Relational Learning: Peer Mentoring Among Teacher Candidates

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Workshop Overview

*The **Peer Mentoring Project** is a program that was started as a way to support undergraduate teacher candidates in their required Educational Psychology course. Mentoring has been found to increase students' academic success, social skills, self efficacy, and ability to refine their professional dispositions. This workshop proposes a forum for dialogue and reflection about mentoring programs, their structure, and their benefits to both students and mentors. Additionally, this workshop will assist participants in beginning to think about how to design a mentoring program that meets their needs as educators and their students' needs as learners.*

I.   The philosophy of mentoring

The mentoring project has served as a vehicle to engage the students in relational learning. Relational learning is a way of being with students from a social constructionist perspective where students, mentors and professors learn from each other through the back and forth sharing of ideas. The project invites students and professors to enter into a dialogue about learning with their peers. At the same time, the involvement of the mentors deconstructs the hierarchy within the traditional teaching relationship and opens space for more collaborative experiences. Most students come to university with the traditional model in mind. While there may be a place and time for a teacher-centered model, the relational approach lends itself to the active process of co-constructing knowledge not only in the classroom but outside in the world.

II. Framework: A historical background and research on mentoring

Mentoring has been the focus of much research over the past few decades. In one example, Smith (2008), evaluated a new mentoring program, which utilized peer mentors who had already successfully completed the course they were mentoring, for outcomes. Data was collected in the form of surveys, peer mentors' assignments, and interviews. Findings of this study suggest that students are influenced by the presence of peer mentors who attend and assist with their classes, even if they are not formally paired with a mentor; specifically, the advantage of having the mentor in class, offering his or her perspectives and expertise on both the class and the class content, was believed to enhance the students' overall class experience, as well as the building of relationships, trust, and credibility by the mentors (Smith, 2008). This shows that the results of mentoring relationships can be secondary and residual, as well as being a primary focus. Additionally, it suggests that even students who are too busy or would not normally choose a mentor for personal reasons can benefit from the presence of a mentor in the classroom. This suggests a strategy that can be used when designing a mentoring program, both to help students who are aware that they want help, and to assist those who many not know that they need help, or who initially do not want any assistance. A mentoring

relationship can also have a positive effect on the mentors themselves. According to Good, Halpin, and Halpin (2000), mentors who participated in a peer mentoring program targeting the mentees most likely also received many benefits, including academic outcomes, increased retention, improved social skills, and increased levels of self-satisfaction, as individuals who have impacted someone else's learning outcomes.

a) Our mentoring project: What it is and how it began

b) From service project to course credit

c) Mentoring in Italy

d) Learning from our students

e) Future directions

III. Small group sessions: Sharing our own experiences with mentoring projects

IV. Returning to the larger group: A discussion of mentoring projects we have been involved in

V. Small group sessions: Designing a mentoring project relevant to your needs and situations

Finding mentee participants

Creating assignments for the mentee/mentor relationship

Building assessment tools

Creating the syllabi

Organizing the mentees around the idea of being mentored

Organizing the mentors around the idea mentoring

Deciding what mentoring is/is NOT

Designing the Mentor meetings. Reading assignments and class assignments.

Research and assessment of your project.

References

Andersen, T. (1991). *The Reflecting Team: Dialogues and Dialogues about the Dialogues*. New York:

    Norton.

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.

Smith, T. (2008). Integrating undergraduate peer mentors into liberal arts courses: A pilot study.

    Innovative Higher Education, 33(1; 1), 49-63.

Notes

***Please turn in your mentoring project plan before you leave, along with your E-mail address.
Plans will be typed up and distributed to all for future reference and ideas.*

I've gained valuable experience for my future of being a teacher because I feel like, the more I work with students, the more I work with peers, the more I work with professionals in the field, the better experience and more knowledge I'm going to have as a first year teacher in the next year, year and a half, and I feel like that experience right there is more valuable than any experience I could have sitting in a class, reading a text book.

Mentoring Project Plan

I think the best benefit for anyone who would be thinking about it would be just that it really does keep you kind of sharp and prepared for [the Praxis] because you're constantly talking about Vygotsky and Piaget again, just like you were in the semester you took the course, so I think it does just kind of keep it fresh in your mind and give you the experience of teaching because, you know, mentoring really is kind of teaching or, at least, facilitating. So, I think anytime an education student gets an opportunity to help someone else understand something, they should take it, if for no other reason than it will help with the Praxis II.