize teaching them to interrogate the philosophy and rationale of those equations. If students are not taught how to interrogate the answers that they are being inundated with inside the classroom, this could translate to an inability to think critically about authority and to exercise their own agency as adults. For many reasons it is essential that we critically reexamine the purpose and mode of education as a public service for our young people.

Based on the nature of findings from this qualitative study with high-dosage tutors, I recommend that state- and district- level officials expanding tutoring initiatives reevaluate the

current testing mandates for K–12 schools. I recommend that district and university administrators coordinate tutoring efforts around preestablished testing schedules to optimize tutors' time with students. Until high stakes testing is significantly reimagined, program administrators should also set time aside to make intentional decisions about how to support tutors and schools in balancing staffing shortages alongside the program goals. For example, several study participants were asked to proctor exams or help with grading in lieu of tutoring. This helped fill the needs of the school but prevented tutors from supporting students academically. University students may be well-positioned to deliver high-impact tutoring; however, when they are used to fill broad staffing gaps, meaningful learning is undermined.

The Promise of University Students as Paraprofessionals

As I have noted throughout this study, researchers have identified that tutoring programs with the most positive impact on student achievement share the following characteristics: high-dosage delivery (i.e., three or more sessions a week), provided during school hours, and provided by professional teachers or paraprofessionals with ongoing training and support. In professional tutoring interventions, certified classroom teachers or learning specialists fulfill the role of the tutor (Nickow et al., 2020). Paraprofessionals are tutors who are professionally employed and trained for their role but are not certified educators. This category of tutors includes school staff, undergraduate and graduate students with training in education, and fellows in professional development and service programs such as AmeriCorps and Saga Education, which place tutors in cities around the country (Education Reform Now, 2021; Nickow et al., 2020). Both the 1997 and 2001 federal reforms (that I discussed at length in Chapter One) to expand tutoring services sourced volunteer tutors who had little to no training.

Although unpaid, volunteer-based programs demonstrate smaller effect sizes on student learning, and thus limited impact, professional tutoring is very expensive and difficult to staff. As such, programs that employ paraprofessional staff members as tutors "may save on administrative costs given their integration into the school and may allow for stability as the programs develop. Education-oriented civic programs are becoming increasingly common within the career trajectory of recent college graduates" and "are likely to continue to create large pools of potential tutors for many years to come" (Nickow et al., 2020, pp. 54–55). As far as scaling and implementation go, policymakers may find paraprofessional tutors to be a cost effective and impactful resource when growing programs.

A promising finding from this study was that tutors without formal education training often engage in culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) with students. This is an exciting finding because CRP is an educational approach that is premised upon acknowledging and integrating students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives into the learning process and it has been found to enhance students' engagement, motivation, and academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Dixon, 2021). If study participants defaulted to this approach to engaging students without formal pedagogical training, it could indicate that university students are an ideal source from which to help staff tutoring and mentoring programs. This does not mean that professional learning opportunities should be overlooked, as not all tutors took this approach and some tutors, like Serena, held dangerous cultural biases against students. However, it is an encouraging finding to realize that many tutors were able to develop culturally responsive and engaging relationships with their students, despite the lack of formal training.

Recommendations for Future Research

A key strength of this study was my insider status as a former tutor, which helped me build rapport with participants who then shared candid insights they had not disclosed to program administrators. My insider perspective also helped me understand the nuanced subtleties in study participants' experiences. For example, some tutors revealed that school administrators overlooked structural constraints and interpersonal relationships. Without rooms to tutor, and deliberate introductions to teachers, these challenges hindered tutors' engagement in HDT with fidelity. However, this research only captures tutors' perspectives, and future research should triangulate these experiences with the perspectives of teachers and administrators. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data from tutors alone limits a comprehensive understanding of tutoring dynamics. Perspectives from teachers and students could have enriched the analysis, highlighted discrepancies and offered alternative interpretations to the tutors' self-reports. Moreover, self-reported data poses risks of bias and subjectivity, underscoring the need for caution in generalizing findings and emphasizing the importance of triangulated data sources in future research on tutoring efficacy. All of these factors should be taken into consideration when designing future studies.

An important strength of this study stems from the applied-research approach I took to partnering with a new and ongoing program. The program was dynamic, and it was continually evolving during my data collection, and it still evolves today. Administrators were able to use my study findings in real time to make improvements. For example, they implemented on-site coaching with tutors and teachers to help facilitate collaboration. Applied research approaches are beneficial for newly implemented programs and the communities they serve. In this way, applied research aligns with my values of social justice and equity, and I recommend this

approach for future educational studies researchers. Additionally, I recommend that future research on tutoring initiatives employ mixed methods approaches that combine quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of tutoring dynamics. This can involve triangulating data sources by incorporating perspectives from multiple stakeholders using interviews and surveys, and including teachers and students, to enrich the analysis and provide alternative interpretations. Longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of tutoring programs over time can also offer insights into their long-term efficacy and adaptation to challenges. As policy makers and district leaders strive to address the impact of opportunity gaps on public education, I recommend that researchers partner with new and evolving programs to bridge research with practice for programs that are often in need of more formal evaluations and formative assessments.

Furthermore, comparative studies between tutoring programs with different structures or stages of development can help identify effective practices and unique challenges that are context specific. By using case studies of successful implementation sites as well as those that are less successful, researchers can identify best practices and barriers with more specificity and detail. To address potential bias in self-reported data, future research should employ strategies such as diverse data collection methods. Lastly, involving stakeholders in the research process can enhance the relevance and applicability of findings, facilitating the implementation of well known guiding principles to HDT as well as lesser known but influential principles. This is important because subtle factors such as deliberate introductions and building relationships between tutors and teachers were revealed as substantial barriers in this study.

Final Thoughts

Although students continue to grapple with schooling disruptions and interventions are crucial to re-engage them, there are inherent issues within efforts to scale tutoring. Apart from the loss of instructional time, the pandemic exposed children to social isolation, financial strain, and limited access to healthcare. These challenges lead to negative impacts on well-being such as declining mental health and fewer socialization opportunities, all of which are correlated with academic performance. Additionally, based on study participants' experiences, it seems the program could have been more effective if the district had started with smaller case studies to gain a deeper understanding of what the barriers and enablers are to enacting HDT. Instead, the approach seemed to be more "quantity over quality" where tutors were placed in many schools, without thoughtful deliberation about the internal dynamics of how this partnership would function on the ground.

When I first began this research there was very little emphasis on non-test outcomes and relationship-building in the NCFDD guidelines, or the corresponding literature database they compiled. Over the course of the past year the discourse around tutoring has shifted significantly and now it is quite common to see language about relationships and mentoring in NCFDD and other large scale programming literature. I began this research with an interest in better understanding what academic and non-academic needs might be addressed by the relationships cultivated between students and their tutor. It is full circle to conclude this study having had the opportunity to witness pendulum swing from a metrics-based notion of individualized instruction to a humanizing model. The connections and overlap I saw between research on mentoring and the effort to scale school-based tutoring programs has evolved in promising ways. The NSSA call to action states,

> Research, experience, and simple logic shows that our best bet is to focus on the individual needs of each student — both academic needs and social-emotional needs. Teachers have valiantly helped their students transcend challenges related to the pandemic and independent of it; but, many students need a level of personal attention targeted to their specific needs that can rarely be delivered in a traditional classroom (n.d., para. 3).

The personal relationships and individual attention encompassed in one-on-one and small group tutoring could help address some of these challenges by creating a supportive, trusting relationship in students' lives. As tutoring programs continue to grow, it is likely that the staff will not have extensive experience working in public school settings or with historically disadvantaged students, much like the participants in this study. For this reason, it is essential not to overlook the importance of naming relationality as a goal, and training tutors about culturally relevant practices, deficit perspectives, and growth mindset. Tutoring is more likely to work when the diverse challenges that may be hindering students' learning can be attended to. The more tutors see their role as one that is flexible—both academic and social, the more prepared they will be to serve the multifaceted needs of young learners. In addition to being able to provide content coaching, effective tutors in this study also worked as skills advisors, advocates, and trusted counsel.

This research has reaffirmed the importance of individualized instruction for me, as a practitioner-scholar and research-based evaluator. K–12 educators study participants described were in a precarious position and less able to engage in tailored instruction. Large classroom sizes, a growing range of behavior and mental health needs, and testing culture limited teachers' ability to understand students' unique learning styles and teach for mastery and comprehension.

It is evident that the current preoccupation with high stakes testing has shaped the landscape of education in profound and counterproductive ways. To me, this indicates that in addition to equity interventions and initiatives, we need to deeply rethink the current structure of our education system. Kids are not getting what they need from the traditional model of schooling and public-school registrations have dropped across the country (Burtis & Goulas, 2023). Tutoring as part of the school day could help support the students who are left in the public school system as growing numbers of families with the means to do so leave for alternative opportunities, but these efforts will not be as meaningful if we do not strive to better intertwine academic and holistic needs and goals. Ultimately, although the improvements in students' behavior, socialization, and confidence suggest that access to tutors and mentors has a positive impact, these programs are not a panacea to the larger inequities impacting the quality of education.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Guide for Research Study: Capturing Tutors' Perspectives

PI: Monique Saastamoinen
FA: Kathy Hytten

Research Objectives:
This study seeks to (a) capture stories that demonstrate the challenges and opportunities of tutoring; (b) to broaden our understanding of the potential benefits tutoring relationships have on K–12 students; and (c) to consider how insights from tutor's could serve as a valuable means of formative assessment for intervention programs targeting K–12 students identified as academically vulnerable. This study will include semistructured individual interviews and focus groups with people who have or are currently working in a tutoring program as part of a school-university partnership. The questions ask about individuals' personal experiences tutoring and their perceptions of the schools, students, and program, to identify and better understand what structural and interpersonal factors impact tutoring work.

Research Questions:

1. How, if at all, did tutors perceive holistic development in students?

2. Based on tutors' experiences, what are the key factors impacting successful tutoring in a high dosage tutoring program?

Who is a part of the interviews?
Eligible participants must be at least 18 years old and who have or are currently working as a K–12 tutor in a school-university partnership model.

Logistics:
The interviews will be held over zoom because it is a location that most graduate students can access regardless of various school placements or differing schedules.

Semistructured outline for interviews

Introduction

- PI introduces self and the study, provides outline of how the interview will proceed.
- PI reviews the consent form, answers any questions, and gets verbal consent from the participant.
- PI reminds the participant that the information that is shared in this interview will be kept confidential.
- PI reviews participation guidelines for interviews (e.g., no right/wrong answers, it is okay to skip or come back to a question later, review informed consent)

Core questions are in bold font.

1. **Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?** (Probes: Where did you grow up? How long have you been living in the city where you live today?)

2. **Could you tell me a little about your professional and academic background?** (Probes: How much teaching or tutoring experience did you have before this role?)

3. **How do you understand the purpose of the tutoring program, and your role in that?**

4. **What are some effective strategies for tutoring that you know of and use?**
    a. [I will read a description of high dosage tutoring guidelines]
    b. Given your experience, would you say your day-to-day work reflects these strategies?

5. **Did your mindset shift at all regarding what goals you hoped to achieve with students after tutoring for some time? How about on what your role is?** Probes: Did you realize some goals were harder to meet than others? How did that feel? Were some goals more important to you than others?)

6. **Can you tell me a little about the school where you're working?**
    a. How would you describe the students and teachers? What is the building like?
        i. How would you describe the student's behaviors?
        ii. What are student's strengths and limitations? What challenges do you think they face?
    b. What if anything has surprised you about the school setting or the in-school interactions you observe?
    c. How if at all did this school differ from the school you attended as a K–12 student?
    d. What were the strengths of the school you were placed at? What were the challenges?

7. **What does your caseload of students look like?**
    a. What grades do you tutor? What subject? Is this the subject you were hired for?
    b. How many students do you work with each session? Each day? For how long? How often do you work with the same students?

8. **Can you tell me what a typical day in your job looks like? How about a typical tutoring session?** (Probes: How do you begin, tutor, and conclude? / What do you do with them in your sessions?

9. **How do you know if students are benefitting from tutoring time?**
    a. Is there a system for monitoring whether students are benefitting from tutoring? If there is, do you think that system could be improved in any way? How so?
    b. At the end of a tutoring session, how to you know if it was successful or impactful for the student(s)?

10. **Do you see any ways that this service benefits students outside of academic achievement?**

a. Tutoring is about delivering individualized learning to improve students' academic knowledge. There are other things that happen during tutoring, like learning how to socialize, or learning about non-academic skills or information from your tutor. Did you have other non-academic outcomes you prioritized with students? How did you decide what you were going to prioritize?
b. I will briefly describe cognitive and non-cognitive skillsets. I will ask tutors which, if any, of those came up in the work they do?
    i. If no, do you think those should be part of a tutor's role/ responsibility and why or why not?
    ii. If yes, what strategies do you use to build those skills?
c. What were some challenges you've observed in students building those skills on their own?
d. What do you think are challenges in helping build/ teach students these "non-cognitive" skills?

11. Tell me about one of the more challenging experiences you had as a tutor this year? How did you handle it?
a. How did you respond to the challenge/ what was that experience like?
b. Any challenging encounters you had with a student?
c. Were there any misconceptions you about a student/ or students, and has your perspective changed?
d. What support did you need to work with that student, and did you receive what you needed?

12. **How would you describe your communication with teachers, and program administrators?**

13. **What are the strengths of the program, from your perspective?** (Probes: What are the opportunities that would make the program beneficial for students? For teachers? For tutors?)

14. What would it look like at the end of a successful semester or school year with a student? How would you know it was successful?

15. How would you describe how this experience working in a U.S. public school has shaped your view of public schools? Of their role in a democratic society?

16. Given that I'm interested in thinking about what experiential wisdom from on-the-ground tutors can teach us about the creation, implementation, and formative assessment of tutoring programs, is there anything else that you would like to share that I might not have thought to ask?

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Focus Group Guides for
Research Study: Capturing Tutors' Perspectives

PI: Monique Saastamoinen
FA: Kathy Hytten

Research Objectives:
This study seeks to (a) capture stories that demonstrate the challenges and opportunities of tutoring; (b) to broaden our understanding of the potential benefits tutoring relationships have on K–12 students and (c) to consider how insights from tutor's could serve as a valuable means of formative assessment for intervention programs targeting K–12 students identified as academically vulnerable. This study will include semistructured individual interviews and focus groups with people who have or are currently working in a tutoring program as part of a school-university partnership. The questions ask about individuals' personal experiences tutoring and their perceptions of the schools, students, and program, to identify and better understand what structural and interpersonal factors impact tutoring work.

Logistics:
The focus group(s) will be held over zoom because it is a location that most graduate students can access regardless of various school placements or differing schedules.

Research Questions:
1. How, if at all, did tutors perceive holistic development in students?

2. Based on tutors' experiences, what are the key factors impacting successful tutoring in a high dosage tutoring program?

Who is a part of this focus group?
Eligible participants are those who have already participated in an initial interview or focus group. This focus group is intended as a sort of member check and way to engage those who've experienced tutoring in the analysis of the research.

Introduction
- PI re-introduces self and the study, provides outline of how the focus group will proceed.
- PI reviews the consent form, answers any questions, and collects the signed forms.
- PI reminds group that the information that is shared in this focus group should be kept confidential and stresses the importance of not sharing names or information with others.
- PI reviews participation guidelines for focus groups (e.g., no right/wrong answers, not interrupting since we're audio recording, allowing others to speak, talk to each other).
- Participants are asked to introduce themselves.

Focus group questions

1. *Specific questions can only be identified after the first interviews and focus group is conducted and analyzed. However, here are some general questions I anticipate asking:*
    a. Here are themes that seemed to run through the interviews. What ideas/questions do you have based on these themes?
    b. How does anyone see it differently? Are there other points of view?
    c. Here are quotations that I found to be important to the research. What do these quotes mean to you?
    d. Here are questions I am asking myself now after going through this information.
        i. What questions are you asking yourself after going through this information?
        ii. What are your responses to these questions and what we've discussed today?
    e. What are you thinking the most about after we've gone through this? What's most interesting, leaves you skeptical or excited?
    f. Is there any last thing you want to say about what we've talked about today? Recommendations or advice for me?

Conclusion

- PI thanks everyone for their participation and reviews next steps, including how she'll be writing up this information.
- PI reminds everyone again about importance of confidentiality and their role in maintaining that.
- PI stays around to answer any questions.

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: PERSPECTIVES AND LESSONS LEARNED: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TUTORING IN A K–12 INITIATIVE

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Monique Saastamoinen, Principal Investigator, Kathy Hytten, Faculty Advisor

Participant's Name: _____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?
This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. The aims of this study are to (a) capture stories that demonstrate the challenges and opportunities of tutoring; (b) develop suggestions for program development, professional learning opportunities, retention, and recruitment efforts, and (c) to broaden our understanding of the potential benefits tutoring relationships have on K–12 students. This study will include semistructured individual interviews and focus groups with university students who have, or are currently, working as K–12 tutors in public school settings. The questions will ask about individuals personal experiences as a tutor, and about perceptions of the strengths, challenges, and benefits of tutoring programs.

Why are you asking me?
You are being asked to participate in this study if you are currently working as a K–12 tutors or have previously worked as one. You must also be at least 18 years old.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

The study involves

I. individual interview that will last no longer than 1.5 hours AND
II. 1 optional focus group that will last approximately 2 hours, that allows you to review and discuss transcript excerpts of previous interviews and initial findings from the data for accuracy as well as to contribute any ideas or experiences that were not previously captured.

The questions you will be asked in either the individual interview(s) or focus group will be seeking information about your personal experiences and perceptions as a tutor working with K–12 students.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Monique Saastamoinen at 607.338.0705 or mnsaasta@uncg.edu. Or you may contact her Faculty Advisor, Kathy Hytten, at khytten@uncg.edu or 336.334.3490.

Is there any audio/video recording?
All interviews and focus groups will be conducted and recorded on Zoom. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described below.

The researcher will limit access to the recordings by being the only person to access them for transcription purposes. After the interviews are transcribed, there is no need for the recordings to be listened to, and they will be deleted.

What are the risks to me?
The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. Because the study asks you to share about your experiences as a tutor, there may be some details you feel more comfortable sharing than others. You decide how much information to share in the study, including whether you want to even answer a question (you may skip questions, as many as you want). You may also remove yourself from the study at any time, with no negative consequences to you.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Monique Saastamoinen at 607.338.0705 or mnsaasta@uncg.edu. Or you may contact her Faculty Advisor, Kathy Hytten, at khytten@uncg.edu or 336.334.3490.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?
Information gained from this study may inform the future recruitment, training, and retention of tutors.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?
There are no direct benefits to you for your participation.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?
There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?
At the start of the interview or focus group you will have an opportunity to identify a pseudonym, or fake name, that will be used in place of your real name so that your experiences remain confidential, otherwise I will choose a pseudonym for you. The electronic recordings will be stored on a password-protected laptop that only the PI will have access to. The recordings will be disposed of after transcripts are completed. The transcription data will be kept indefinitely and may be used for future research without your additional consent.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law, or you have elected to use your real name during the interview(s) or focus group(s) in order to be credited for your ideas and experiences.

Will my de-identified data be used in future studies?
In addition to being used for a dissertation, your de-identified data will be kept indefinitely and may be used for future research without your additional consent.

What if I want to leave the study?
You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:
By signing this consent form/completing this survey/activity (used for an IRB-approved waiver of signature) you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, in this study described to you by Monique Saastamoinen.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Dear tutor,

My name is Monique Saastamoinen, and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. I am conducting a research study exploring the experiences and perspectives of UNCG students working as tutors in the IPiE initiative, and I would like to invite you to participate in the study. If you agree, I will ask you questions about your experience working in the program during an interview that will take approximately one hour, and an optional focus group meeting that will take no more than two hours. The interviews will be conducted over zoom and recorded to create transcriptions. After transcriptions are generated, I will delete the recordings.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain anonymous during and after the study. All transcripts will be anonymized, each participant will receive a participant pseudonym and a participant log will be kept in a separate location from the transcripts.

Audio and video recordings and transcripts will be housed securely on my personal computer and a secure data server to be supplied by the university. Data will be destroyed seven years after the study has closed.

If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me at cakierna@uncg.edu. Thank you for your participation,

Monique Saastamoinen
University of North Carolina Greensboro
School of Education
Doctoral Student