Student and Tutor Perspectives of Tutoring in a Russian Flagship Program

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Introduction

This paper presents findings from a small-scale qualitative study based on interviews with Russian Flagship students and tutors at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to explore students' and tutors' perceptions of tutoring in the UW-Madison Russian Flagship Program. The UW-Madison Russian Flagship is a rigorous undergraduate program funded by a grant from the National Security Education Program (NSEP) to provide opportunities for highly motivated students of any major to reach a Superior level of proficiency in Russian by graduation. Students in the program are provided with two to four hours per week of individual tutoring in Russian. The present study follows up on a formal program evaluation conducted in fall 2010, which revealed that students considered tutoring to be the single most beneficial aspect of the Russian Flagship program for their learning. This study aims to provide further insights into student and tutor perceptions of tutoring, including their beliefs about those aspects of tutoring that are most helpful for their learning of Russian. The paper compares student and tutor perceptions with the vision for tutoring in the UW-Madison Russian Flagship articulated by the program's directors, and discusses implications relevant not only for Flagship programs, but for any Russian program which includes structured tutoring or is interested in exploring tutoring to complement in-class instruction.

Research on Foreign Language Tutoring

An extensive review of the scholarly literature revealed no previous research on tutoring in Russian as a foreign language in the United States: the only relevant works investigated student experiences in Russian individualized instruction (Rugaleva 1984; Twarog and Walters 1981), a self-paced, mastery-based, instructor-assisted alternative mode

to traditional language instruction that enjoyed a fair amount of interest in higher education and attention in the scholarly literature in the 1970s and early 1980s (Harlow 1987) (Tutoring, unlike individualized instruction, supplements classroom instruction; it does not replace it.) Recent research on Russian individualized instruction includes studies by Bown and White (2010) and Bown (2006) that examined students' emotions, perceptions and beliefs. Bown and White (2010) explored student emotions in Russian individualized instruction, to provide rich descriptions of the broad range of emotions that students experience in learning Russian through this type of program. Bown (2006) investigated the experiences and beliefs about language learning of U.S. university students in Russian individualized instruction, to examine perceptions of the *locus of learning*, "a confluence of beliefs about the nature of learning and the roles and responsibilities of instructors and students in the learning process … that can be either internal (i.e., attributed to the learner him or herself) or external (i.e., attributed to factors outside of the learner's control)" (647). Bown's research suggests that students who hold beliefs consistent with an internal locus of language learning may be more successful in a program of Russian individualized instruction than students with an external locus of learning.

Research that draws on sociocultural theory (Vygotsky 1978) also addresses the notion of the *locus of learning*, but from a socially constructed perspective, to provide insights into the role of interaction, mediation and regulation in language learning.[1] Aljaafreh & Lantolf (1994), for example, examined error correction and feedback in audio-taped, one-on-one tutoring sessions to show how leaners, working with an expert tutor, move from regulation by others (in this case, the tutor) to self-regulation: "At first, responsibility for the novice's linguistic performance is distributed between the novice and the expert, with the expert having more control over this performance than the novice. Under the expert's guidance, control is gradually appropriated by the novice" (480).

The review of the literature revealed that there is little other published research on perceptions of foreign language tutoring. One notable exception is Matthews (2010), who investigated features of one-

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[1] A full discussion of sociocultural theory applied to language learning is outside the scope of this paper. See Lantolf, James and Steven Thorne, S. 2006. *Sociocultural Theory and the Genesis of Second Language Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

on-one foreign language tutorials that influence student perceptions of self-efficacy. The study, which examined tutorials in French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish at a U.S. university, was based on pre- and post-tutoring questionnaires intended to measure changes in student motivation for language learning, and an analysis of videotaped tutoring sessions. Matthews concluded that even "a single one-on-one tutoring session can significantly increase tutees' self-efficacy judgments for learning the material" (622).

The overwhelming majority of research on language tutoring is in English as a Second Language (ESL); it focuses especially on the context of the ESL writing center. Several studies in ESL (Cumming and So 1996; Thonus 2001; Thonus 2002; Weigle & Nelson 2004) attempt to understand how tutoring is conducted. Such research suggests that the practice of tutoring can vary significantly from best practices of tutoring based on current tutoring theories, especially regarding the role of the tutor and tutee. Thonus (2004, 2002, 2001), for example, used conversation analysis of tutorials and interviews with tutors and students to suggest that "tutee perceptions of the tutor role differ substantially from the idealistic characterization of the collaborative peer common in writing center theory and training manuals" (Thonus 2004, 236). Weigle and Nelson (2004), through case studies of tutoring in an ESL writing center, explored the negotiation of roles in tutoring. Findings from that study suggest that it may not be "possible or desirable" (222) for tutors to maintain a less dominant role in tutoring, especially for learners at lower levels of language proficiency. Moreover, the study suggests that tutor and student roles may change over time, and that these changes do not necessarily affect perceptions of success.

This review of the scant research in foreign language tutoring in educational settings that has been conducted to date suggests a need for further research in this area. The Russian Flagship Program at the UW-Madison, a program in which tutoring plays a major role, is an ideal context for such research.

The Russian Flagship Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison
The UW-Madison Russian Flagship Program, established in 2010 through a grant from NSEP, is one of four Russian Flagship Programs in the United States. The mission of the program is to provide opportunities for outstanding undergraduate students of all majors to reach a Superior level of proficiency by graduation. The program consists of both

domestic and overseas components: the program at UW-Madison is designed to enable students to reach a minimum of Advanced Low proficiency, the minimum level required to apply for the yearlong capstone Overseas Russian Flagship Program at Saint Petersburg State University, administered by American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS (American Councils). Students in the UW-Madison Russian Flagship, as in the other domestic Russian Flagship programs, study in Russia at least twice: for a minimum of six weeks at the high school level or above, and subsequently, for those students who meet proficiency benchmarks and are recommended for admission, for a full academic year on the Overseas Russian Flagship Program in Saint Petersburg.

The UW-Madison Russian Flagship curriculum requires first- to fourth-Russian, or the equivalent, and the following advanced courses taught in Russian: a two-semester sequence of courses on Russian culture; two one-credit Russian tutorials linked to a course in either Russian area studies or the student's major area of study; and one of the following courses: *Russian Flagship Research Seminar*, *Capstone Course in Russian*, or a special topics Russian language course. In addition to coursework, students participate in extensive extra-curricular programming, including a weekly Russian Flagship Social Hour, Russian film screenings, and lectures and informal conversations with visiting scholars or members of the community. Finally, students meet from one to four hours per week with dedicated Russian Flagship tutors.

Satisfactory student progress in the UW-Madison Russian Flagship Program is based on the achievement of proficiency benchmarks. Proficiency is assessed through unofficial Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPIs) conducted by ACTFL-certified OPI Testers, and a number of proficiency-based tests, developed and administered by UW-Madison or American Councils. In addition to meeting proficiency targets, UW-Madison Russian Flagship students must maintain a GPA of 3.5 in their Russian courses and an overall 3.0 GPA, participate in Russian Flagship programming, and take part in Russian Flagship assessments.

Tutoring in the UW-Madison Russian Flagship Program
Tutoring plays a vital role in the UW-Madison Russian Flagship Program. It is a defining feature of the Language Flagship model at the national level: individual tutoring is featured as the first among basic

aspects of the Language Flagship, as described on NSEP's website: "Our language program is unique because it offers: Intensive language and culture instruction, including group training and individual tutoring, in a U.S. university setting."[2] All Russian Flagship programs – located at Bryn Mawr College, Portland State University, the University of California Los Angeles, and the UW-Madison, as well as the academic-year capstone Overseas Russian Flagship Program at Saint Petersburg State University, directed by American Councils – feature individualized tutoring as a key part of the program's design. Tutoring in these programs takes a variety of forms, including both individual and small-group tutoring led by tutors who are professionals with doctoral degrees (*Kandidatskaia* in Russia); graduate students from a variety of disciplines including Russian and Slavic studies, generally with Russian proficiency levels ranging from Advanced High to Native; undergraduate students who could be advanced Russian Flagship students or native or heritage speakers of Russian from a variety of majors; or native-speaking volunteers from the community. Russian Flagship students in these programs may meet with one or more tutors for a total of one to as many as eight academic hours per week.

In the UW-Madison Russian Flagship Program, students work with individual tutors at least two hours per week: one hour dedicated to improving oral proficiency, which could be as informal as conversation or could include formal academic discourse, including presentations; and one hour dedicated to improving writing proficiency, which could include work on grammar, syntax, stylistics, or various aspects of academic discourse. The focus of tutoring for each student is based on Russian Flagship assessments to identify the current needs of individual students. Students do not receive academic credit for these tutorials.

In addition to the two or more hours of general tutoring, UW-Madison Russian Flagship students at the fourth- or fifth-year level of Russian are required to take two one-credit Russian tutorials linked to courses in Russian area studies, or to courses in the student's major discipline. These "Russian Across the Curriculum" tutorials are overseen by the UW-Madison Russian Flagship Director, in consultation with the course instructor, and conducted on a weekly basis by a graduate tutor who is, preferably, a specialist in the discipline area of the course. The

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[2] National Security Education Program. "Language Programs Overview." Accessed December 28, 2011. www.thelanguageflagship.org/overview.

Russian Across the Curriculum tutorials are coordinated with the syllabus of the linked course: students work with primary or secondary texts in Russian that supplement the English readings in the syllabus, and incorporate them either into a paper written in English or Russian for the main course, or into a separate paper written in Russian specifically for the one-credit tutorial.

Student participation and progress in tutoring is closely monitored through written reports that tutors submit each week through an online reporting system. A Head Tutor assists with the compilation of these reports, which are reviewed on a weekly basis by the Russian Flagship leadership.

The UW-Madison Russian Flagship directors (Karen Evans-Romaine, director; Dianna Murphy, associate director; Anna Tumarkin, assistant director) conceived of tutoring as a generalized activity to improve students' proficiency, not linked with any specific courses, with the exception of the Russian Across the Curriculum tutorials. Written guidelines for tutors, reviewed with tutors in a pre-service tutor orientation, describe tutoring in those terms. Similarly, guidelines for students, reviewed with students in Russian Flagship orientation meetings and at the beginning of each semester, state that "Russian Flagship advisors determine general areas of focus for tutoring (e.g., academic writing, conversation); you and your tutors decide together how best to organize your tutoring sessions, based these general areas of focus, and on your interests and needs."

The Russian Flagship directors conceived of tutoring as driven primarily by students, not as formalized lessons led by tutors. Guidelines for both students and tutors convey this intent, so that students are motivated to come prepared to tutoring sessions having considered in advance those areas in which they need practice or are targeting for improvement. Guidelines for tutors and students state that "Tutoring sessions should be primarily driven by student; they are not independent study or formalized courses for which tutors need to prepare lesson plans."

The Present Study

The present study is an initial exploration of student and tutor perceptions of tutoring in the UW-Madison Russian Flagship Program. The research was approved by the Education Research Institutional Review Board at the UW-Madison (protocol number SE-2011-0735).

Participants, Methods, Procedures

Participants in the qualitative study (N=6) were Russian Flagship students (n=3) or Russian Flagship tutors (n=3) studying on the UW-Madison campus in the fall 2011 semester. Students that semester received two to three hours per week of individual tutoring; tutors provided between two and six hours per week of tutoring. All Russian Flagship students studying in UW-Madison that semester (i.e., not studying abroad on the Overseas Russian Flagship or on another program in Russia) were at the Intermediate Mid to Intermediate High level of proficiency in Russian; some students were at the borderline of Advanced Low in speaking, and within the Advanced range in receptive skills. Most of the students had not yet participated in study abroad in Russia. Tutor participants were graduate students at the UW-Madison who were employed by the Russian Flagship to provide individual tutoring for the program in fall 2011. Many of the tutors were graduate students in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature and experienced Russian language Teaching Assistants (TAs) for the department's undergraduate Russian program; Slavic Department tutors included both native and non-native speakers of Russian. Several of the tutors were native speakers of Russian in other graduate programs, including Curriculum and Instruction (School of Education), East Asian Languages and Literature, Languages and Cultures of Asia, and History; those tutors were not TAs in the Russian language program. Both groups of participants, students and tutors, were recruited through an email solicitation. Participation in the study was voluntary and confidential; participants did not receive remuneration.

The study consisted of two parts: a written questionnaire, administered online; and structured, 30-minute interviews with participants. This article presents findings from the interviews only. The interviews were conducted with individual participants, following a structured protocol (see the Appendix). The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded to remove any information that might identify individual participants.

The authors of this article, the primary researchers in this study, are also faculty and staff in the UW-Madison Russian Flagship Program. Two of the authors are also UW-Madison Russian Flagship directors who participated in the design of the tutoring program. To ensure participant confidentiality, and to mitigate risk to participants as the result of potential status relationship issues with the authors, a fourth researcher,

not affiliated with the program, coordinated and conducted the interviews, and coded the written transcripts to remove personally identifiable information. The analysis of the interview data was conducted by the authors.

The written transcripts were analyzed by the researchers following an interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) to analysis (Smith & Osborn 2003). This approach aims to understand phenomena based on narratives produced by participants; it is "concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or events… not an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself" (Smith & Osborn 2003, 53). This approach thus does not provide accounts of what actually happens during Russian Flagship tutoring sessions; rather, it offers insights into how the primary participants in tutoring, Russian Flagship students and tutors, perceive the tutoring sessions, including those aspects of tutoring that participants perceive to be more or less useful. In this approach, participant perceptions are understood through participant accounts of their thoughts, feelings and experiences, as expressed through narratives obtained through interviews, and analyzed in the manner outlined below.

Following the steps of IPA in Smith & Osborne (2003), the researchers first worked independently to conduct a preliminary analysis of each interview transcript, as follows: 1) read the transcript several times; 2) made initial annotations of the thoughts, ideas and opinions expressed by the participants; 3) reread the transcript to document emerging themes; 4) compiled and grouped emerging themes for each participant; 5) checked the clusters of themes against the transcript; 6) produced superordinate themes and key words. The researchers completed these same steps for each transcript from each interview. Then, each researcher constructed a list of superordinate themes for all participants as a group, students and tutors. The researchers next met several times to compare their individual analyses, and to create a set of superordinate themes for each group of participants. One researcher then returned to the transcripts to review them in light of the new themes, and to translate the themes into a narrative, presented in the *Findings* section. Finally, the researchers returned several times to the interview transcripts, following an iterative process, to review and revise the findings, validated against the participants' narratives.

Research Questions

The study addresses two sets of research questions:

1) **Students**

1a) How do students perceive tutoring in the Russian Flagship Program?

1b) What are students' goals for tutoring?

1c) Which aspects of tutoring do students perceive to be more or less beneficial for their learning?

2) **Tutors**

2a) How do tutors perceive tutoring in the Russian Flagship Program? How do those perceptions differ from those of students?

 What are tutors' goals for their students?

2c) Which aspects of tutoring do tutors perceive to be more or less beneficial for their students' learning?

2d) To what extent do tutors feel that tutoring is beneficial for them as teachers?

Findings

Student Perceptions

Research Question 1a: How do students perceive tutoring in the Russian Flagship Program?

The first set of research questions (RQ1a-1c) focused on student perceptions. The analysis revealed several common themes. First, all of the students who participated in the study viewed their Russian Flagship tutoring sessions as strongly linked to their experiences in Russian language courses. All students commented on the opportunities to practice speaking during tutoring sessions, compared with opportunities in class, as illustrated by the following example: *I think of tutoring as an extra two hours of Russian that I can't really get in the classroom where there are 10 other kids who want to speak Russian just as badly as I do* (Student 1). One student compared his level of anxiety in language classes to tutoring, remarking that the more relaxed environment of tutoring is helpful for his speaking: It [tutoring] *makes it feel more natural [than a formal class setting]. I feel a lot more relaxed and I can speak a lot better in a less formal setting because I feel less anxiety and pressure* (Student 3). Students also noted that the tutoring sessions themselves are based on materials or assignments from Russian language or literature courses: students described discussing a text that they were reading for class (Student 2), discussing a paper that they had submitted for class (Student 1), or talking about what they are doing in class (Student 3). Students' strong

association between their Russian Flagship tutoring and their Russian language courses was surprising, given the intent in the design of the tutoring program that generalized tutoring *not* be linked with students' language courses.

A second common theme that emerged from the student interviews addresses the role of tutors in Russian Flagship tutoring. In describing their tutoring sessions, all students described the actions or behaviors of their tutors in some detail, but did not, to nearly the same degree, describe their own actions. For example, from one student's account:…*he's asking what I had read and asking about what I thought about each novel and …more specific questions … like how I felt about the … characters* (Student 3); and, from another student: …*typically, my conversation tutor, she asked me how the weekend was and then we build the conversation from there* (Student 1). Students also described tutor behaviors that students felt were more or less helpful for their learning: *I like it when my tutors are hard on me and really demand and expect me to speak not just for fluency, but have grammatical perfection as well* (Student 1); and *I get the impression … that she doesn't really correct me as much as she probably could* (Student 2). The emphasis in students' narratives on what the tutor does, and not on what they themselves do, suggests that Russian Flagship students in this program might benefit from explicit training to heighten their awareness of their own thoughts, behaviors and actions during tutoring, and in their Russian learning more broadly, to encourage a more internalized view of the locus of learning (Bown 2006). Notably, when students did discuss their own experiences in tutoring, it was to express the difficulty that they encounter when they are required to take initiative, in selecting, for example, topics for tutoring sessions: …*sometimes the hardest part is that I have to think of a grammar topic that we are going to do the next day* (Student 1).

A third common theme addresses students' perceptions of their expanded use of Russian during tutoring. Students reported speaking in Russian during their tutoring sessions on a broader range of topics and in a greater level of detail, using more specialized vocabulary, than in their Russian classes: *We always end up talking about topics that I never thought I could talk about in Russian. For example… we started talking about just movies in general. And then, … she is asking me about the difference in special effects for movies that were made in the 1950s as opposed to movies made now. And I used a lot of technical vocabulary that I didn't even know I had, or had the*

ability to use… I looked back after – I was proud of myself that I was able to do that in Russian (Student 1).

Students' narratives also emphasized the loose structure of tutoring sessions, in comparison with their language courses, and the increased opportunities in tutoring for spontaneous and creative use of Russian*: I really like … how they [tutoring sessions] are somewhat structured but not overly structured, where you can go in kind of knowing what you're talking about, where you still have to…think on your feet and still have to come up with ideas in Russian in a setting that will be equivalent to the conversation you would have with somebody where you have no preparation* (Student 3).

Research Question 1b: What are students' goals for tutoring?

The first set of research questions also asked about students' goals for their tutoring; however, the interviews did not reveal much data on student goals. Two of the participants answered a question about their goals for tutoring by avoiding it: instead, they described activities that they perceive to be useful (one-on-one speaking practice), or that they would like to engage in more frequently (more tutoring). When students did discuss their goals, they described them in general terms. Students' goals were related to fluency (*I really hope that I can improve my ability to speak with relative fluency and not have to mumble and stutter and think for minutes about what I'm trying to say* [Student 3]); accuracy (*I would like to stop making grammatical mistakes as often* [Student 2]); confidence (*My goal is to be more confident in general* [Student 3]); or their ability to speak in more sophisticated Russian (*I would like … to be able to talk more theoretically in the abstract and make sense* [Student 2]). These findings regarding student goals suggest that the program might consider ways to help students to formulate and articulate more targeted learning goals for their Russian Flagship tutoring sessions.

Research Question 1c: Which aspects of tutoring do students perceive to be more or less beneficial for their learning?

Analysis of student responses on more or less helpful aspects of tutoring revealed that students perceived the most helpful aspect of tutoring to be the focus on their individual needs and interests. Above all, students emphasized the benefits in tutoring of having the opportunity to speak in Russian, one-on-one, especially on topics of interest to them: *I can always ask my tutors and they help me answer more specific questions that apply to my interest instead of the topics we're covering in class* (Student 3). Students

highly value their tutors' flexibility, especially to adjust the sessions to their particular needs at a given time: *We started working on just specific grammar points, but I think we both realized I was doing OK with those. So, we kind of moved to a more specific point of language, … the intonation patterns* (Student 1).

The crossover benefits of tutoring for Russian courses emerged as another common theme among students. Students remarked that the additional speaking practice during tutoring helps them to have more confidence when speaking in class or performing on oral exams, and that individual help on homework is useful. One student commented that the use of Russian to discuss grammar in tutoring is helpful in giving him the vocabulary to ask grammar questions in class. A related common theme was the perceived positive impact of Russian Flagship tutoring on students' study habits: *It* [tutoring] *has been really helpful because it just gives me more motivation to get started … researching and thinking about my paper topics a lot earlier than I probably would have, moreover in Russian* (Student 2).

A third theme that emerged regarding student perceptions of the most helpful aspects of tutoring had to do with the students' affective response. In addition to the feeling of increased overall confidence, one student in particular emphasized the positive effect of tutoring on lowering his *fear of saying something wrong* (Student 3). This student attributed this benefit to the less formal (compared with the classroom) environment. Other students also discussed their emotional responses to tutoring, related to setting high expectations for themselves (Student 1), relishing the challenge of tutoring, and taking pride in an accomplishment (Students 1 and 2).

A common theme in responses about the least helpful aspects of Russian Flagship tutoring was a mismatch between tutoring sessions and students' individual interests or perceived needs. Students perceived that the level of discourse was not always appropriate for them: *It's difficult sometimes to keep pace with him … I understand most of it, but sometimes I feel it's almost too challenging, I guess…. I feel sometimes that I don't have the ability to talk about some of the subjects that we're speaking about. It's good to have a challenge, but sometimes I feel overwhelmed* (Student 3).

Finally, and perhaps somewhat surprising, given the students' heavy course loads and two to three hours per week of Russian Flagship tutoring in the fall 2011, a common theme in the student interviews was

an overall positive assessment of tutoring in the Russian Flagship Program, and an interest in being provided with even more.

Tutor Perceptions

Research questions for tutors were posed in parallel to those for students, with an additional question about perceptions of crossover benefits of tutoring on the tutors' classroom teaching. The analysis of tutor interviews revealed some themes in common with those emerging from student interviews, but also some significant differences.

Research Question 2a: How do tutors perceive tutoring in the Russian Flagship Program? How do those perceptions differ from those of students?

Research Question 2b: What are tutors' goals for their students?

Like students, Russian Flagship tutors view Russian Flagship tutoring as linked, more or less explicitly, with students' Russian courses. Implicit in tutors' descriptions of the relationship between tutoring and students' course work, however, is a perceived tension between students' desire to focus tutoring on material that will help them succeed in their classes, and the tutors' desire to help students improve their general knowledge of and proficiency in the language. In describing tutoring, all of the tutors in this study compared tutoring to students' learning experiences in Russian language classes to describe, for example, how tutoring is directly linked to a class, how tutoring supplements classroom instruction, or how tutoring requires students to speak in Russian for more extended periods of time than is possible in the classroom. Tutors also describe activities not related to specific classes, however: Tutor 1 expresses a desire for students to gain a grasp of *things that are never necessarily even covered in Russian classes, but they come up often. I feel like there's a lot of little things like that..* Tutor 3 sets a goal related to students' speaking proficiency: *to try and make them have a higher-level conversation.* Tutor 2, apparently one of several Flagship tutor participants in a Russian Flagship-sponsored ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) Workshop held in Madison in September 2011, emphasized the potential for individual tutoring to promote greater language proficiency, but admitted that she sometimes acquiesces to the desires of students in addressing perceived needs linked to their work in Russian courses*: I've had students in the past who just want to work on something that they're studying right now in their Russian courses. And so, in this case I … have the syllabi for the courses they are taking currently. And I look at the syllabus*

together with the student and I bring some exercises on these particular topics… This tension between a desire to promote opportunities for developing proficiency and the perceived need to help students perform well in courses exposes a perception of tension between proficiency and achievement in classroom exams: *I don't think that making grammar exercises on paper… like filling in certain words, helps a student to become a better speaker or a better writer. And that's what proficiency is, functioning in the language. So, it doesn't make a student … function in the language [better], but hopefully it helps him or her take the test* (Tutor 2). This perception of tension between proficiency-oriented goals and students' desire for success on exams in Russian classes suggests the need for further guidance for both students and tutors, in order both to understand the nature of this tension, and to help resolve it and find common ground: to help students better understand the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and thus set realistic and achievable short-term proficiency-oriented goals along with the goal of success in classroom achievement testing, and for tutors, to discuss scholarship on the link between structural accuracy and attainment of proficiency at the Superior and Distinguished levels. (Leaver & Shekhtman, eds. 2002; Davidson 2010)

A second common theme among Russian Flagship tutors and students was a tendency to focus on the actions of the tutor, and less on the actions of the student, in describing tutoring sessions. One tutor, for example, described a typical tutoring session as follows: *I bring them the article or they find the article. They read it at home. When they come back, I at first ask them to tell me what the article is about. Then I ask them questions about the article. Then I ask them to make sentences with some of the new words that were in the article. And then, I want them to tell me what they think of the article, and how they are going to use it in their paper* (Tutor 3). The emphasis in both student and tutor narratives on the actions of tutors is further illustrated in a related theme in the tutor interviews: a perception of the role of the tutor as similar to the role of a teacher in a traditional language course in which the teacher/tutor designs and leads instruction and initiates talk. Indeed, some tutor descriptions of tutoring sessions resemble the lesson plan outline offered in Rifkin's "Guidelines for Foreign Language Lesson Planning" (2003), an article assigned to all beginning language TAs at the University of Wisconsin – Madison as part of their pre-service orientation: Overview, Preparation, Drill & Practice, Check/Accountability, Follow-Up. Tutor 1 describes an overview (*My student had asked me for help working on participles. And so, I*

brought several materials to the tutoring session); preparation, drill and practice (*I started out by drawing a basic scheme of the four types of participles and I asked her to fill in as much as she knew about each type of participle. And so, when she had done what she could do, then I asked her questions and tried to help her fill in the* rest), check/accountability (*then I asked her to use each type of participle in a sentence*), and follow-up (*And if there were things that I thought were particularly tricky, I would ask her, "So why did you write this?"*). This perception of the role of the tutor as teacher and leader is very different from that envisioned in the design of the Russian Flagship tutoring program, and as articulated in written guidelines for tutors and students.

Analysis of the descriptions of tutoring sessions by tutors revealed descriptions of inductive approaches that may foster more productive learning and encourage greater student initiative. Tutor 1, as part of the narrative provided above, described providing an answer to the student only as a last resort, after prompting the student to provide answers: *And when she really didn't know the answer, then I would tell it to her.* Tutor 1 sums up this approach as follows: *I am also aware of the importance of … forcing the students to ask their questions and not just direct information at them.*

A third common theme among tutors was a desire for students to take more responsibility and initiative in tutoring, to prepare for the tutoring sessions, and to work independently on topics addressed during tutoring sessions. Related to this theme was a desire on the part of tutors that students be more aware of their needs. For example: *…the most helpful part is when the students have questions themselves. When they are able to see that they are not clear about why something is the way it is, or they are not sure if they are saying something correctly, and then ask questions about that* (Tutor 1); *… [it] would be helpful for a student if a student first of all takes this tutoring session, or studies in general, responsibly and independently. If a student actually knows what his or her strengths and weaknesses are and… makes a tutor aware of those* (Tutor 2) To that end, tutors expressed the goal of helping students to become more effective learners and researchers: *Another goal that I think is very important is to kind of show student how to study* (Tutor 2); *So that's the main goal for me now, to make them ready to keep doing their own research in Russian by themselves, online and in the library* (Tutor 3). The need for greater self-awareness on the part of students, and of the importance of student initiative and responsibility, was noticeably absent from the student interviews.

Research Question 2c: Which aspects of tutoring do tutors perceive to be more or less beneficial for their students' learning?

With regard to the perceived benefits of tutoring, interviews with tutors revealed that, like students, Russian Flagship tutors perceived the primary benefit of tutoring to be the individual attention that students receive, focusing on areas of particular need for that student. For example, a tutor working with a student on intonation patterns remarks: *because it was a one-on-one session, I could ask her, "So did you hear it that time?" or … "What did you hear that time?" I could keep focusing on that until she was able to hear it. And then, once she was able to hear it, she was able to start pronouncing it correctly… that just doesn't happen in a large classroom where you have 18 people* (Tutor 1). Like students, tutors also compared the individual focus in tutoring to the group dynamics of traditional courses: *It seems to me that tutoring is mostly for them to work individually … on the problems they have. And it's not possible sometimes in class because very often we have bigger classes* (Tutor 2). Tutors and students alike perceive that the expanded opportunities for using Russian in tutoring are beneficial for students: *It's very useful for them to be forced to speak just one-to-one, to have an extended dialogue. Because in class, they don't have that much time to really converse in Russian* (Tutor 3). Finally, tutors unanimously described the importance of repetition to learning, even for students at higher levels.

In discussing the least helpful aspects of Russian Flagship tutoring, a common theme among tutors was the difficulty in identifying student needs accurately. Tutor 1 sums this theme up clearly: *Sometimes I misgauge what their level is… they tell me, "I'm having trouble with these kinds of verbs. Can we work on these types of verbs?" And so, I prepare some materials for them on these types of verbs. And then, when we go to use them, I find out that, actually, they seem to be doing just fine, and I don't understand why they think they don't understand them or what the problem is. Conversely, I think, sometimes, students think they understand things better than they do.*

Noticeably absent from the tutor narratives was a discussion of pragmatic competence and of affective factors in student responses to tutoring.

Research Question 2d: To what extent do tutors feel that tutoring is beneficial for them as teachers?

With regard to the benefits of tutoring for their classroom teaching, tutors referred to greater awareness of the needs of individual students (*I think later, when you have lots of students, it helps you to be able to zoom on to*

one particular student when necessary. It helps you to have more individual approach to students. [Tutor 3]); the value of repetition and review (*I'm sensing that's also true in first year that students need to practice what they are learning a lot.* [Tutor 1]); the importance of proficiency-oriented instruction (*So, hopefully in my future teaching I will be concentrating more on … getting … all that knowledge and putting it into speech … rather than just doing exercises* [Tutor 2]); and the importance of requiring students to participate more actively in instruction: *In the tutoring sessions, it's very, very interactive and seeing that that's effective to the extent that I can in a classroom with 18 students* (Tutor 1).

Conclusions

Findings from this pilot study provide preliminary insights into student and tutor perceptions of tutoring in the Language Flagship Program; the findings should be relevant, however, for any language program in which tutoring supplements in-class instruction in some way. Findings show that for the small number of Russian Flagship students and tutors that participated in this study, tutoring is perceived to be highly beneficial for student learning due to expanded opportunities for students to practice using Russian, in comparison with opportunities to use Russian in language classes; the focus of tutoring on the individual interests and needs of students; and a learning environment that students perceive as less stressful than the language classroom. The study shows that both tutors and students describe tutoring sessions primarily in terms of similarities with and differences from Russian language courses, with a greater emphasis on the connection between tutoring and coursework than envisioned in the design of the tutoring program. Both groups also describe tutoring more in terms of the actions of tutors, not in terms of the actions of students. Differences between the two groups include an emphasis by tutors on more targeted learning goals, and on the need for students to take greater responsibility for their learning.

With the usual caveats about the generalizability of findings from qualitative research, findings from this study suggest several areas for improvement of this program and provide insights for the design of any tutoring program. First, both students and tutors perceived tutoring to be linked to success in Russian courses, far more than anticipated in the design of the tutoring program. This finding suggests the need for greater programmatic support for setting goals for learning that are based to a greater degree on students' developing proficiency, and less

reliant on student achievement in Russian language courses, while also emphasizing the importance of students' linguistic accuracy and structural command to attainment of Superior-level proficiency. An ACTFL OPI Workshop seems to have helped tutors who participated in it to frame goals in terms of students' developing proficiency. This study suggests that additional workshops or other forms of ongoing training might be warranted, for students as well as for tutors. Second, student and tutor interviews revealed that both groups perceived that the tutor plays a leading role in structuring tutoring sessions and initiating talk. Tutors and students might be encouraged to discuss openly their expectations for their respective roles in tutoring, and look for ways to encourage students to take greater initiative. It might be beneficial to explore ways to promote increased student autonomy by providing tutors and students with tools to make independent learning more effective. Finally, findings from this study suggest that students may not have targeted learning goals that are appropriate to their developing proficiency in Russian. Students might benefit from explicit strategy instruction on setting short-term proficiency-based goals, with ongoing coaching to raise their awareness of both their learning needs and study habits.

Acknowledgements

Appendix: Interview Protocol

Student Interviews

1. Describe, your own words, your Russian Flagship tutoring sessions. What is the focus of your tutoring? What do you do during tutoring sessions? Who usually leads/plans for the tutoring session?
2. What are your goals for tutoring? What do you hope to get out of your tutoring sessions?
3. What aspects of tutoring do you find to be most helpful for your learning??
4. What aspects of tutoring do you find to be least helpful for your learning?

5. How useful do you feel that tutoring is in helping you to improve in Russian?

6. To what extent do you feel that tutoring focused on one aspect of Russian (e.g., conversation), helps you in other areas (e.g., writing or grammar)?

*Optional probe follow-up questions, for all questi*ons: Could you tell me a little more about that? Could you give an example?

Tutor Interviews

1. Describe, in your own words, your Russian Flagship tutoring sessions. What is the focus of your tutoring? What do you do during tutoring sessions? Who usually leads/plans for the tutoring sessions?

2. What are your goals for your students? What do you hope that your students get out of tutoring?

3. What aspects of tutoring do you find to be most helpful for students' learning?

4. What aspects of tutoring do you find to be least helpful for your students' learning?

5. How effective (useful) do you feel that tutoring is in helping your students to improve in Russian?

6. To what extent do you feel that tutoring focused on one aspect (e.g., conversation), helps students in other areas (e.g., writing or grammar)?

7. To what extent do you feel that tutoring is beneficial for you as a teacher/in your teaching?

Optional probe follow-up questions, for all questions: Could you tell me a little more about that? Could you give an example?

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