Fostering Reading: Supporting Foster Children Through Virtual Tutoring

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Professional literature presents evidence that foster care agencies, foster parents, and educators are unprepared to meet the distinctive educational needs of foster youth. Although there is a general lack of evidence on specific interventions developed for foster youth, some studies have addressed the impact of tutoring. This paper studies the impact of a pilot program that paired 15 teacher candidates with 15 foster youth for virtual reading tutoring as part of a college course. Data were collected from youth, parents, and teacher candidates through surveys and focus groups. The results of this study suggested that the tutoring relationship produced several academic and emotional benefits for both foster youth and tutors. Participants all saw evidence of increases in the tutees' skill level and content knowledge, and tutors overwhelmingly reported feelings of fulfillment. The establishment of a strong, supportive relationship between tutor and tutee was also seen as a primary factor in success. Finally, the study presented evidence that diverse instructional resources and methods are important for youth engagement and that tutors need in-depth, thorough training on how to locate and properly use these types of resources. Suggestions for future research are proposed.

Keywords: foster children, virtual tutoring, service learning, academic skills, reading, educational outcomes

Fostering Reading: Supporting Foster Youth Through Virtual Tutoring

Children in foster care are one of the most vulnerable populations of youth, and the support they receive directly influences their life outcomes. In the United States, over 420,000 children are in foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Foster care is defined as care given to any child who has been taken out of their home with their biological family for any number of reasons (Ramsay-Irving, 2015). Some enter the system after the death of their parents (Verulava & Dangadze, 2021), but others experience abuse, neglect, or their families lack the resources and support to properly care for them (Gypen et al., 2017; Ramsay-Irving, 2015).

Compared to the general population, foster children are more likely to experience negative outcomes because of a lack of stability in their childhood (Gypen et al., 2017) and trauma that presents itself in a variety of mental, emotional, and behavioral issues (Goemans et al., 2015; Ramsay-Irving, 2015; Somers et al., 2020). There is an abundance of research on the challenges

foster youth face in care and how it impacts their transition to independent living. Many studies have found that foster children are at a higher risk for physical and mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, PTSD, ADHD (Gypen et al., 2017), and an increase in both internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Goemans et al., 2015). These issues disrupt development and functioning, contributing to a higher risk of criminal justice system involvement (Gypen et al., 2017), youth violence (Benbenishty et al., 2018), substance abuse (Ramsay-Irving, 2015), and teen pregnancies (Scannapieco, 2007). These trends are exacerbated by the insecure attachment that develops in children who experience multiple placements.

As a result of these struggles, foster youth have a harder time transitioning to adult life. Foster parents are frequently unprepared to meet the unique needs of their children, and there is an overall lack of communication among parents, children, and social workers about the supports and services available (Scannapieco, 2007). Despite the best efforts of foster care agencies, the outcomes for foster children remain overwhelmingly negative (Scannapieco, 2007).

Literature Review

One particular area of need for foster children is academics, as they are one of the most academically at-risk groups, but their education is often overlooked due to more pressing needs. They have much lower levels of educational attainment than their peers (Gypen et al., 2017; Morton, 2015; O'Higgins et al., 2017; Watson & Kabler, 2012), with only about 50% graduating from high school and 33% going on to college (Benbenishty et al., 2018; Morton, 2015). While many foster children consistently perform below grade level and have poorer cognitive skills, they also have a lack of commitment to education that can cause them to get discouraged easily and avoid setting goals for the future (Palmieri & La Salle, 2017).

Having to adjust to new schools throughout placement changes is another barrier to learning (Clemens et al., 2018; Morton, 2015) and is made worse by frequent absences due to health issues, therapy appointments, and court appearances (Neiheiser, 2015; O'Higgins et al., 2017). Relationship disruptions often leave them disconnected from their school and less likely to participate in school activities (Somers et al., 2020). This is a significant issue because a sense of belonging and participation in the school environment is a strong predictor of better behavior, mental health, and overall success in the classroom (Benbenishty et al., 2018; Brinser & Wissel, 2020; Parker & Folkman, 2015).

Morton (2015) explored foster children's perspectives on the barriers they faced in their education through interviews with current or former foster youth. They expressed feeling disempowered or silenced because decisions were frequently made without them. They lost trust in the foster care and school systems because of the lack of support they received. A systematic review of literature on factors influencing foster youth's educational achievement completed by O'Higgins et al. (2017) came to similar conclusions. They found that more frequent school changes had a strong link to lower educational outcomes, along with other factors like involvement in special education classes, behavioral challenges, and poor physical and mental health. Older foster children were more likely to fall behind as the cognitive load increased, and they lacked the foundational skills to progress. Many of the academic difficulties foster children

have begin early in their education, go unresolved, and have lasting impacts as they get older (Clemens et al., 2018; Neiheiser, 2015; O'Higgins et al., 2017; Somers et al., 2020).

Furthermore, each foster child comes from different circumstances and requires different types and levels of support to be successful. In their study on the educational barriers foster children face, Palmieri and La Salle (2017) acknowledge that "students in foster care may legitimately face more behavioral difficulties than their peers due to adverse life circumstances; however, it may be just as likely that these students are being unfairly targeted due to negative staff perceptions and a lack of staff preparedness" (p. 119). Collaborative partnerships between teachers, parents, students, school staff, child welfare agencies, and community experts should be established, so each child gets the individualized, multi-tiered systems of support they need (Berardi & Morton, 2017; Neiheiser, 2015; Palmieri & La Salle, 2017; Parker & Folkman, 2015; Watson & Kabler, 2012). Additionally, teachers and staff should receive more education and training on how to properly respond to trauma in youth to facilitate a safer, more supportive classroom and school environment (Berardi & Morton, 2017; Brinser & Wissel, 2020; Neiheiser, 2015). Research also suggests foster children benefit from social services programs to help them navigate the education system and prepare them for employment and independent living (Gypen et al., 2017; Watson & Kabler, 2012).

Tutoring as a Targeted Intervention

Tutoring is an effective intervention that has shown to improve the educational outcomes of at-risk students, including foster children. Tutoring can meet individual academic needs (Hickey & Flynn, 2019; Tyre, 2012). Both tutors and tutees benefit from the relationship component of tutoring programs, particularly in a one-on-one setting (Harper & Schmidt, 2016).

Hickey and Flynn (2019) evaluated an individualized, home-based tutoring program called TutorBright. College student tutors were trained and provided detailed resources to use with the group of foster youth, who were randomly assigned to either the tutoring group or a control group. Hickey and Flynn (2019) found that while there were no statistical differences between the tutoring and control group on the pretest, the tutoring contributed to a statistically significant positive effect in the areas of reading fluency, reading comprehension, and math comprehension. Harper and Schmidt (2016) studied a similar program, finding that the tutored group showed significant gains in word reading, spelling, and math, though not in sentence comprehension. Another study by Flynn et al. (2012) explored the effects of trained foster parents delivering the tutoring to their child. This program improved academics as well, and gave parents an opportunity to be more involved in their child's education.

Chien et al. (2018) suggest that online tutoring provides unique benefits that face-to-face tutoring lacks. Most notably, it helps tutors avoid the time and cost of a commute, allowing for increased tutoring frequency and a chance to build technological skills. They created and evaluated an e-tutoring program over a three-year study in group homes in Taiwan. College student tutors enrolled in a course to prepare them to engage in online teaching and completed weekly journals, interviews, and observation reports for data. Some challenges were low motivation of the tutee, distractions in the home, technical issues, and the difficulty of switching tutors each semester. Chien et al. (2018) determined that programs like this require good management by supervisors

and thorough training of tutors to be successful. Tutoring has the biggest impact when it is transformative instead of transactional. When the tutoring was focused too heavily on content knowledge, tutees were more likely to report that the learning was boring and repetitive (Chien et al., 2018). The relationship aspect of a tutoring partnership is crucial to the success of this type of program.

Overall, there is a lack of research on specific interventions for foster youth (Flynn et al., 2012; Forsman & Vinnerljung, 2012; Harper & Schmidt, 2016; Hickey & Flynn, 2019; Tyre, 2012). They only found 11 relevant studies in the area and could not draw conclusions, although they did identify tutoring as a strongly supported practice. They concluded that "this review – and national cohort studies – points to inadequate services being the culprit, not the children themselves" (Forsman & Vinnerljung, 2012, p. 1089).

Conceptual Framework

Ramsden's theory of university teaching outlines three stages of teaching progress which are relevant to the action research approach Chien et al. (2018) used in their study of virtual tutoring. They investigated the partnership between the university and foster care institutions and analyzed how it could be improved. Action research allowed for a process of questioning and reflecting that resulted in the development of better practices and a greater understanding of how to problem solve in the educational system. The first stage of Ramsden's theory of university teaching refers to teachers as "content deliverers" who explicitly transfer knowledge to the student in what is referred to as "teacher-centered learning" (p. 223). The second stage is "activity organizers" and represents the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. Teachers design activities and act as supervisors, but students are engaging in their own learning more than they were in the first stage. The final stage of Ramsden's theory refers to teachers as "knowledge inspirers" who engage in teaching and learning in a collaborative process with students. In this stage, teaching is spontaneous, and knowledge is more than just a static body of information. This teaching establishes the foundation for independent learning.

This study explores the impacts of a Fostering Reading pilot program that provided free virtual reading tutoring for local foster youth by pairing them with Miami University's future teachers. The following three research questions are explored: (1) How can an online tutoring program benefit both foster children and college student tutors? (2) What are the results of the program? (3) How can the program be improved? We use Chien et al.'s (2018) framework to inform analysis.

Methods

Fostering Reading paired 15 college student tutors studying teacher education with 15 elementary age foster children from the local community for a semester long program. Tutors were assigned to the program as part of their coursework for an introductory course in special education. Permission to collect data from human subjects was approved by the University IRB. Data were collected through a tutor Likert scale survey and focus group interview, team discussion assignments completed by tutors, a foster parent survey, and a foster child interview. Deductive thematic analysis was used to triangulate data.

Participants

This study included 45 participants: 15 college student tutors, 15 foster youth, and 11 foster parent contacts, all from southwest Ohio. The program was advertised through a Facebook post on a closed site by a non-profit agency supporting foster parents. Tutors were undergraduate elementary teacher education majors in their second semester at a mid-size, mid-western university. Tutors were each paired with a foster child in grades 1-6 for virtual reading tutoring. The online tutoring took place approximately three hours a week for a 12-week semester. Tutors were prepared to address academic skills and foster a supportive relationship with the student.

Instrumentation

Several data sources were used in program evaluation. College student tutors participated in two online surveys and two focus group interviews during the semester. Surveys consisted of 12 5-pt Likert scale statements about the impact of their online tutoring experience. The survey was created by Cofer (2020), who conducted a study on the effects of peer tutoring on the tutor. The only change to Cofer's survey was the removal of the word "peer" from "peer tutoring" from each of the 12 statements.

The second tutor survey was adapted from the results of a study conducted by Nickel and Hughes (2020), who explored the impacts of a tutoring program on teacher candidates' understanding of reading instruction. They interviewed tutors in focus groups, concluding a combination of service learning and traditional coursework was beneficial for future teachers. The questions used in the present study were developed by the researchers using the themes that were presented by Nickel and Hughes. Interviews included 10 open-ended questions about the tutoring experience.

The final two data sources we used for this study were a parent and foster youth post-survey in order to collect data on perceptions of the program. Parents took an online survey with six written response questions developed by the researcher. Youth interviews were conducted individually over Zoom and included five open-ended questions.

Procedure

University tutors were given the survey and focus group interview during their assigned class period, once halfway through the semester, and once at the completion of the program as the course's final exam. Focus groups were conducted online after the conclusion of the survey in two groups in order to maximize opportunities for participation.

At the conclusion of the semester, all foster parents and children were contacted via email to participate in the post-survey (parents) and schedule a time for an online interview (children). All foster children were minors, so their parents were asked to be present during their interviews. Ten out of 11 foster parents took the online survey for a response rate of about 91%, and seven out of 15 children completed the Zoom interview for a response rate of 47%.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the qualitative data collected in this study, we used Pearse's (2019) seven step framework for deductive thematic analysis. One primary researcher conducted the analysis, which was then spot-checked by the secondary researcher at regular intervals as the analysis proceeded. Any discrepancies were resolved before data collection resumed for purposes of triangulation. Transcripts and notes from the qualitative data collection in this study, which included 4 focus group interviews, 59 team discussion assignments, 10 parent post surveys, and 7 foster children interviews - were coded using the subsequent method.

The first step was to choose a conceptual framework based on the patterns that emerged from the literature review. Keeping Ramsden's theoretical framework in mind, the next steps were to develop propositions and codes based on those propositions that would help us identify the important ideas from our qualitative data (Pearse, 2019, p. 265). Each code is a distinctive set of keywords that correspond to participants' responses, guided by the interview questions in what Pearse (2019) refers to as the question matrix, step four of deductive analysis. Interview questions and the categories separating the propositions and codes are all grounded in the theories from our conceptual framework. Thus, after data collection, we used the same propositions Chien et al. (2018) used in their study to begin defining our results. We refer to these propositions will as "contexts" to align with the terminology used in the foundational research study. While our contexts were drawn directly from this source based on what was already known about the topic of inquiry, the codes are unique to our data sets. Where our data did not align with theirs, we added or eliminated appropriate contexts to represent where our findings diverged and new information was found. A tally of each code appearance in the transcripts was also calculated to provide a quantitative measure of the significance of each code in our study.

Data triangulation was achieved by looking for similar themes across the multiple sources of data from tutors, tutees, and foster parents. In the final step of data analysis, the findings from all data sets were reported in connection to our initial theory, showing where the results matched up with the framework as well as where there were digressions or expansions from the theory (Pearse, 2019). Means from the tutors' pre and post surveys were used to support the qualitative data analysis in the following results.

Results

Tables 1 to 3 compare results to those obtained by Chien et al. (2018). Data presented include only the data recorded at the end of the semester for comparison. The chart includes a "categories" column with the three stages of the conceptual framework, a "contexts" column, which includes the propositions, and a "dimensions" column, which has the codes identified in our data. Each table presents results of a different group of participants.

Table 1
Findings from Tutors

Categories	Subcategories	Dimensions (Assignment Data)	Dimensions (Focus Group Data)
Stage 1: teaching as telling or transmission	Content & learning	1. Repetition helps tutee understand concepts (12) 2. Work on several different skill sets per session (5) 3. Start with foundations to build content knowledge (4) 4. Becomes uninterested in topics quickly (4)	1. Activities as low stakes assessments (5)
	Practical learning	1. Consistent expectations, schedule format helps with focus issues (12) 2. Online environment conducive to distractions in home (11) 3. Feelings of discouragement/frustration (4) 4. Technical issues over Zoom (3) 5. End of semester issues with participation, engagement (15) 6. Struggles with memory (3) 7. Easily overwhelmed, rushes through problems causing errors (3)	1. Boredom sitting on Zoom, distracted by environment (4)
Stage 2: teaching as organizing student activity	Tutoring concerns	1. Let tutee set pace of instruction, control their learning (13) 2. Large time commitment, hard to schedule (5) 3. Small group team discussions were helpful (19) 4. Structured plans, daily objectives are important (18) 5. Tutors need explicit instruction on instructional strategies, lesson planning (7)	1. Tutors would benefit from slower start to semester, structured preparation (4) 2. Small group meetings, peer/mentor feedback (6) 3. Groupchat with other tutors for quick advice (3)

Categories	Subcategories	Dimensions (Assignment Data)	Dimensions (Focus Group Data)
		6. Tutor should take strengths-based approach (4) 7. Early get-to-know you activities/assessment helps tutor with future planning (3) 8. Requires good communication with parents (6)	
	Knowledge gains	1. Skill level increases, understanding of content knowledge (28) 2. Valuable teaching experiences (17) 3. Ability to personalize learning to tutees' needs, be inclusive (11) 4. Make connections between experience and course material (10) 5. Feeling of fulfillment (10)	1. Growth in knowledge of subject content (3) 2. Greater awareness of connections between lessons (3) 3. Teaching experiences (6) 4. Feel accomplished when tutee progresses (3)
Stage 3: teaching as making learning possible	Competency gains	1. Self-confidence, excitement to learn (21) 2. Communication, social skills, participation (20) 3. Hard-working, persevering mentality (17) 4. Problem solving skills (11) 5. Pays attention, stays focused (11) 6. Kindness, cooperation, maturity (7) 7. Overall positive attitude towards tutoring (5) 8. Willingness to try new things (4) 9. Make connections between previous and new knowledge (3) 10. Ability to clearly explain instructions, expectations to tutee (13) 11. Learning how to interact with young students, being a role model, forming bonds (12) 12. Confidence/flexibility preparing for sessions (12)	1. Social skills, initiating conversations with tutor (5) 2. Vocal expression of explanations/questions (4) 3. Perseverance, self-motivation,

Categories	Subcategories	Dimensions (Assignment Data)	Dimensions (Focus Group Data)
		13. Adjust to appropriate rates of presentation (6) 14. Organization skills (5) 15. Familiarity with appropriate level resources (3)	determination (3) 4. Self-confidence, enjoyment of learning (3) 5. Confidence/flexibility preparing for sessions, self-efficacy (10) 6. Problem solving skills (4)
		1. Higher engagement (11) 2. Ask questions throughout session to monitor understanding (8)	7. Comfortable interacting with young student (3)
		1. Incorporate tutees' interests (14) 2. Ask tutee for feedback, keep track of activities they enjoyed (5)	
	Adult guidance	1. Enthusiasm, encouragement, positive reinforcement (24) 2. Use scavenger hunts, games, videos, music to engage tutee (22) 3. Take breaks, break material into small chunks (16) 4. Use variation of activities, modes of instruction (13) 5. Give tutee choice in type/order of activities (12) 6. Begin/end session with informal activities (7) 7. Explain importance of each activity (6) 8. Work as a team so tutee isn't hesitant (3)	
	E-tutoring approaches	9. Informal and constant assessment is important (3) 10. Prioritize strengthening tutor/tutee relationship over content (11)	
	Transformative		1. Adapt to tutees' preferred methods of

Categories	Subcategories	Dimensions (Assignment Data)	Dimensions (Focus Group Data)
	development		learning (5) 1. Use of games, incentives, variety of activities (3)

Table 2
Findings from Parents

Categories	Subcategories	Dimensions
Stage 1: teaching as telling or transmission	Content & learning	
	Practical learning	
Stage 2: teaching as organizing student activity	Tutoring concerns	
		1. Difficult to schedule full amount of time each week, sometimes not needed (5) 2. Flexibility in scheduling necessary (4)
	Knowledge gains	
		1. Need better communication with parents, progress check-ins (6)
Stage 3: teaching as making learning possible	Competency gains	1. Evidence of skill level increases (5)
	Adult guidance	1. Experiences organizing/preparing for sessions each week, new activities (7)
	E-tutoring approaches	1. Developed excitement about learning and working with tutor (9) 1. Professional, good communicator (6) 2. Creative with engaging tutees (3)
	Transformative development	1. Tutors need more support finding diverse online resources, evaluation/assessment methods (3)

Categories	Subcategories	Dimensions
		1. Tutee enjoyed playing games with tutor (3) 1. Tutees looked up to tutors, liked working with college students one-on-one at their level (3)

Table 3
Findings from Youth

Categories	Subcategories	Dimensions
Stage 1: teaching as telling or transmission	Content & learning	1. Use of games to teach content knowledge (5) 2. Repetitive content, need for different activities or different subject areas (4)
	Practical learning	
	Tutoring concerns	
Stage 2: teaching as organizing student activity		
	Knowledge gains	1. Subject learning (6) 2. Content became easier, lessons went faster (4)
	Competency gains	1. Teaching experiences (3)
Stage 3: teaching as making learning possible		1. Develop excitement about learning and working with tutor (5)
		1. Find engaging games, online resources (5) 2. Interact with young students (particularly those with learning disabilities or challenges) (3)
	Adult guidance	
	E-tutoring approaches	1. Focus on building relationship with tutee (3)

Categories	Subcategories	Dimensions
	Transformative development	1. Use games to make learning fun (7) 1. Establish supportive relationship (3)

We summarize the results below in order of Chien et al.'s (2018) stages.

Stage 1: Teaching as Telling or Transmission

For stage one, repetition as a way to reinforce comment was mentioned by both tutors and youth. Beginning with foundational reading skills, multiple skills were taught in each session, using activities and games to engage youth and as low-stakes assessment. Tutors expressed concerns about the online environment, with youth quickly becoming disengaged and distracted by stimuli in their environment.

Stage 2: Teaching as Organizing Student Activity

With respect to tutoring concerns, tutors indicated they would benefit from more structured, clearer preparation before beginning the tutoring. They found it helpful to engage with their peers around the tutoring experience with small group meetings and group chats to give and receive feedback. Consistent expectations helped, but there were end of semester concerns with participation and engagement. Parents found it difficult to schedule the full amount of time (three hours) each week, expressing the need for flexibility in scheduling. They expressed the desire for additional contact with the tutor to provide feedback on progress.

Stage 3: Teaching as Making Learning Possible

With respect to competency gains, all three groups (tutors, parents, and youth) indicated an increase in skill level in content as well as self-confidence. They appeared to agree that youth enjoyed working with and interacting with the tutor, and that the relationship between youth and tutor was valued. Tutors also indicated an increase in social skills and self-confidence in terms of youth initiating conversation and generally responding to prompts. Again, tutors expressed the need for additional training, particularly in instructional strategies and lesson planning. With respect to transformative development, all three groups appeared to agree that the youth enjoyed both the games and the supportive relationship as discussed above.

Discussion

Overall, the participants in this study mentioned specific positive impacts of the tutoring program evaluated in this study. Tutoring has shown to improve educational outcomes for foster youth, and we identified similar benefits in our project. Recurring themes from the results include the tutoring relationship, the need for the use of diverse instructional materials to motivate tutee learning, the need for tutor assistance in locating appropriate resources, and the outcomes of skill level (for the tutee) and fulfillment (for the tutor).

Beginning with the tutoring relationship, our data showed that the relationship aspect of the tutoring was beneficial for both tutor and tutee and important for the progression of the partnership. This finding indicates that the primary focus when implementing a similar program should be building a supportive relationship between the tutor and the tutee.

Our results about the tutoring relationship were also very similar to those of Chien et al. (2018), who concluded in their study that tutoring had the biggest impact when it was transformative instead of transactional. This also conveyed that a focus on guidance and topics the tutee found interesting were more important than knowledge transfer and highlighted the benefits of the relationship. All children require stable relationships for their growth and development, but often that is one thing foster children lack (Ramsay-Irving, 2015).

Another theme was that the use of diverse instructional materials is a good strategy to motivate tutees' learning. In their focus group interviews and team discussions, the tutors in this study mentioned how their experience as a tutor helped them determine effective instructional strategies. They learned that offering a variety of activity options and giving their tutee choice aided in motivation. Their tutees responded well when given a voice in their learning, and their interests were incorporated into their lessons. Not surprisingly, the foster parents and youth foster children mentioned the use of games to be particularly engaging for the children, and they were motivated to learn when the learning was fun.

Most tutoring studies in this field of research focus solely on evaluating the structure of the tutoring program based on the academic outcomes (Chien et al., 2018; Flynn et al., 2012; Forsman & Vinnerljung, 2012; Harper & Schmidt, 2016; Hickey & Flynn, 2019; Tyre, 2012). This study expands current knowledge by examining results about tutoring techniques employed by tutors, particularly pedagogy used within a virtual environment.

Next, results of this study point to a need for further assistance in helping tutors locate appropriate resources. Assistance appeared to be needed in explicit instruction, instructional strategies, lesson planning, and different types of assessments. They found it difficult to find diverse activities and lessons to fit an online format and often reverted to what they knew worked. Some youth indicated finding the tutoring repetitive, and parents mentioned that tutors appeared to need some support in planning diverse instruction and finding a variety of activities and resources.

Several tutors suggested a slower start to the semester and more structured preparation before beginning tutoring. They also mentioned that having more in-depth information about their tutee prior to the partnership would have been beneficial to their small group meetings with peers also appeared to be helpful.

Professional literature reinforces the need to provide tutors with sufficient training and resources, particularly when serving groups of students like foster children, who often have specific academic needs (Berardi & Morton, 2017; Brinser & Wissel, 2020; Chien et al., 2018; Neiheiser, 2015).

Although this study relied on self-report, the final theme in our results involves program outcomes, academic and emotional. The youth reported increased skill levels and a better understanding of content knowledge, as seen in similar students (Flynn et al., 2012; Harper & Schmidt, 2016; Hickey and Flynn, 2019). Along with the growth in knowledge, some youth reported improvements in their attitude toward learning as a result of our semester program. Tutors saw that as the partnership went on, their tutees became more confident in their ability to learn, encouraging them to participate more and make connections between lessons.

Benefits to the tutor included feelings of fulfillment and accomplishment. Not surprisingly, another notable benefit seemed to be the value of the teaching experience provided. They believed this tutoring service-learning experience would be beneficial to their future careers because it allowed them to improve skills necessary for teaching and connect their course material to real experience. Some of the skills and assets they mentioned included self-efficacy in teaching, flexibility in preparing lessons, and the ability to teach and interact with young students, supporting them in their unique educational needs. This outcome is also discussed in the study by Chien et al. (2018), aligning with their conceptual framework.

Conclusion

This research study evaluated the outcome of a tutoring program targeting fostering youth. The results of this study suggest that the tutoring relationship produced several academic and emotional benefits for both foster youth and college student tutors. Participants mentioned evidence of increases in the tutees' skill level and content knowledge, and tutors reported feelings of fulfillment. This research also supported the idea that the establishment of a strong, supportive relationship is necessary for the success of tutoring. This study also presented evidence that suggests diverse instructional resources and methods are important for the continued engagement of the tutee, and tutors need more assistance locating and using these types of resources, particularly when navigating an online platform.

While the effects of tutoring are well-researched, the implications for specific at-risk student groups like foster youth and the outcomes for the tutors (especially college student tutors) have not been studied as comprehensively. Professional literature generally focuses more on the structure of tutoring programs and tangible outcomes versus specific curricula and teaching techniques. The current study suggested the use of diverse resources is one of the best ways to motivate tutee learning and keep foster youth engaged, particularly as tutoring progressed mind as the semester ended, which brings me to the next new idea that came out of this study. Finally,

this study added to previous research by examining the support systems for tutors. Small groups appeared to be effective, and providing tutors support is essential for their self-confidence and success. Small group discussions appeared to be successful.

One of the limitations of this study is its limited sample and status as a pilot. Future research can focus on scaling up this or similar programs. Another limitation of this research is that it did not use direct academic performance measures, relying primarily on qualitative data from research participants and youth self-report. This choice allowed us to explore perceptions of all stakeholders. In future research, direct outcome measures could be concluded.

In conclusion, the results contribute to the knowledge base on tutoring interventions and service learning and can be used to assist in the development of similar programs by teacher educators. As our knowledge and understanding of tutoring and its impact grows, so will our ability to academically support these vulnerable populations of students and create learning partnerships that allow both tutor and tutee to learn and develop.

Author Notes

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