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A Spoonful of Success: Undergraduate Tutor-Tutee Interactions and Performance

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A Spoonful of Success



Undergraduate tutor-tutee interactions
and performance

Dr. Jon Marx, Ms. Kimberly Howard, & Mrs. Michelle Wolf

Mythbusting the Tutor–Tutee Relationship

- Tutoring services act to undermine traditional classroom dynamics.

MYTH!

- Tutors “coddle” students and prevent them from “grappling” with course content.

MYTH!

- The tutor–tutee relationship offers ways to create a learning environment that is enjoyable, encouraging, impactful, and non–threatening.

FACT!



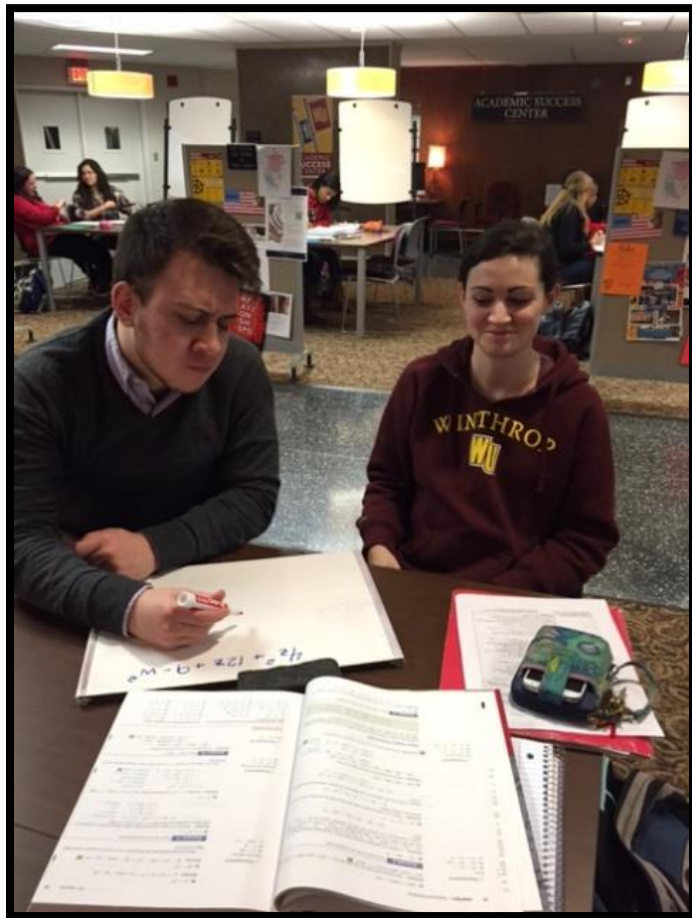
This presentation busts these myths and shows how [a spoonful of peer tutoring](#), in tandem with faculty members' efforts, can help the learning go down.



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The Importance of Tutor Training



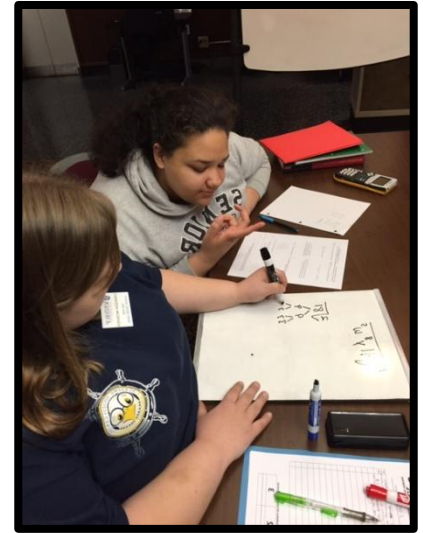


“Unless we specially trained tutors in techniques to encourage students’ self-reliance, those students will continue to have the same academic difficulties which they brought with them to tutoring in the first place. The irony is that those difficulties will have been reinforced, not corrected, by the tutor.”

Ross MacDonald, 1994

Confronting the Challenge

- Advanced tutor training
- Marketing to campus constituents
- Explicitly stating tutor objectives and outcomes to clients



Both peer tutors and students experienced **positive effects** in the areas of **learning, attitude toward subject matter, and self-concept.**

(Cohen, Kulik, & Kulik, 1981)



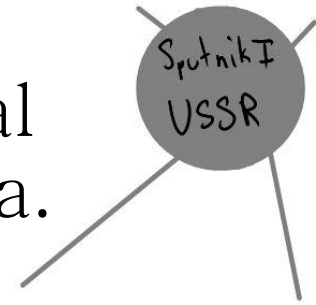
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Historical & Theoretical Underpinnings



History

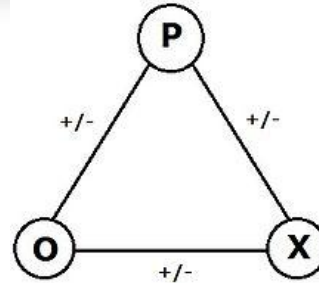
- Fears about the decline of traditional norms date back to the Cold War era.
 - Fueled by fear that extracurricular activities diverted attention from learning



- Students involved in school-sponsored extracurricular activities generally outperform their peers.



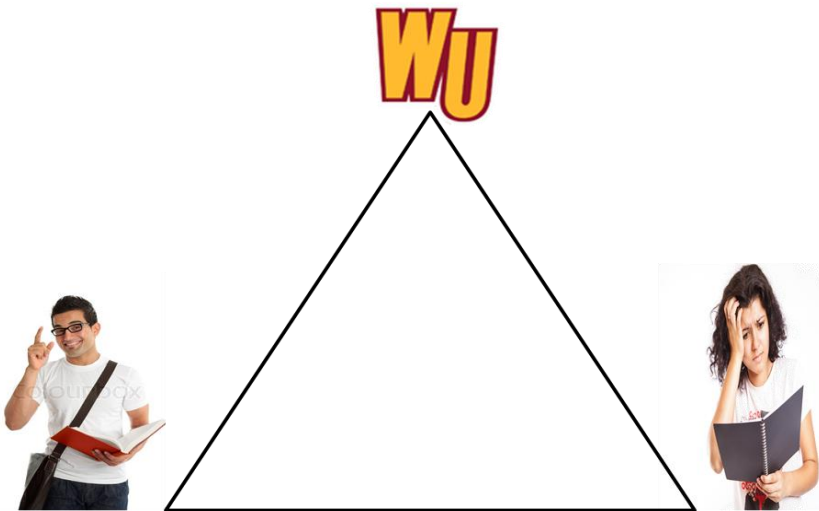
Balance Theory



- Humans like internal experiences to be congruent with external experiences.
- For our purposes, people tend to like characteristics that they associate with people that they like.
- Coaches, teachers, and students involved in extracurricular work are generally more pro-school. These students often have enhanced academic performance and higher aspirations.

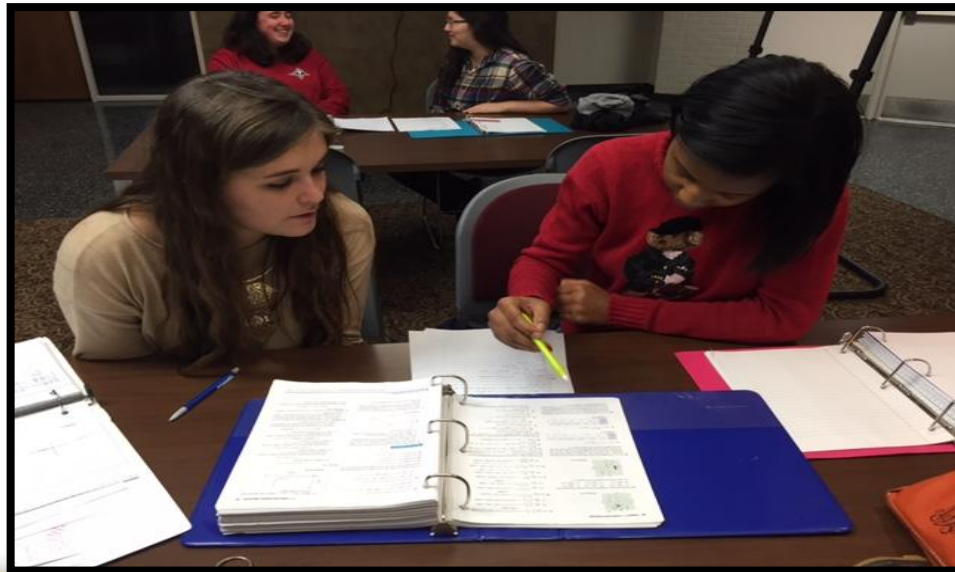
How Do Peer Tutors Fit?

- Special case of this dynamic.
- Advocates of school and embrace the traditional student role.



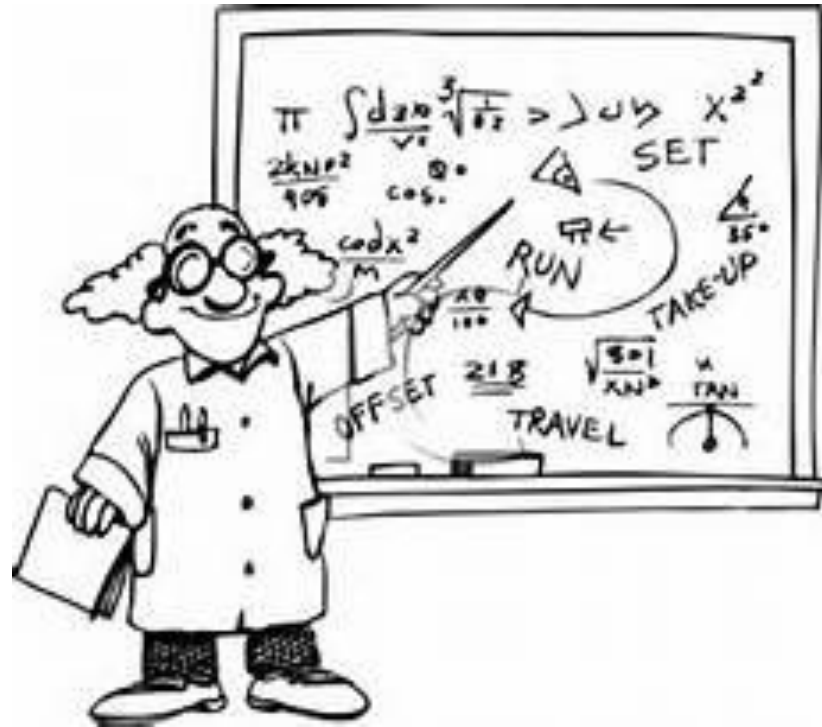
Hypothesis:

Strong, positive tutor-tutee relationships are associated with the adoption of independent study skills, the enhanced independent study skills positively impact performance.





Method



Participants & Setting



- Student success center at a mid-sized comprehensive university
 - 5,000 undergraduates
 - Located in the **southern region** of the United States
 - In early history, was premiere female teacher training college in the state (co-educational since 1974)
 - Predominantly female (67%)
 - African American/Black attendance (30%)
 - Graduation rate of this population: 81%

Participants & Setting

- Student Success Center
 - Services available to all **undergraduate** students
 - Approximately 50 different **general education courses**
 - **Voluntary**
 - Tutees meet **weekly** with the same tutor
 - **Required orientation** meeting for tutees at the beginning of each academic year
 - Briefed about the study
 - Completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent forms
 - Learned about tutoring objectives, expectations, and protocol

Tutors

- Tutors are **paid**.
- Undergo a **required training program (LEAD 120F)** that is certified through the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA).
- **Advanced training opportunities** are available to tutors who would like to pursue additional skills.
- Tutors learned about the study in their training sessions and signed the IRB consent forms.



Sample

- $N = 333$ tutee-tutor dyads
- 53% response rate of total number of Spring 2015 tutee-tutor dyads
- 88% response rate among tutors



What are the demographics of the dyads?



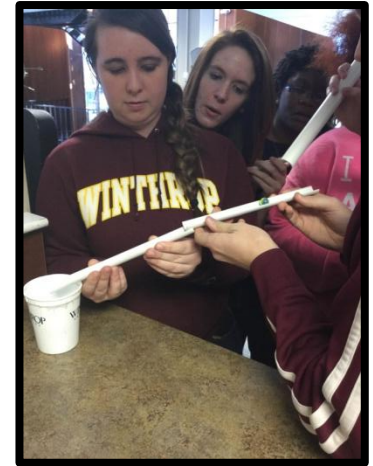
Table 1

Descriptive and Demographic Information about Tutors and Tutees in the Study of Social Interaction, Independent Study Habits and Performance (N=333 tutor/tutee pairs)

	Tutors	Tutees
Variable (Percentage or Mean^a)		
Race		
White	69.7	39.0
Black	21.6	52.6
Other	8.7	5.4
Gender	77.7	80.0
Mean Tutoring Sessions Attended		5.5 (2.64) ^a
Mean Semesters as Tutor	2.4 (1.45)	
Tutor's Training Level		
Novice	75.4	
Experienced	24.6	
Perceived Performance Upon Entry to Success Program		
A		4.6
B		17.3
C		40.2
D		20.7
F		12.7
N/Withdraw		4.3
Perceived Performance After Success Program		
A		23.3
B		50.2
C		23.8
D		2.8
F		.6
N/Withdraw		
Mean Perceived Improvement in Grade		1.2 (.99)
Courses		
Math		28.0
Sciences		31.0
Business		21.0
Other		20.0

Measurement Tools

- Primary focus of this study was to examine tutor-tutee relationships, traditional student role acquisition, and performance
- Several scales were introduced to gain insight into these concepts



Appendix I

Test Constructs for Undergraduate Tutor-Tutee Interactions and Independent Learning Skills

Scales	Items	Item/Total Correlation
Conflict Subscale Items		
(modified STRS)		
	-This tutee and I always seem to be struggling with each other.	.66
	-This tutee easily becomes frustrated with me.	.64
	-The tutee sees me as a source of criticism.	.28
	-The tutee remains angry or is resistant after being corrected.	.67
	-Dealing with the tutee drains my energy.	.61
	-When this tutee is in a bad mood, I know we're in for long, difficult session.	.53
	-This tutee's feeling toward me can be unpredictable or can change suddenly.	.72
	-Despite my best efforts, I'm uncomfortable with how this tutee and I get along.	.45
	-This tutee complains when he/she wants something from me.	.58
	-This tutee is manipulative of me.	.44
	-The tutee feels that I treat him/her unfairly	.41
		Cronbach's Alpha = .86
Closeness Subscale Items		
(modified STRS)		
	-I share a caring, warm relationship with this tutee.	.60
	-If upset, this tutee seeks comfort from me.	.53
	-This tutee values his/her relationship.	.58
	-When I praise this tutee, he/she reacts positively.	.54
	-This tutee spontaneously shares information about himself/herself.	.54
	-It is easy to be in tune with what this tutee is feeling.	.55
	-This tutee shares his/her feelings and experiences with me.	.58
	-This tutor follows my direction and suggestions.	.44
	-My interaction with this tutee makes me feel effective and confident.	.41
		Cronbach's Alpha = .83
Dependency Subscale Items		
(modified STRS)		
	-This tutee appears hurt or embarrassed when I correct him/her.	.29
	-This tutee is overly dependent on me.	.37
	-He/she asks for help when he/she does not need it.	.38
		Cronbach's Alpha = .53
Suggested Independent Learning Skills		
	-My tutor suggested working habits	.40
	-My tutor expected me to complete homework before the tutoring session.	.41
	-My tutor encouraged my participation in each session	.46
		Cronbach's Alpha = .63
Resulting Independent Learning Skills		
	-As a result of tutoring, I study more effectively for class.	.64
	-As a result of tutoring, I am more willing to go to class	.64
	-As a result of tutoring, I am more prepared for class.	.58
	-As a result of tutoring, I am more likely to go to the professor's office hours.	.57
	-As a result of tutoring, I am more likely to ask a question in class.	.63
	-As a result of tutoring, I am a more independent learner.	.54
		Cronbach's Alpha = .82

Results

- Ordinary least square techniques were used for analyses
- Investigation culminated with a path analysis that models the relationships among tutor-tutee relationships, independent study skill acquisition, and performance

Table 2.

OLS Regression Coefficients (Standardized) for Tutee-Tutor Characteristics with Salient Criterion Variables (N = 333 tutor/tutee pairs)

	Model 1 Saturated Grade Improvement	Model 2 Saturated Resulting Study Skill	Model 3 Saturated Suggested Study Skills
<u>Demographic Traits</u>			
Tutor Race (0=other, 1=white)	-.073	.053	-.018
Tutee Race (0=other, 1=white)	.058	.028	-.078
Tutor Gender (0=female, 1=male)	-.029	-.030	.033
Tutee Gender (0=female, 1=male)	.023	.054	.068
Tutor Training Level (0=novice, 1=experienced)	-.019	-.048	-.025
Semesters as Tutor	-.019	.075	.097
<u>Tutoring Dynamics</u>			
Conflict Scale	-.008	-.051	-.228**
Closeness Scale	.005	.013	.299**
Dependency Scale	-.049	-.039	-.120#
Tutoring Sessions Attended	.116**	.158 **	.033
<u>Independent Learning</u>			
Suggested Independent Learning Skills	-.093	.453**	—
Resulting Independent Learning Skills	.223**	—	—
<u>Controls</u>			
Tutored Course (0=other, 1=math, science, business)	-.023	.053	-.104
Program Entry Grade	-.743**	.123*	-.024
R Square	.551	.265	.121

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ (two tailed), # approached significance .07

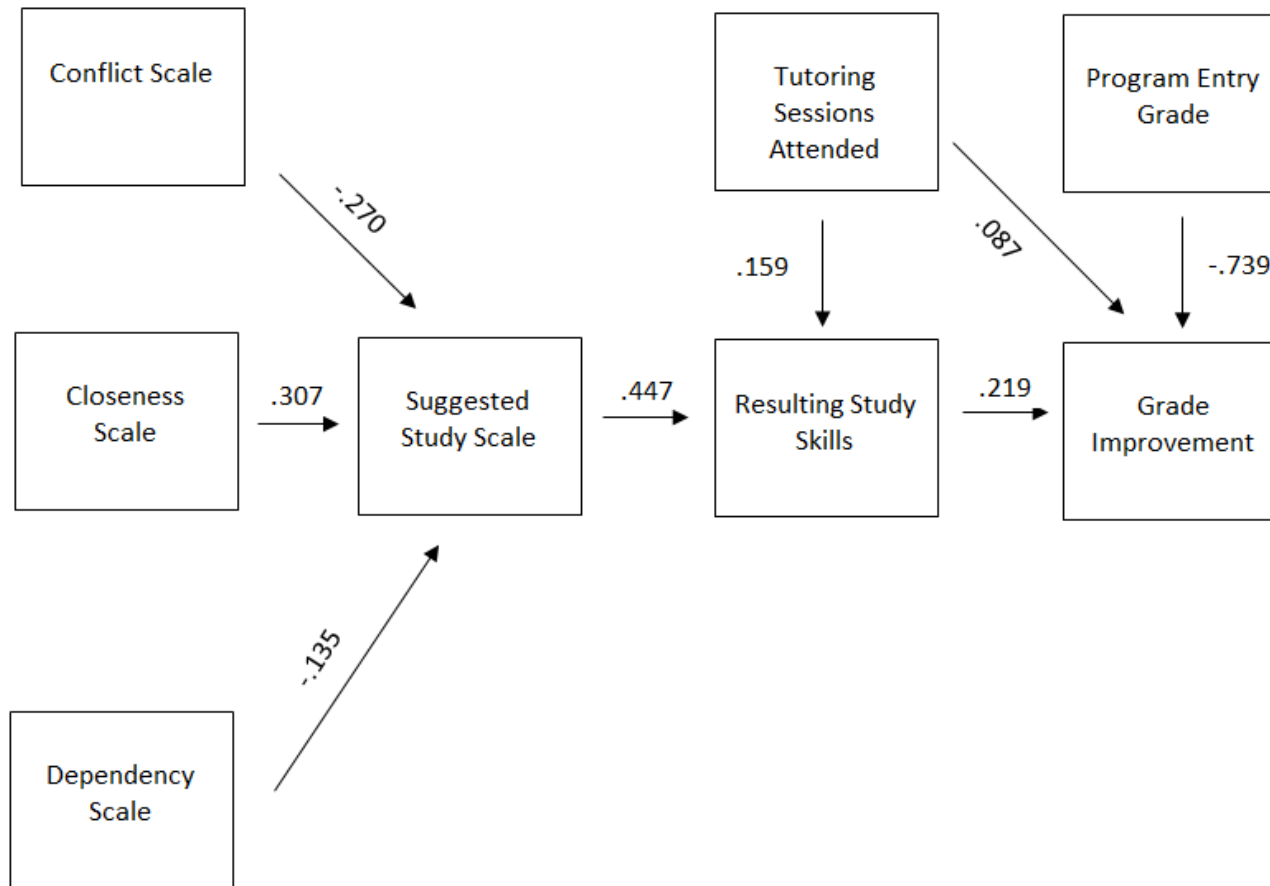


Figure 1. Outcome diagram of causal relationships of tutee grade improvement in an undergraduate student success center



Conclusion

Caveats to Consider

- The university and learning center used may not be representative of most colleges.
- This study only explored perceptions.
- We may have a selection bias on who participated.
- Need more demographics on tutees.

Methodological Contributions

- Significance of using the tutee and tutor dyads as a unit of analysis.
- Researcher's modification of STRS showed some promise in college-aged population.
- Path analysis uncovered dynamics that inform the structuring of more effective training programs for tutors.

Contributions that Warrant More Research

- No evidence was found that suggested that course subject area was an important factor in terms of the adoption of study skills or performance outcomes.
- The number of times a tutee and tutor meet has both direct and indirect influences on performance.
- The development of traditional study skills and cognitive learning strategies are more like to be developed with a sustained, positive relationship between tutor and tutee.

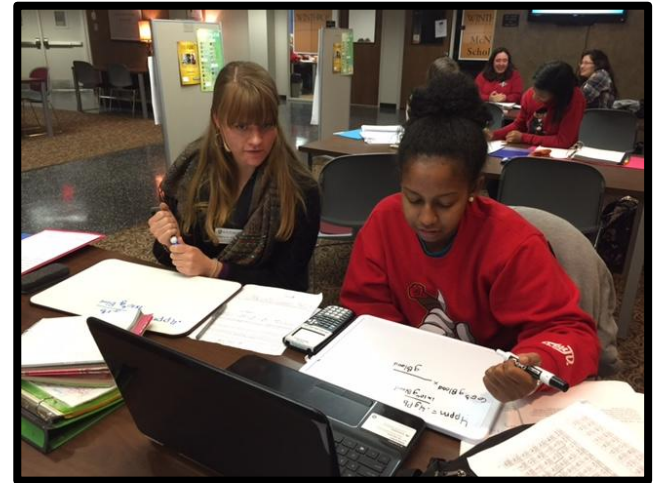


Final Thoughts

- Do learning centers advance student helplessness?

NO!

- Success centers are a bridge to the development of traditional independent study skills.
- Tutors are advocates of traditional pro-school norms and behaviors.



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Q&A

