

Reflecting Processes in a Peer Mentoring Project

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Introduction:

Social construction focuses on the ways in which knowledge and understanding are affected by and dependent upon the interactions that an individual has. In social construction, the individual's experiences act as the context from which meaning is created.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of the mentors and mentees participating in a Peer Mentoring Project, which is part of an Educational Psychology class. Recent research has explored mentoring along a number of dimensions, including as a way to increase academic achievement (Bernier, Larose, and Soucy, 2005; Campbell and Campbell, 1997; Rodger and Tremblay, 2003), retention (Rodger & Tremblay, 2003), self efficacy (Wang and Wu, 2008), social exchanges (Ugrin, Odom, and Pearson, 2008), and enhanced learning (Smith, 2008).

The approach used for this project is a process of reflection in which each group of participants is able to discuss their experiences and thoughts about a certain issue and then listen to the thoughts of another group and reflect on what they have heard (see Andersen, 1995). The purpose of a reflecting team should be to open dialogue between two groups, and viewed as an opportunity to reflect, listen, be thoughtful, and question. These reflecting teams then engaged in dialogues *with* one another in an open conversation as they thought about and reflected upon their mentoring experiences.

Materials and Methods:

Reflecting processes were used in four separate sessions. For the purposes of this study, reflecting teams were created which consisted of combinations of mentors, mentees, and the researchers, depending upon the session's goals.

Each reflecting team consisted of between four and seven participants. Some participants engaged in all four reflecting processes, while others were only present for one or two, as all participants were volunteers. The class at large acted as the listening layer, who then had the opportunity to discuss what they had heard the initial group say and consider the experiences they had discussed. The researchers guided the conversation with questions and, as appropriate, probes for additional information. The researchers were careful to act as facilitators for this dialogue and as a vehicle for the reflecting team to explore thoughts, ideas, and possibilities, but not as providers of a solution.

The following questions guided the reflection sessions: 1) What is it to be a mentor? 2) What is the Peer Mentoring Program and how has it changed over time? 3) What is it to be a mentor or mentee? 4) What is the Peer Mentoring Project? Data was collected in the form of audio- and video- recorded sessions and transcribed.

Conclusions:

This research project is still in progress. The next steps will be to return to the students who participated in these reflecting processes, and have them talk about what they learned, saw, and experienced during these reflecting processes, as well as what they may have gained from then and what suggestions they have for using them again in similar situations.

Following are some of the comments made by students during these reflections.

"Being on this [mentor] side I had to think back, saying, 'this is exactly what I was doing and I need to be the person to help guide them just the same way I was guided.' They don't know exactly what they're doing, just like I didn't know what I was doing last year."

"It's not a middle man between the student and professor, but it is, at the same time. . . it reduces that anxiety for students to . . . go and ask their professor [if something is correct]. The mentor has been through it, they know what's right, what's wrong, what doesn't work out quite as well."

"It made a lot of difference when we started meeting as a whole group of mentors. It's just good to hear all the other mentors because it turns out that we all have the same issues."

"[And I said] well, write down what's good about it, too. They want to hear that. [The students] spent time on it and they want to know what looks great."



References:

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