

Collaboration and Interaction between Mentors and Mentees in a Peer Mentoring Program

Kristen Chorba, Kallie Brown, Michael Brown, and Anne Morrison, Ph. D
 Kent State University

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of the mentors participating in a Peer Mentoring Project in an undergraduate Educational Psychology class at a large, Midwest university. Research on peer assessment has been shown to improve social factors of student development, and may have an impact on students' academic achievement (Topping, 1998). According to Good (2001), mentors who participated in a peer mentoring program received many benefits, including improved social skills. Because of the reciprocal nature of learning that mentors and mentees engage in, students in a mentoring relationship benefit regardless of their role. Having mentors in a class is believed to enhance the students' overall class experience, as well as the building of relationships, trust, and credibility by the mentors (Smith, 2007). Higher self-esteem, especially as it relates to connectedness to peers and perceived social support have also been noted (Karcher, 2008).

All undergraduate students currently enrolled in this course have the opportunity to be paired with a volunteer mentor, who is another undergraduate education student who has successfully completed the course in a previous semester. This study looked at the kinds of experiences that mentors in a teacher training program have during the mentoring process and in their interactions with their mentees.

Methods

The primary research question was: What kinds of experiences are these mentors having? A second research question was: What are the learning outcomes that these mentors are experiencing, throughout the semester and through their interactions with each other and with their mentees?

There were seven main interview questions:

- 1) Please describe your experiences as a mentor thus far this semester.
- 2) What considerations/thoughts went into your decision to be a mentor this semester?
- 3) Tell me what you have learned or gained from this experience.
- 4) Could you describe a "telling moment" for you in this class?
- 5) How was the preparation for becoming a mentor? (Do you feel you were prepared to be a mentor this semester?)
- 6) Do you feel supported as a mentor?
- 7) If you were talking to someone who was considering becoming a mentor about your experiences and what it's "like" to be a mentor in this capacity, what would you tell him/her?

Twelve students, three males and nine females, ranging in age from 19-27 participated in in-depth interviews, which lasted between fifteen and thirty five minutes in length.

Results

Four main categories emerged from this data:

- *Intrapersonal Experiences,*
- *Interpersonal Experiences,*
- *Professional Growth, and*
- *Improvements or Ways the Program can be Different.*

This poster focuses specifically on the *Interpersonal* theme, which includes:

- *Mentor Connection and Community,*
- *Navigating Peer Relationships, the*
- *Plane Wreck activity, and*
- *Communication.*

Mentor Connection/Community was defined as the sense of connectedness felt by the mentors. Navigating Peer Relationships addresses the ways in which individuals find their way through peer relationships in a mentor/mentee relationship. Plane Wreck was an ice breaker activity used to both build community between mentors and mentees and to exemplify the role of a mentor. Finally, Communication addresses how mentors and mentees learn to communicate with others.

References:

- Good, J. M., Halpin, G., & Halpin, G. (2000). A promising prospect for minority retention: Students becoming peer mentors. *Journal of Negro Education, 69*(4-4), 375.
- Karcher, M. (2008). The study of mentoring in the learning environment (SMILE): A randomized evaluation of the effectiveness of school-based mentoring. *Prevention Science, 9*(2; 2), 99-113.
- Smith, T. (2008). Integrating undergraduate peer mentors into liberal arts courses: A pilot study. *Innovative Higher Education, 33*(1; 1), 49-63.
- Topping, K. (1998). Peer assessment between students in colleges and universities. *Review of Educational Research, 68*(3), 249-276.

Conclusions

"Every interaction I had with my mentees was a learning experience and I can talk to them and help them."

As a current mentor points out, this quote "really shows how the mentoring project is beneficial to both the mentor and mentee. To me it shows what [the Mentoring Project facilitators] are doing to prepare us to be teachers by placing us in intimate roles as educators with age groups that present challenges we will face in the classroom."

"Learning how to interact with them, keeping it professional but still . . . learning how . . . to [figure out] the appropriate way to interact with them, [and] learning how to, like, adjust they way I'm explaining things . . . And just working with people of my same age on something like that. Usually I'm working with my peers, on group projects that I'm involved in, but this is kinda different 'cause I've already done it and I'm helping them out, so it's kind of a different way of interacting with people."

This quotation highlights how the Peer Mentoring Project gives the mentors an opportunity to interact with people on different levels . For example, as a mentor, one is able to interact with other mentors as a colleague, with his or her mentees with a different kind of relationship, and with the course instructor and researcher in yet another type of relationship; in the words of one current mentor, "the relationship is personal yet professional. Mentoring creates space for the teacher candidates to take on multiple perspectives within their role as a mentor.

