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## Self as Teacher: Preliminary Role Identification of the Potential Teaching Candidate

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*Abstract: In this study, the researchers used qualitative surveys to explore potential teaching candidates' preliminary perceptions of self as teacher and examine how roles are identified, defined and constructed in the context of a tutoring lab that provides support to English Language Learners. Prospective candidates' perceptions of their tutees, children whose cultural identities and backgrounds differ from their own, are also examined. Findings indicate participants' teaching identities and conceptualizations of their roles as teachers became more specific and elaborated over the course of the semester. Additionally, the significance of multiple practicum experiences in diverse settings for ongoing identity development and for developing knowledge about culturally and linguistically diverse school children was also clear.*

The United States Census Bureau (2008) estimates that the nation will be, "...54% minority in 2050. By 2023, minorities will comprise more than half of all children. In 2050, the nation's population of children is expected to be 62% minority, up from 44% today. Thirty-nine percent are projected to be Hispanic, and 38% are projected to be single-race, non-Hispanic white." Comparatively, those responsible for educating America's youth will be female (75%) and primarily white (83%) (NCES, 2007). State and local initiatives, alternative and transitional licensure programs, and monetary incentives toward the recruitment of minority teachers have yet to dent the demographic armor of the American practitioner. Such embedded notions surrounding the teaching profession will take decades to shift; failing to address the changing demographics of our public schools.

Teacher educators have long sought solutions for how to best approach the increase in demographic diversity while accreditors required that licensure programs include courses addressing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners (NCATE, 2002). It is our belief that teacher preparation programs cannot improve the quality of education provided to CLD populations by simply discussing the issues in coursework or as a footnote in instructional design. Potential teaching candidates (PTCs) must not only have interactions with diverse student populations throughout their preparation, but must continually examine their beliefs, attitudes and actions toward such groups and across teaching situations.

Our personal identities are powerful entities that are shaped by myriad experiences that occur within a given social and cultural context. We realize how influential our candidates' prior schooling experiences have been in regard to their notions about teaching, understanding of diverse populations and most importantly, to the shaping of their self-identities. To understand

others, one must begin with an understanding of self. This study explores the potential teaching candidates' perceptions of self as teacher, their understanding of professional roles, and their existing notions about English language learners (ELLs). We seek answers to the following research questions:

- How does the practicum experience, defined here as weekly tutoring interactions, shape the student's perception of self as teacher?
- How does this teaching situation shape their role identification as tutor?
- How are the PTCs' perceptions of English language learners impacted by these one-on-one interactions?

## **Literature Review**

### **Early Formations of Teacher Identity**

In many traditional teacher education programs in the United States, undergraduates complete their general education course requirements during the first and second academic year. The introductory teaching course can be chosen as an elective, for those exploring career options, or as a required course for admission to the teacher education program. The introductory course provides potential teaching candidates (PTCs) with an overview of the foundations of education—from theoretical to pedagogical. At our institution, practicum hours are a component of the class thus providing these individuals an opportunity to work with school-aged children and determine if the teaching profession is a viable option. In this study, we examine the role identities and attitudes of one group of PTCs enrolled in this introductory course, which includes a 40-hour practicum tutoring English language learners in an afterschool “lab” setting.

Limited studies have been conducted on the potential teaching candidate (PTC)—an individual who is considering the profession of teaching but has not yet been formally admitted to a teacher education program. The majority of these individuals are still seeking out and forming new social networks based on their multiple roles as college students. As teacher educators, we have observed how the self-identities of these individuals are negotiated and reconstructed as they make important career decisions and project their potential life paths. Potential teaching candidates provide varying perspectives about the role and expected actions of the teaching professional based on their past schooling experiences.

This study explores the developing role identity of a group of PTCs situated in a tutorial setting with ELLs. As educational researchers, identity theory has contributed to our understanding of role identities and the development of a professional teaching identity. Role identities include how one acts in a given situation and how those behaviors are assessed, negotiated and acted upon by other group members (Goffman, 1959; Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Cast (2003) describes the significance of these role identities and behaviors to each individual's perception of the social situation. In a school setting, the roles assumed by a teacher are multiple and varied, often identifiable by physical environment (classroom, playground, cafeteria). Students must interpret their teacher's actions and act accordingly, thus confirming and reinforcing the role assumed by the teacher.

In past semesters, we examined how the PTC identifies and responds to her tutoring role and have observed how routine decisions and actions play out as the tutor and tutee interact. More recently, we examined how PTCs' past experiences influence their perceptions of ELLs and how their beliefs and attitudes are impacted. Though the structural aspects of the program have remained consistent, the relations that develop between learning partners continues to be

dynamic; it is a place where influential and powerful social interactions occur. It is also the PTC's first practicum experience, a setting that will not only contribute to her understanding of the various roles assumed by a teacher but quite possibly, will influence her decision to teach.

In the tutoring lab, the role identities of both tutors (PTCs) and tutees (ELTs) could be described as "student"--the tutors are college students enrolled in an introductory teaching course, a prerequisite for admission to the university's teacher education program. The tutees are students enrolled in a neighboring school system. Identified as students, both groups have constructed meanings about what this role entails and the behaviors expected. Yet for these potential candidates, multiple roles must be assumed over the semester-- as a college student (as perceived by faculty), teaching candidate (as perceived by peers) and tutor (as perceived by the tutee). In each case, the setting, group members and teaching situation shape the role and subsequent actions taken. At any time, role identity can be confirmed, negotiated, or resisted by group members *as well as the PTC*. The candidate must continually attempt to figure out "the fit between internal standards and external self-referent input from others" (Burke, 1980). Given our research interests, we believe identity theory provides a lens for examining the uniformity of perceptions and actions among group members specific to teacher roles and professional identity.

### Teacher/Professional Identity Studies

The literature evidences an increasing interest in the developmental phases of teachers' professional identity. While we focus on early perceptions of self as teacher and role identification, a number of research studies have been significant in understanding this ongoing, dynamic process.

In reviewing the findings of several studies conducted on teacher identity, Day, Kington, Stobart and Sammons (2006) report how the stability of individuals' identities vary as they are impacted by personal, professional and situational factors. In addition, Day et al. discuss how these factors contribute to their beliefs and values about the type of teachers they wish to be. Similarly, the identities of the PTCs have been shaped by past interactions and personal experiences, truly influential in her projections of self as teacher. It is important that we, as teacher educators, assist candidates in recognizing the extent of personal self represented in their projections of self as teacher. This is especially important when negotiating agency within institutional settings and addressing personal beliefs about diversity (Kyles & Olafson, 2008).

Finally, it is important for PTCs to develop an awareness of how the sociocultural context of community, school or classroom influences the character expectations and actions of its teaching professionals. The identities and roles of practitioners are after all, influenced by the various constituents (parents, administrators and students) with whom they interact. McLean (1999) describes how the images of self-as-person and self-as-teacher are critical in becoming a teacher because "they constitute the personal context within which new information will be interpreted and are the stuff of which a teaching persona is created" (p. 58). Thus as candidates progress through their programs, it is important to make explicit the significance of context across practicum situations.

Although a number of potential teaching candidates will not pursue teaching as a career choice, their interpretation of self as teacher helps us to understand their cumulative classroom experiences thus far, which have been constructed "from their prior educational biography and particular ideas about the nature of knowing and the roles and performative rituals of students and teachers" (Britzman, 1991, p. 56). Therefore it is important to provide PTCs with

opportunities to reflect upon their prior schooling experiences, notions of teachings and understanding of teacher roles.

### **Teacher Perceptions of English Language Learners**

As research in the United States suggests, preservice teachers' beliefs about students acquiring English are mediated by their own linguistic, social class, and ethnic background, as well as that of the students with whom they are working. A number of studies have investigated the ways that Latino and Latina teachers use their cultural and linguistic capital to connect with students, scaffold their learning, and provide culturally appropriate instruction (Monzó & Rueda, 2001; Quiocho & Rios, 2000; Weisman & Hanson, 2008). In our program, most potential teacher candidates (PTCs) are white and most are middle-class. Research has found that White teacher candidates' have difficulty identifying the advantages gained through White privilege (Sleeter, 2005) or developing positive, resource-based attitudes toward children of color (Lazar, 2004). Researchers have found that teachers can harbor deficit perspectives of children, based not only on race or income level, but also on perceived or actual linguistic ability (Edl, Jones, & Estell, 2008). Having the opportunity to work directly with (ELLs) may mitigate teachers' negative perceptions. Studies have found that teachers who have had more contact with ELLs had more positive attitudes towards those students (Edl et al.; Karabenick & Noda, 2004). Both studies used quantitative survey study designs to collect data on the beliefs and attitudes of practicing teachers. As such they did not consider the ways that self-examination on the part of teachers might have contributed to changes or shifts in perceptions related to serving diverse students, an issue that we hope to address in the present study. However, research indicates that giving educators more opportunities to interact with ELLs is important, especially if these practical experiences are accompanied by purposeful and thoughtful reflection (Bolin, 2007). Coordinating reflection and practical experiences can assist potential teacher candidates in developing an understanding of their own sociocultural positioning and how their perceptions might influence interactions with linguistically diverse children.

The importance of meaningful and collaborative contexts for reflective practice and establishing caring relationships between tutors and tutees was emphasized in a study by Worthy and Patterson (2001). Although this study was focused on the development of tutors' understanding of literacy and literacy teaching, the researchers also found preliminary evidence that the tutors' experiences led to changes in perceptions and biases related to tutees' ethnicity, social class, and language background. Worthy and Patterson assert that "getting to know students individually can lead tutors beyond deficit descriptions of children who are not progressing in ways that schools might expect" (p. 337). Many of the tutors who had similar backgrounds in terms of ethnicity and language as their tutees were able to establish special connections with their tutees and gain insight into these children's lives; however, tutor-tutee relationships characterized by differences also proved to be very fruitful and successful. The key, according to Worthy and Patterson, was the development of ethical and natural caring relationships (Noddings, 1992) between the tutors and their tutees. Worthy and Patterson call for more research that considers preservice teachers' dispositional development with regards to issues of race, class, and linguistic diversity. The current study is an attempt to address the development of PTCs' beliefs about linguistic diversity more directly.

## **Methodology**

### **Tuesdays' Tutors Program**

The data for this study were collected from potential teaching candidates enrolled in an introductory teaching course at a public state university in the southeast region of the United States. This course includes a general overview of U.S. educational foundations, human developmental theory, curricular and instructional approaches, student diversities and exceptionalities, and contemporary professional issues. As a component of the course, PTCs spend approximately 40 hours in a tutoring practicum called Tuesdays' Tutors over the course of ten weeks. Whereas some PTCs may have prior experience working with students, they do not receive any formal training to prepare them to tutor individuals in a lab setting.

Launched in 2005, Tuesdays' Tutors was designed to support the needs of diverse learners in the areas of literacy, math and science in an afterschool setting. Potential teaching candidates provide academic support to K-7 learners, affording them opportunities to apply various instructional strategies with students whose personal and cultural identities differ from their own. The program runs two-and-a-half hours each week and takes place on the university campus.

Each PTC is paired with a K-7 learner for the semester. The tutees begin their afternoon with snacks and informal conversations with their tutors before working on homework. On average, an hour is dedicated to academic support, primarily in the areas of math and language arts. At mid-session, the children and their tutors engage in various physical activities. For the remaining hour of the lab, the PTCs and their tutees work on individual or small group projects. Over the past several semesters, these projects have ranged from studying ducks at the duck pond to writing bilingual books about a topic of their choice. The program promotes the university as a resource and as a place to pursue future academic endeavors.

### **Potential Teaching Candidates (Tutors)**

This paper focuses on the developing teacher identities of PTCs in their role as tutors. Students from three sections of the course were provided the opportunity to tutor in the lab. Twenty-six candidates volunteered to tutor, of which 19 consented to participate in the study: 17 were females (15 white, 1 Latina, 1 Hmong), and 2 were white-males. About half of the PTCs indicated a range of licensure interests in the field of education (See Table 1). Those listed under the Liberal Arts are exploring educational venues in their field, such as music majors who considering teaching music as a career option.

Education	Liberal Arts
6 elementary	1 psychology
1 middle grades	3 visual arts/media
1 special education	2 music
3 secondary (math, English, social sciences)	2 theatre

**Table 1: PTCs Indicated Programs of Interest**

**Elementary Students (Tutees)**

During the spring of 2008, twenty-one children attended Tuesdays’ Tutors. Two were from grades K-2, 7 from grades 3-5, and 12 from grades 6-8. Of these students, 15 were Latina, 1 was a White female, 4 were Latino, and 1 was a White male. Latino/a participants were primarily of Mexican and Mexican-American background. The parents consented for their children to participate in the study. Typically, tutees were placed with a tutor that shared their gender.

**College of Education Faculty**

Considering our work from Delgado-Gaitan’s (1993) perspective of the researcher acting as an insider or an outsider, we believe it is important to examine the social positioning of the faculty involved. As insiders, two professors taught the course in which the PTCs were enrolled, and facilitated the lab. A third faculty member worked during the lab sessions to support the Tuesdays’ Tutors community, especially in the area of mathematics. The fourth member of the team was added the following semester to aid in data analysis and interpretation of the findings. As an outsider, this individual’s perspective was important in confirming and verifying categories and themes that emerged. All faculty were White, female, and spoke English as a first and dominant language.

**Data Sources and Procedures**

The research team constructed two surveys to explore tutors’ beliefs and assumptions about tutoring ELLs and to determine how these beliefs changed across the semester. Prior to meeting their potential tutees in the lab, the PTCs (n=19) completed a pre-survey. The same survey was administered at the end of the semester as a post-survey (n=16). Complete data sets were available for a total of 15 participants. The pre-post surveys asked the following three open-ended questions:

1. What do you think of when you consider working with students who have English as a second language?
2. What are some ways in which you can connect to a student whose native language is not English?
3. What do you see as your role in a tutoring experience?

The midterm survey intended to determine the PTCs understanding of the multiple roles assumed by practitioners and what they perceived as the purpose of those relationships for teaching children. Fifteen participants completed the midterm that was administered after five weeks of tutor-tutee interactions. Our data analysis concerned the following questions:

1. How have your interactions with the tutees impacted your perceptions about ELL students? What have you learned about the language and culture of these students?
2. How would you describe your relationship with the tutees? What actions have you taken to establish rapport and trust with your tutee?

The questions were developed from common strands in the reviewed literature and anecdotal evidence—we were interested in the change in preconceptions of ELL students by a group of predominately white middle class individuals over time and the developing relations between the tutors and tutees in this lab setting. Both change in self and in the roles assumed could be potentially captured through these qualitative responses.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis included three significant phases: the raters' independent determination of coding categories and coding of data sets, reconciliation of emerging categories among researchers, and confirmation of working themes. We independently developed response categories to each of the survey questions based on notions of preservice teacher/professional identity defined in the literature. Using these codes, two of the raters then independently coded the data. Afterwards, a meeting was held, including a third researcher, to reconcile the independent codes. With the introduction of a fourth researcher, the process was repeated one year after the initial coding and similar outcomes were evident across response categories. Afterwards, subcategories were identified and described, leading to the resulting themes and outcomes reported in this study.

In addition to completing the pre, post and midterm surveys, the PTCs were also required to complete weekly field notes regarding their Tuesdays' Tutors experiences; these were sent to the course instructor (two of the researchers). In an effort to confirm the validity of our data analysis, we compared the survey themes to themes revealed in the tutors' weekly field notes. A final stage in the analysis consisted of creating tables where each participant's responses to each survey question could be viewed longitudinally as illustrated in Appendix A. This allowed us to examine each candidate's responses over the term.

### **Findings**

Our primary research intentions have been to examine how PTCs assume active roles during preliminary teaching situations in the Tuesdays' Tutor lab and to what extent this activity shapes their formative identities as teaching professionals. We report the themes that have emerged from the data. We have learned from this process how difficult it is to dissect the lived experiences of the candidates to answer the research questions posed. The development of a teaching identity, the negotiation and establishment of roles in a given setting, and a change in perceptions about self and others are inextricably intertwined. Nonetheless an attempt was made to organize our findings in an order similar to the research questions.



**Perceptions of Self as Teacher**

Our first research question explored the PTCs’ development of identifiable roles in a teaching situation. As a practicum experience, Tuesday Tutors provides these candidates with opportunities to assume multiple roles common to teaching. For those uncertain of this career choice, the context of these personal experiences is paramount; the individual must see herself as a teacher and be perceived by others as such. To understand the PTC’s perception of self as teacher, pre and post survey questions (item one) and the midterm survey (item two) were analyzed. In categorizing candidates’ responses, two major themes emerged: identification of learner (based on past and present experiences) and identification of self in becoming a teacher (future). Table 2 summarizes these themes and their subcategories.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Subcategories:</b>
<b>* Identification of Learner:</b>	
	ELL as identifiable OTHERS (Essentialized definitions of ELLs)
	ELL as member of a different social group
	ELL = Me
<b>* Becoming a Teacher (seeing self as teacher):</b>	
	Developing knowledge/expertise in language and culture
	Developing caring relationship
	Assuming responsibility for student motivation and engagement
	Developing knowledge of self
	Shaping the environment (creating a fun learning environment and developing a relationship with the tutee: Taking action)

**Table 2: Perception of Self as Teacher**

*Identification of the Learner*

At the outset, PTCs’ responses indicated that they were concerned in defining and delineating the characteristics of the learners who they would be tutoring. Nearly 70% of the PTCs responses fell into one of the three subcategories related to this theme. The first subcategory includes those candidates whose preliminary notions about ELLs were focused on observable attributes and were written to indicate personal distance, or a lack of previous interactions with ELLs. In other words, the PTCs’ interpretations of “working with ELL students” (survey) were focused on the presumed characteristics of an ELL rather than on the act of tutoring. These PTCs negotiated the unknown by first identifying self and then differentiating self from other (ELL).

“The language issue may be difficult at times, but I don’t think it will get in the way too much. I’m looking forward to it.” (Pre-HP)

“I think they are like any other student, but are able to speak two different languages and they may not know English 100% yet, depending on how old they are.” (Pre-CA)

Assumptions of weak spoken language skills and the need for specific communication strategies, such as talking slower, using non-verbal cues and gestures were also noted. PTCs' responses revealed unfamiliarity with bilingual or multilingual communities and were heavily focused on presumed communication barriers. Few references to tutoring or supporting students with homework were evident in these initial responses.

A smaller number of PTCs (5) interpreted their tutoring expectations beyond defining the individual ELL solely in terms of his levels of English proficiency and recognized that English learners are members of larger social and cultural groups. These PTCs focused on broader sociocultural differences in their responses and identified *self as different from the social group*. The following responses are representative of the PTCs who interpreted the tutoring task as an opportunity to work with children of culturally diverse backgrounds:

“I think they are very diverse when it comes to culture. And since English is the second language, I think that it will be tough to understand me sometimes” (Pre-GH)

“I think there will probably be some cultural difference and some communication barriers, but I think it will be fun—I can learn as much from them as they can from me.” (Pre-CC)

From these examples, communication still seems to be a concern for the PTC, but there is also evidence that cultural differences beyond language may be an important aspect of their learning and tutoring experience.

The third subcategory represented the two candidates that identified the learner as representative of a former “self”—as ELL, they perceived working with this group of tutees as an opportunity to share their experiences and strategies for learning the English language.

“I love that idea because I was once an ELL, so I know how they feel. I could be able to tell them what helped me the most to learn the language.” (Pre-CR)

“Well, I myself, would really, really enjoy it because English is a second language for me as well. I think it would be great.” (Pre-CV)

Of interest in these PTCs' responses was the idea that being an English learner was something that *used to be* an aspect of their identity, but that they had since grown out of. Additionally, it appeared that having had the experience of learning English as a second language might have provided them with experiences and expertise that they would be able to draw upon to build positive tutee relationships. These PTCs' responses exhibited comfort and positive anticipation towards the idea of working with a child acquiring English rather than the anxiety characteristic of other responses.

Over the course of the practicum, the PTCs learned that many tutees had a command of conversational or interpersonal English, but not academic language. Situations arose that presented the PTCs with opportunities to recognize their own limitations in communicating subject matter and the need for making abstract concepts more concrete. In addition, some PTCs reported that active learning strategies were of use to all learners, not necessarily just ELLs. A number of candidates utilized other tutees as resources for assisting peers with more limited English skills. Though the PTCs had opportunities to reexamine preliminary notions of ELLs in the context of the lab setting, their interactions and experiences with these learners had little impact on their original preoccupations with language and communication, at least as evidenced by post-survey data. In answering the question, “What do you think of when you consider

working with students who have English as a second language?” at the end of the practicum, responses remained centered on the limitations of the tutee as opposed to the tutor’s actions.

“I may have to take time with an ELL student, but I’m up for it” (Post-HP)

“I think that you should know some of their language also, because sometimes it was hard to explain problems to them.” (Post-CA)

Stability in the personal and social identities of these PTCs remained constant, with little evidence that they perceived themselves as potential teachers.

For the five candidates that indicated the lab as an opportunity to learn more about cultural differences, we noted a shift from initial responses. Whereas these individuals identified the social group in responding to the expectations of the lab, these PTCs focused their attention on communication issues and the perceptions of others:

“I thought they would have trouble speaking basic English. But they were able to speak to where we could understand.” (Post-GH)

“I think that you have to be patient sometimes—there could be challenges depending on how much English the child knows. It is important not to think of ELL students as stupid just because they don’t not yet speak English.”(Post-CC)

This group of PTCs recognized the range in language abilities of the tutees and how it impacted their weekly interactions. Though identification of self as teacher is not explicit in their responses, the candidates indicate an awareness of previous perceptions of ELL and in some cases, refer to how language differences might impact their future teaching.

For the two candidates that identified the learner as representative of a former “self,” the stability in their personal identities remained fairly constant. CR’s response to the post survey was comparable to the initial response, while CV’s response indicated how personal strategies, learned in the past were useful:

“I like that idea a lot because I can relate to those students since English is my second language.” (Post-CR)

“Well I used to be one so I think it’s so much fun because you can show them and teach them things that they may not know because English is their second language.” (Post-CV)

PTCs across all three subcategories identified the ELL in some way based on prior experiences. Perceptions of self as teacher were not explicit in responses, yet were observable in the lab as the PTCs interacted with their peers. These candidates did assume the role of tutor, yet did not perceive their actions as that of a teacher. The PTCs described the practicum as an opportunity to interact with diverse learners while fulfilling course obligations. These outcomes are comparable to the findings related to first-year candidates in Guseva, Dombrovskis and Kokina’s (2009) study on professional identity acquisition. A high level of identification with the social role of “student” was noted while role identities of teacher were not evident (p. 34).

### *Becoming a Teacher*

For the majority of PTCs, the experience of participating in the lab appeared to highlight the importance of creating an authentic and caring tutor-tutee relationship. At midterm, nearly half of the candidates who completed the mid-term survey emphasized the importance of establishing personal connections and trust with their tutees, much changed from their initial responses of “having to work with them.” Thirteen of the 15 PTCs described their personal relations with the tutees as good or very good. Observational field notes revealed increased

confidence across all PTCs over time, evident in their instructional choices and decreasing reliance on faculty support.

Over the course of the semester, nine PTCs indicated their intentions or plans for continued professional growth. The majority of these candidates described how the experience had impacted on them and indicated intentions of actions that would be useful as a classroom teacher. A majority expressed a need to learn a second language, with four indicating a desire to participate in more cultural or diverse situations.

“I think of it as a challenge, but also as a good opportunity to help the children with their English skills in relation to school. I expect to learn more about another culture and language, and about dealing with ESL kids in general.” (Midterm-VN)

“It has really made me want to learn how to speak Spanish, that way I am able to communicate with my students that speak Spanish as a first language.” (Midterm-CL)

For this group of candidates, identification of self went beyond the distinction of “me” and “them”, and extended to the *becoming of* a teacher, an identity that required time, growth and change.

The desire to learn a second language was not the only identified change resulting from the Tuesdays’ Tutors experience. In post-survey data, we noted how increasingly important the sociocultural context of the lab had been in shaping the PTCs’ identification of self in regard to their own culture. To clarify, in developing relations with the tutees and other members of the lab, these social interactions consistently included the sharing of personal self. Discussions on school life, home life, traditions, activities and interests brought to the forefront the notion that the cultural fabric of any group is woven from these comparable threads of daily life.

“I don’t know a lot of Spanish, but she speaks English very well and sometimes teaches me a few Spanish words. I’ve also learned a lot about Hispanic culture. It seems like family is more important in their culture than ours—my student always talks about how much time she spends with her family on the weekends.” (Midterm-CH)

“While working with my tutee, I have realized that she is actually extremely smart and can speak our language better than she speaks Spanish. I have learned that their culture is amazingly different from ours and have found a very beautiful language. (Midterm-CW)

There were also those PTCs who assumed responsibility for the tutee’s motivation and engagement. Through field observations and midterm survey data, these candidates’ actions demonstrated how they negotiated various tutoring situations to promote interest and develop skills in their learners.

“Find activities that you both enjoy, especially if they don’t require speech. Playing games is something that any child can do, regardless of what language they speak.” (Midterm-VN)

“ . . . playing *Life*. It involves a lot of exchange of money and he is always the banker . . . I ask him for money in random denominations so that he has to figure out what other bills he must use. He gets real enjoyment out of playing and is excited to see what he has to do next as the banker.” (Midterm-CJ)

From our findings, we conclude that the potential teaching candidate’s perception of “self as teacher” had been influenced by her identified social role in the practicum. For the candidates

whose actions and responses indicated an identification of self-as-student, personal identities and social roles remained stable and consistent over the course of the semester. The Tuesdays’ Tutors lab was not perceived as a teaching context or as contributory to their professional development. For the other half of the PTCs, the lab setting provided a context for candidates to negotiate various teaching roles, to explore instructional and motivational strategies with the tutees, and to self-identify areas of potential growth.

***Role Identification as Tutor***

In regard to our second research question, this practicum experience provided the PTC with a context for exploring his/her own preliminary notions about teaching, instructional planning and preparation, and learner development. Over ten weeks, we observed the PTC develop his/her own systems and routines within the time frames of the tutoring lab. The first hour is to be dedicated to homework support; the second hour includes a whole-group activity or task. On a weekly basis, the PTC has little certainty of what the tutee will bring in and how much of the designated time will be needed to fulfill the various tasks at hand. Four PTCs consistently came prepared with supplementary resources, materials or activities. The majority of candidates demonstrated inconsistent efforts in preparedness or planning beyond what was provided for that particular tutoring session.

Based on the early work of McCall and Simmons (1966), the acquisition of role-based identities requires some form of interaction with and negotiation among group members. From the pre-survey responses, identification of the PTC’s role in the Tuesdays’ Tutors program was primarily a generalized description of actions that centered on supporting the tutee. Once immersed into the lab, the candidates are expected to assume multiple roles in varying contexts each week. When the post-survey was distributed, we expected to see a change in the PTCs’ identification of their roles.

Table 3 indicates the primary roles identified and described by the PTCs at the end of the semester.

General helper
Facilitator; Guide
Friend: confidante provide emotional support
Mentor: Big brother or big sister
Teacher

**Table 3: Roles Identified by Potential Teaching Candidates**

Observable differences are evident in the PTCs’ actions and relations with tutees over ten weeks. When we asked them to identify their roles at this time, specific roles (with corresponding actions) were more clearly defined. Post-survey results revealed that eleven of the tutors saw themselves in the role of a guide—an individual who facilitates student learning and provides academic, social, and emotional support. Though the PTCs described the actions of a guide differently, they did recognize that a particular role includes specific actions. These actions included leading students in the right direction (4), helping tutees with homework (5), or providing social and emotional support in addition to academic support (8). PTCs who identified themselves as “mentor” consistently indicated the need to be a positive role model (7). The cumulative examination of data sources indicated that the PTCs had developed an understanding

of role in the lab context and were able to identify the actions defining that role. Whereas at the outset, the candidates generally described their role as that of helper (11), the tutoring context provided relevant and meaningful experiences for shaping the lab role(s) assumed.

### **Perceptions of English Language Learners**

In our final research question, we consider how the context of Tuesday's Tutors influenced their perceptions of ELLs. Here we examine more specifically how prior notions about a group of learners have been affected by one-on-one interactions over time. The lab, its structure, and its various members remain fairly consistent from across terms with the exception of the change in tutors (PTCs). In essence, these candidates are the true lab outsiders and typically have limited experiences with or understanding of ELLs.

Responses to the pre-survey indicated that overall, students were both excited and had trepidations about working with bilingual or ELL students. Respondents indicated that they were excited by the opportunity to work with ELLs and imagined that it would be fun. Students looked forward to using their Spanish language skills and learning about their tutee's linguistic and cultural background. Several PTCs indicated that working with students who are acquiring English as a second-language would be challenging and difficult, although this was not necessarily expressed negatively. This finding is not surprising since the overwhelming majority of our PTC participants had limited or no previous experience in multicultural or multilingual environments. Two participants identified themselves as ELLs or bilingual. These PTCs articulated positive attitudes towards working with their tutee and regarding their tutees' motivation and intellectual ability.

PTCs' perceptions of ELLs frequently focused specifically on language and revealed several interesting assumptions about the cultural and linguistic background of these students. For example, several PTCs assumed their tutees would be native Spanish speakers. PTCs also presupposed that their tutees' English communication skills would be "limited" and that this would present communication "barriers." The majority seemed to hold the belief that being bilingual or having a native language other than English was problematic.

In the midterm survey responses (n=15), eight students described ways that their knowledge of bilingualism and second language acquisition had developed through the tutoring experience. Their responses indicate that some PTCs realized that their tutees were bilingual and had developed conversational or social language skills in English, but were still in need of extra support for developing academic English language and literacy. Four of these students explicitly stated that they were surprised by the tutee's English language proficiency. These findings reinforce Lucas et al's (2008) assertion that teacher candidates need to be reminded of the differences between academic and social English and that the characteristics and teaching consequences should be addressed.

Midterm survey responses also revealed PTCs' increased understanding of their tutees' funds of knowledge, culture, and family values that had developed through the experience. In some cases they were also able to gain some insight into their tutees experiences as a language minority student who attended school in a mostly White and monolingual context. A few PTCs wrote responses that revealed very specific examples. The following two comments illustrate this point:

"(I've) always envied ESL students; they have the opportunity to learn more than one culture/language. After talking with my tutee, I realize that prejudice is still a

big issue at school and home . . . I think about how difficult it must be to experience another culture positively when you're being shunned from other students for your own. . . I learned from my tutee the proper way to make tortillas from scratch for tacos and quesadillas with fried rice. . . . learned about her family's business and how she works as cashier at one of two stores. . . . dancing is a big part of her family. Her and her sister love dancing and watch movies to get ideas for new ways of Salsa dancing . . . (Midterm-CB)

"My student has shared lots of information of the cuisine of her culture and how to create it. When she was describing this, she also shared information on how important family is in her culture; her aunt helps her mother prepare the food they sell." (Midterm-MS)

Although a critical eye might point to some exoticization of what is perceived to be a "foreign" culture in these PTCs' comments, we believe that they demonstrate that a number of PTCs were beginning to gain some insight into their tutees' lives. Given the PTCs' limited prior experiences, their recognition of the value and importance of their tutees' home language and culture, though on a surface level, was an important first step. Further, there is some evidence that as the PTC and tutee built a relationship, this led, at least some of the PTCs, to rethink and question previously held prejudices about English learners, as PTCs began to recognize immigrant children and their families as community members.

In the post-survey, preliminary notions related to the English language competencies of tutees were still evident, as PTCs noted that the tutees' limited English proficiency and skills resulted in difficulties in communicating. In fact there were more comments related to the barriers presented because of language differences on the post survey than there had been on the pre survey. Nonetheless, the realization that ELL students (tutees) had greater conversational proficiency in English than originally anticipated appeared to contribute to lower anxiety in the PTCs and also seemed to result in positive appraisals of tutees' academic and intellectual capacities. Several PTCs wrote that students who are learning English are just as bright as monolingual peers but need more time to acquire language. The "language-as-a-problem" (Ruiz, 1984) deficit view was replaced or couched as a need to slow pace of instruction and be patient with ELL students. Thus a few of the PTCs who had expressed concerns about the projected challenges of teaching ELLs in the beginning indicated that their experiences in the lab helped lower their anxiety and increased their confidence.

## **Discussion/Implications**

In regard to perceptions of self, this group of potential teaching candidates was evenly divided between those individuals who remained focused on self-as-student (college) and those who perceived themselves as prospective teachers. As teacher educators, we often interact with candidates who are resistant to the process of self-examination. This resistance may be influenced by their religious and cultural backgrounds, which emphasize civility and conformity rather than opposition or confrontation. For the majority of the candidate's life, his or her perception of self has been shaped by interactions with family and community; inseparable are the situational and cultural influences (fundamentalist, middle class, southern). While placing candidates in social contexts that differ in regard to race, class, culture or background is important, we cannot expect significant changes in their self-identities to occur overnight. As

emphasized by Burke (2006), “identities are always shifting, although generally in small amounts, because we resist situations that may require large changes” (p.4). This result is also consistent with identity development theories (Marcia, 1966; Erikson, 1970) that describe stages where adolescents may accept the belief structures and career expectations of family rather than addressing the dissonance required to develop their own belief systems and identity achievement.

For teaching candidates to change their self-identities, and their perceptions of others, we must begin with helping them to understand how various social factors have influenced and contributed to one’s identification of “self.” They must first recognize the particularities of their individualism—identifying who they are and how others perceive them. Then, they must learn that these attributes of self are subject to interpretation—by others, as shaped by context and role. This is a significant step in the PTCs early development as teachers because in the process of understanding self in multiple situations, we believe the individual is likely to be more “cognizant of *all* of the participants in the process, and to understand more about what each brings to these encounters” (McLean, 1999, p. 56).

In our preliminary interactions with Tuesdays’ Tutors, we were excited to learn that two students, who identified themselves as ELLs, had volunteered to participate in the study. In the pre-survey, we noted how both candidates perceived their past experiences as a resource for helping their tutees. From “knowing how they feel” to “showing and teaching them things they might not know,” these PTCs focused on how past schooling experiences would be beneficial in *relating to ELLs*, but not necessarily in terms of how these experiences might serve as resources or strategies for a prospective teaching professional. We also noted how their identification of self-as-ELL was described in the past tense (Example: “Well, I used to be one . . .”). It was interesting how these candidates identified the experiences as beneficial to associating with the tutees, but that the identification of self as ELL was past, or perhaps viewed as a deficit that had been unlearned or outgrown.

In his sociological study of teachers, Lortie (1975) makes explicit the number of hours young people spend interacting with teachers and then describes how this statistic far exceeds their interactions with any other occupational group. Whether these individuals decide to become teachers or not, the role of the teacher has been generalized, contributing to the widespread idea that anyone can teach (p. 62). For the potential teaching candidate, our findings indicate that the lab had a positive impact on the PTCs’ abilities to identify explicit roles associated with teaching, as defined by their personal interactions with tutees. A more identifiable role, inclusive of descriptive, corresponding actions, was evident in post-survey responses. As proposed by Burke and Reitzes (1981), we believe that “to be (some identity), one must act like (some identity)” (p. 90), and that the context of the lab contributed to their understanding of essential teaching roles.

Another positive aspect of the lab’s social context was that those PTCs who were more tentative about taking an active role in the lab were able to observe other tutors interacting with their tutees. The tutee was also key in shaping the tutor’s role. Most tutees were lab veterans and they taught the tutor what they needed. Finally, tutors were able to draw upon the expertise of different faculty—for example if students did not know how to do 7<sup>th</sup> grade math then they could talk to the math professor.

Finally, we wish to discuss how the PTCs perceptions of ELLs shifted over the ten weeks. From pre and post survey data, we noted that the PTCs’ perceptions of English learners and specifically their notions about limited language abilities did not change appreciably. In fact, it appeared that more PTCs perceived barriers in communication at the end of the tutoring



experience than before. We have several possible explanations for this finding. First, this finding may be explained by noting that PTCs are still developing in terms of their understanding of roles in a practicum setting. In this program, the PTCs were working with a group of students who were primarily elementary school learners who consistently presented math and language arts (spelling) homework. Having no methods courses prior to this experience, many candidates did not understand the need to instruct students based on the tutee's developmental needs. The frustration some PTCs experienced during tutoring tended to be attributed to the tutee *being an ELL* rather than to the PTC's own lack of experience.

A second possible explanation for the increased focus on language as a barrier is that the PTCs were beginning to recognize the differences between social and academic language. Candidates recognized that to effectively teach content, their students would need to have developed an academic language as well as a conversational. Evidence supporting this interpretation includes the fact that several candidates indicated the need for further course work about, or field experiences with, diverse learners or in culturally and linguistically diverse settings. Unfortunately, too many candidates find that these expectations are not fulfilled in a teacher education program. Limitations in time often make it difficult for candidates to engage in opportunities with diverse populations outside their program of study. Currently our program does not provide PTCs with sufficient diverse experiences.

Another key finding we would like to highlight is PTCs increased understanding of the value of tutees' culture and family. Although it is true that PTCs' perceptions related to language did not seem to be impacted, for some this went beyond language to a more personal understanding of what defines a culture and the comparable elements of life. Due to the development of personal relationships between tutors and tutees, most PTCs learned *something* about their tutees' culture that they never would have realized otherwise. Many PTCs remarked with surprise how "Americanized" their tutee was while recognizing what immigrant children have had to give up or negotiate in order to survive in mainstream schooling contexts.

Our findings tentatively suggest that PTCs developed more positive orientations towards ELLs as students and as community members. This finding supports previous research indicating that teachers with greater opportunities to interact with ELLs have more positive attitudes towards these students (Edl et al., 2008) and that service-learning and field experiences can be effective ways of developing more nuanced and informed perspectives related to the cultural resources of Latino families (Bolin, 2007). However, it is very clear that these developing understandings of the lives and cultures of others are preliminary and fragile, and need to be nurtured throughout the teacher education program. It is important to build on these shifts by encouraging on-going reflection and by providing follow-up experiences. Changes to their identities will not be internalized on the basis of a one-semester experience.

### **Limitations and Implications**

This study had several limitations that should be noted including the researchers' dual role as teacher and researcher, the use of self-reported data, the limitations imposed by the size of the lab, and the pros and cons related to the lab's setting. The survey instruments used to collect data about the potential teacher candidates' perceptions and expectations related to the Tuesdays' Tutors lab were constructed and administered by the two researchers who also taught the associated introductory education course. Since these researchers were also professors of the

course, some of the PTCs' grades were explicitly linked to their participation and performance in the lab. Although PTCs were not required to participate in the research study itself, they were required to participate in a tutoring experience. PTCs may have edited their responses to survey questions to fulfill professors' expectations. Furthermore, our primary concern was in developing a positive learning experience for the PTCs; therefore, sometimes energies had to be diverted away from data collection and towards teaching. Another limitation is that all of our data are written survey responses. We did not interview any of the PTCs; therefore we cannot confirm the validity of our assumptions about some of their responses. We were not able to verbally corroborate meaning. We were, however, able to examine written responses longitudinally. The collection of more data and in particular follow-up interviews with PTCs' may have provided a more robust data set and further triangulation and confirmation of findings presented.

Because the Tuesdays' Tutors afterschool lab is limited to one college classroom and two passenger vans for transporting the tutees, there is a limit to the number of PTCs (tutors) who can be included... Additionally, working with the same tutees over time influences the initial interactions between each tutor-tutee dyad, which set the tone for the developing relations that follow. All tutees come from the same school and often know one another; some are also related to one another. While this is an advantage for the tutees, who seem to feel relaxed and confident in the lab setting, these facts about the lab may contribute to the PTCs' learning and experiences.

While there are certainly advantages for the tutees and tutors to having the lab at the university, there may also be some limitations associated with this arrangement. For instance, bringing the ELL students out of the school context limits the PTCs' understanding of the daily struggles of ELL students in a school or classroom environment. The lab setting has become a safe setting for the tutees in which Latino children are the majority. In the lab, the tutees are relaxed and outgoing and PTCs may not realize that the child may have a completely different experience in their school, one in which they might have to deal with social prejudices or marginalization. This may limit our PTCs' abilities to fully understand the context of what it means to be labeled as an English learner.

There is a great distinction between teaching and talking about teaching. All PTCs have had extensive schooling experiences and thus tend initially to think of the role of the teacher in a one dimensional way. It is therefore, crucial to engage them in experiences, early in the teacher education program, that require them to assume and discuss teacher roles. Shallow and erroneous PTC assumptions are best challenged in a practicum setting where theory and practice can be effectively integrated.

Our study supported the findings of previous researchers (Worthy & Patterson, 2001) that the development of caring relationships in a tutor-tutee setting provided a rich learning environment in which to develop PTCs understanding of the complexities of teaching and learning. The faculty's support of the development of these relationships allowed us to focus on several goals: 1) helping PTCs relate to ELLs as individuals with personal histories rather than as a monolithic group; 2) helping PTCs learn to discern and develop different teaching roles; and 3) using the development of the tutoring relationship to help the PTCs recognize the need for additional professional development to help them learn to teach specialized content such as math, science, and reading. One of the important consequences of this experience for PTCs is that it may make them more receptive to the instruction that they receive in their teacher education classes because they are better able to appreciate their value. One of our on-going challenges in the lab is to find ways to help the PTCs become better tutors in the academic areas when they are

tutoring before they have experienced any of the content methods courses. We have been experimenting with online tutorials to help the PTCs develop mentoring and tutoring skills.

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