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Assessing the Impact of Mentoring Underserved Youth through Service Learning

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Abstract

Mentoring underserved youth through service learning can provide various positive impacts for both mentors and mentees (Banks, 2010; Hughes et al., 2012; Rhodes, Grossman & Resch, 2000; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001; Washburn-Moses, Fry & Sanders, 2014; Weiler et al., 2013). This qualitative interview study assessed the perceived impact that a mentoring program had on mentees, who were underserved youth at an elementary school in a low-income community, and mentors, who were college students participating through a service learning course. The findings revealed overall positive outcomes for both the mentors and mentees. The mentees benefited academically and looked up to their mentor as a role model, while the mentors felt they benefited personally, civically and academically, and they also felt as though they made a difference in their mentees' life. These findings informed various recommendations, including the expansion of the program, more variations in activities, as well as adding homework help to the mentor training and reflection for the mentors. With these findings, more programs forming relationships with college students and underserved youth should be established in order to allow more individuals to become active and productive members of society.

Keywords: Service Learning, Mentoring, Underserved Youth

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Introduction

The value and impact of service learning on college campuses cannot be denied. The effectiveness is reflected in the teaching method being increasingly implemented in colleges and universities across the country and around the world in multiple disciplines (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Service learning is a community-oriented method of instruction that integrates service with academics in order to enhance overall learning (Celio et al., 2011; Jones & Abes, 2004). Wang & Rodgers (2006) explained that service learning makes connections between service and academics through reflection. The impact of service learning is widespread and has an effect on the communities served, the higher education institution, as well as on the students participating (Celio et al., 2011).

Service learning is linked to various positive developmental outcomes for higher education students. Throughout the literature it is evident that service learning can lead to improved cognitive development, including academic achievement (Celio et al., 2011), degree completion and retention (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013; Simonet, 2008; Wolff & Tieney, 2006), and improved problem solving and critical thinking skills (Joseph, Stone, Grantham, Harmancioglu & Ibrahim, 2007; Wang & Rodgers, 2006; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Service learning can also have a positive impact on a college students' social/interpersonal development, as it can lead to increased understanding of social issues (Yorio & Ye, 2012), a moral and cultural awareness (Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008; Lies, Bock, Brandenberger, & Trozzolo, 2012; Scott, 2012), and a tolerance for diversity and increased civic responsibility (Celio et al., 2011; Einfeld & Collins, 2008). Finally service learning can also have a positive impact on a college students' intrapersonal development, including the formation of an identity, self-authorship (Day, 2009; Jones & Abes, 2004; Meyers, 2009) and improved self-esteem (Celio et al., 2011; Yorio & Ye, 2012). The improved cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal development demonstrated

throughout the literature truly reveals the impact that service learning can have on higher

education students and therefore demonstrates the value of service learning programs.

Even though much is known about the general benefits of service learning on the higher

education student, much less is known about the effects of mentoring on the students who mentor

underserved youth as their specific service learning placement. A few significant studies have

looked at mentoring within a service learning context revealing the benefits that arise for the

mentor (Banks, 2010; Hughes et al., 2012; Washburn-Moses, Fry & Sanders, 2014; Weiler et al.,

2013). Mentors experienced improved civic attitudes and action, increased problem solving skills

(Weiler et al., 2013), increased understanding of diversity (Banks, 2010; Hughes et al., 2012;

Washburn-Moses, Fry & Sanders, 2014; Weiler et al., 2013), increased self-confidence (Banks,

2010), and improved communication skills (Washburn-Moses, Fry & Sanders, 2014).

Not only do mentors benefit from the mentoring relationship, but youth do as well.

Throughout the literature it was found that the youth experienced improved outcomes in

perceptions of parental relationships, scholastic competence and school attendance (Rhodes,

Grossman & Resch, 2000), as well as academic achievement (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001).

Mentoring is most effective when it is supported with a structured mentoring program (Smink,

2003). There exists a need for the creation of structured mentoring programs as The National

Mentoring Partnership recognized that "Nearly 18 million young Americans need or want

mentoring, but only three million are in formal, high-quality mentoring relationships" (National

Mentoring Partnership, 2005). Therefore, more than 15 million children and adolescents still

need mentors, creating what is known as the "mentoring gap."

In my capstone project, I designed and implemented a mentoring program at an

underserved school in a low-income community. The program helped to bridge the mentoring

gap that exists by creating one-on-one mentoring relationships with seven college students and

eight elementary school students ranging in age from 6-12 that attend an after school program. In

the evaluation component of the project, I explored the following research questions: What is the

impact of service learning on higher education students who participate in a mentoring program

with underserved youth? What is the impact on the youth in this program? This study assessed

the perceived outcomes of the mentoring program from both the mentors' and mentees'

perspectives. In this project, I conducted a qualitative interview study, inviting a sample of the

mentors and mentees to take part in an interview to discuss the experiences they had with the

program. With the findings, I evaluated the effectiveness of the program and provided

recommendations to improve the program in the future integrating both the data and literature. In

order to shape the study effectively, I will first review the literature related to mentoring

underserved youth and service learning in higher education.

Literature Review

Service learning Positive Developmental Outcomes

Improved cognitive development. One of the major impacts of participating in service

learning for higher education students is improved cognitive development. Cognitive

development can be measured in many more complex ways than simply measuring students'

GPAs or grades (Wang & Rodgers, 2006). Multiple researchers have found that service learning

can lead to increased cognitive development in terms of critical thinking and problem solving

abilities (Joseph et al., 2007; Wang & Rodgers, 2006). In order to measure a more complete

picture of cognitive development as a result of service learning, Wang and Rodgers (2006)

utilized MER, a reliable production measure of the Perry Scheme. The Perry Scheme is a

theoretical framework, which describes nine levels of complexity of cognitive development and

the ways in which students make meaning. These principles of cognitive development instruction

do not limit cognitive development solely to grades or knowledge of course content, but extends

it to students making meaning of knowledge and valuations. Seventy-two students from six

service learning courses participated in this study, which consisted of a quasi-experimental

pretest-posttest design. Using MER as the measure, the finding was that students thinking and

overall reasoning ability became more complex after taking a service learning course (Wang &

Rodgers, 2006).

Not only have researchers found that reasoning ability improves when students

participate in service learning, but also that critical thinking and problem solving ability improve

as well. Joseph et al. (2007) utilized a self-report survey given to 150 students one time instead

of a pretest posttest design using MER. Using statistical analysis, the researchers found that

service learning was marginally beneficial in improving cognitive reasoning skills, since many

students reported that their critical thinking and problem solving abilities were enhanced.

However, self-report studies that solely utilize student perceptions of improvement lead to

questions of validity, but improved cognitive development has also been found by a number of

other well-designed studies.

Students' improved critical thinking and problem-solving ability results in improved

academic performance, which is another positive outcome of service learning. Celio et al. (2011)

utilized meta-analytic techniques in order to compare students participating in service learning

and students not participating in service learning. Celio et al. (2011) performed a meta-analysis

of 62 studies involving 11,837 students. The criteria for inclusion was that the study had to

appear before 2008, evaluate a service learning program that appropriately integrates service

with academics, involve students at all levels of education and use a control group and control effect sizes. Celio et al. (2011) found that students participating in service learning demonstrated significant improvements in academic performance with a mean effect size of 0.43, which they note is statistically significant and is indicative of cognitive development.

In comparison, Yorio and Ye (2012) also confirmed these findings, expanding cognitive development to include problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, writing skills, management skill development, grade point average and course performance. They also utilized meta-analytic techniques in order to compare students participating in service learning and students not participating in service learning. The sample included studies published ranging from 1993 to 2010 with 5,495 subjects overall throughout the various studies. After conducting the meta-analysis, Yorio and Ye (2012) found that service learning positively impacts cognitive development. They extended the finding by providing an explanation for the improved cognitive development. The researchers asserted that service learning provides opportunities for students to learn from others different from themselves in a new and challenging setting.

Improved cognitive development is also reflected in degree completion and retention (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013; Simonet, 2008; Wolff & Tieney, 2006), which are both linked to service learning. Service learning provides an opportunity for increased student engagement, which leads to student retention. It provides chances for students to apply course content knowledge to work towards solving complicated social issues and enables authentic engagement in issues related to real life (Simonet, 2008; Wolff & Tieney, 2006). This engagement is what can lead to retention as Lockeman and Pelco (2013) revealed. They utilized a quantitative non-experimental ex post facto research design gathering data about 3,458 full time undergraduate students from the university's Office of Planning and Decision Support, the Integrated

Postsecondary Education Data System and the Graduation Rate Survey. After analyzing the data

the researchers found that service learning positively impacts students' learning and success, as

the service learning students "earned more credits, had a higher average college GPA, and they

graduated at a significantly higher rate than did non-service learning students, despite having

greater financial need while enrolled" (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013, p. 18). The strength of these

results reveals the impact that service learning can have on increased cognitive development.

Implementing a program with retention implications is especially crucial in a time when

only approximately 50% of all students who enroll in colleges and universities complete their

degree within six years of enrolling (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013). Since college completion rates

are disconcertingly low, it is time that colleges and universities look towards other ways to retain

students, and service- learning appears to have such an impact. It not only has an impact on

degree completion, but on students' developing key critical thinking and problem solving skills

which can create more well- rounded citizens overall. All of these findings connecting service

learning to improved cognitive development make the value of service learning clear for higher

education students.

Improved interpersonal/social development. Not only does service learning lead to

improved cognitive development, but also to college students' social or interpersonal

development. Einfeld and Collins (2008) found gains in civic engagement, social justice and

multicultural competence, which are all interlaced with interpersonal development. The

researchers specifically examined a university sponsored AmeriCorps Program through a

constructivist theoretical perspective. They interviewed 9 participants following a semi-

structured protocol selected through purposive sampling. After analysis, they found that the

students developed in three major areas, including social justice orientation, multicultural

competence, and civic engagement. Students developed multicultural competence with an increased tolerance for diversity and empathy, as the service learning experience brought them into contact with marginalized populations. Participants communicated a commitment to sustained civic engagement post graduation. This sustained civic engagement matters because in a democracy we need sympathetic citizens who are free to make their own choices and are committed to the betterment of society. This evidence suggested that service learning encourages students to change society by envisioning a better world and promoting the public good.

Expanding these findings further, Celio et al. (2011) found through their meta-analysis mentioned earlier that students participating in a service learning program had gains in social skills and civic engagement, with a mean effect size of 0.30 and 0.27 respectively, which the researchers note are both statistically significant. Yorio and Ye (2012) through their meta-analysis cited previously specifically found that service learning positively impacts students understanding of social issues. Students gained an understanding and tolerance for others through their experience at the service learning site (Yorio & Ye, 2012).

Furthermore, one of the major areas included in interpersonal development is moral awareness (Yorio & Ye, 2012). Interestingly, the findings in regards to the impact of service learning on moral development are mixed (Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008; Lies et al., 2012). Education involves a moral and civic imperative and community service forces students to encounter moral issues. Service learning therefore implicitly aims to teach moral reasoning (Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008). Utilizing the Defining Issues Test, the Service Learning Outcome Scale and the Moral Justification Scale, Bernacki and Jaeger (2008) performed a pre and posttest design to study 46 students in service learning and non-service learning sections of comparable courses. Through analysis they found that the scores on moral development did not change

significantly and they attributed this to the limited single semester service learning experience, which might not be long enough to effect moral development (Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008). However, the study did reveal in the self-reports that students became more compassionate, had a greater understanding of social issues and possessed a greater belief in their ability to make the world a better place in comparison to the students in non-service learning courses, which could all be a precursor to moral development changes (Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008).

In comparison to Bernacki and Jaeger (2008) who did not find a statistical difference, Lies et al. (2012) did find a significant statistical difference utilizing the same Defining Issues Test. They performed a pre-post quasi-experimental design studying 76 students that participated in service learning and 68 students that did not. The service learning group displayed significantly higher scores post-test in moral reasoning in comparison to the non-service learning group (Lies et al., 2012). The differences in findings between these two studies may have been attributed to the design of the service learning project. Bernacki and Jaeger (2008) studied a semester-long weekly service, while Lies et al. (2012), studied a more intensive eight week summer service project integrated with a continuing reflection taking place throughout the fall semester. Even though the findings are mixed and full moral development has not occurred in some studies, the link is still strong, making the value of service learning evident. Overall college students' experienced increased interpersonal development as a result of participating in service and this interpersonal development is spurred by the intrapersonal development that occurs at the same time.

Improved intrapersonal development. Finally service learning can also have a significant impact on a college students' intrapersonal development, including the formation of an identity, self-authorship (Day, 2009; Jones & Abes, 2004; Meyers, 2009) and improved self-

esteem (Celio et al., 2011; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Jones and Abes (2004) examined the influences

of service learning on college students' identity development and self-authorship extending the

research by analyzing the enduring influences, rather than just the short-term impact in

comparison to the other studies (Jones & Abes, 2004). The researchers performed a

constructivist study interviewing 8 participants who had completed a service learning course 2-4

years before the study. After the analytic process of generalizing themes and categories, the

finding was that service learning did in fact have an enduring influence that allowed for the

construction of a more integrated identity. This was revealed through the openness the students

portrayed in regards to new ideas and experiences, the complexity with which students thought

about their self and relationships with others, and shifts in future commitment and social

responsibility (Jones & Abes, 2004). They also found that self-authorship was fostered through

service learning. Self-authorship involves taking personal authority over one's identity and

internally creating one's identity rather than allowing others to shape it. For the service learning

students in this study, the service of others became integral to self as it promoted reflection on

their own beliefs (Jones & Abes, 2004).

In addition to observing that service learning has an impact on identity development and

self-authorship, similarly, it improves personal insight and self-esteem. As referenced earlier

through their meta-analysis, Celio et al. (2011) also confirmed the improvement in self-esteem

through service learning participation as they found significant gains in students' attitudes

towards self with a mean effect size of 0.28, which the researchers note was statistically

significant. Yorio and Ye (2012) specifically examined personal insight, which is how one

perceives themselves in various environments, including identity, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

After performing the meta-analysis mentioned previously the researchers also found that service

learning positively impacts the personal insight of the students participating in the service (Yorio & Ye, 2012).

Throughout various studies the researchers found multiple benefits at once revealing that the effects are not isolated to one category of development, but rather are occurring simultaneously. Three major themes appeared to emerge throughout the literature. Aspects of cognitive development increase along with various personal and social aspects of development at the same time. Service learning can be the bridge that brings academic achievement and personal growth together, shaping a more integrated identity, which then can inspire commitments to socially responsible work (Day, 2009). Meyers (2009) confirms the personal development that occurs as a result of service learning and how such development can lead students to be agents for social change. Such personal development can be achieved through the reflection process as it leads to improved self- awareness, a better understanding of personal values and a grander appreciation of differences (Meyers, 2009). Here we see the overlap between personal and social development of college students. The personal and academic growth, which leads to social action, makes service learning valuable to not only the student, but in service of the public good as well.

Mentoring Underserved Youth Within Service Learning

Even though much is known about the general benefits of service learning for higher education student, much less is known about the specific form of service learning addressed in this study--students who mentor underserved youth. A few significant studies have looked at mentoring within a service learning context. In one study, the researcher performed a qualitative investigation in order to delve into a mentor's experience through a service learning course. Banks (2010) analyzed essays which were written based on classmate interviews and a required

journal by 25 college women enrolled in a middle school adolescent development course. They served as mentors to 22 middle school girls in the GO-GIRL Program, which encourages girls to participate in math and science. Following qualitative analysis of the essays, several themes emerged including valuing the setting, recognizing culture, affirmation of abilities and career guidance. Having a single sex setting allowed the mentors to feel less pressure and having minority mentees they began to become more aware of racial and socioeconomic differences. The students also developed in their self-confidence and provided them with experiences that could help them in their future professional career.

In addition to benefits derived from mentoring middle school girls through service-learning, another study found that mentoring high school students in a high poverty area also provided benefits for the mentor. Hughes et al. (2012) specifically looked at whether participation in a service learning mentoring program affected students learning surrounding issues of poverty and social inequities. They performed a journal entry analysis of 29 undergraduate and 3 graduate students enrolled in a service learning course entitled *High-Poverty Youth: Improving Outcomes* at a private elite university in the Southeast. In the journals, students were guided through Kolb's Learning cycle in order to connect the mentoring with classroom learning. Hughes et al. (2012) used purposive sampling to choose 10 of the 32 mentors' journals that were representative of the total range of experiences. The researchers also interviewed 26 of the mentees at the end of the semester in order to verify the mentors' account. After using the constant-comparative method, the researchers found themes related to issues of poverty. Students were able to recognize and become more aware of racial and economic disparity, they recognized the low-quality education at public schools in urban areas, while still recognizing the assets that existed, they began to come up with strategies to mitigate the effects

of poverty, they became more aware of their own life and privilege and they recognized their own stereotypes.

The benefits derived from mentoring underserved youth were also revealed in another study where the researchers specifically looked at college students who mentored underserved youth ages 10-18 through a service learning course. Weiler et al. (2013) surveyed 390 students in the Campus Corps program and 258 students who did not participate in the program to use as a comparison group. A quasi-experimental research design was used to measure civically related outcomes. They utilized the Civic Attitudes Scale, the Community Service Self-Efficacy Scale, Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale and the Civics Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire. After analyzing the results the researchers found that serving as mentors through Campus Corps was associated with significantly higher scores on all measures including civic attitudes and action, self-efficacy as related to community service, problem solving skills, diversity and social justice attitudes and leadership.

Another benefit of mentoring underserved youth appears to be that students improved communication skills and learning. Washburn-Moses, Fry and Sanders (2014) specifically hoped to determine what was the impact of the experience on students learning. They utilized multiple data sources in order to evaluate the impact on a group of 20 undergraduate students. The researchers gave the students a survey known as the Motivation to Volunteer Scale, which is a 28-item scale used to understand why the college student chose to take part in service learning. They also analyzed structured writings called Diagnostic Learning Logs in order to witness the student growth, if any, throughout the mentoring process. Then they also administered an end of the year focus group in order to expand their knowledge about the students' evaluation of the experience, asking students to describe and assess it. The researchers triangulated the sources

through logical analysis and found three common themes that reveal the positive outcomes that result from participating in a service learning experience mentoring underserved youth. The first theme was that students participating demonstrated an understanding of the diversity and difficulty of the lives of the youth mentees. The second theme was that participants chose to take part because they felt it would be a challenge and enhance their overall learning. The final theme was that communication was the main skill that the students believed improved throughout the experience. Other skills mentioned included listening and remaining positive with non-judgmental responses. Not only does mentoring have a positive effect on the mentor, but it also has an effect on the mentee as well.

Impact of Mentoring for the Underserved Youth

A few significant studies examined the benefits of mentoring underserved youth for the mentee (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). However, most of the literature does not specifically look at college students mentoring underserved youth, but rather adults in the surrounding community. Rhodes, Grossman and Resch (2000) studied 559 underserved youth ranging in age from 10-16 participating in the Big Brother Big Sister Program. The participants were randomly assigned to a control group, who were not assigned a mentor, and a treatment group, who were assigned a mentor. The researchers administered questions at the beginning of the study and then 18 months later. The measures included, parent relationships through the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment Scale, scholastic competence through a six-item subscale of the Self-Perception Profile of Children, grades and attendance by verbal confirmation, school value through an 18-item measure asking students to value the information they learn in school on a 4-point scale, and self-worth through a six-item subscale of the Self-Perception Profile for Children. After analysis of the results the researchers found that

students with a mentor had improved outcomes in perceptions of parental relationships,

scholastic competence and school attendance. They found that mentoring did not directly affect

self-worth, values of school and grades, but may have been mediated by improved perceptions of

parental relationships and scholastic competence. Rhodes, Grossman and Resch (2000) believe

that their findings reveal how the role modeling and support of the mentor can truly influence

cognitive and behavioral outcomes of underserved youth whether directly or indirectly.

     Not only have researchers found that perceptions of parental relationships, scholastic

competence and school attendance improve when underserved youth have a mentor, but

academic achievement as well. Thompson and Kelly-Vance (2001) also evaluated the impact of

mentoring through the Big Brother Big Sister Program and specifically focused on the academic

achievement of underserved youth through a quasi-experimental design. The researchers

employed an individually administered achievement instrument, rather than solely looking at

grades to measure achievement. They administered the Kaufman Test of Educational

Achievement Brief Form, which tests reading, math and science, as well as the Kaufman Brief

Intelligence Test to control for cognitive ability. The test was administered prior to the study and

then eight to nine months after the first administration to both a treatment group, which were 12

male youth with a mentor, and a control group, which were 13 male youth without a mentor. The

youth ranged in age from approximately 8-16. Following analysis of the data, Thompson and

Kelly-Vance (2001) found that having a mentor positively impacted academic achievement.

After measuring the composite score, the boys with a mentor in the treatment group scored

significantly higher. The researchers believe the higher scores resulted from the mentors being

able to give individual attention to the youth and provide them with a positive role model.

Mentoring underserved youth through service learning clearly has positive outcomes for both college students and youth. Throughout the literature it is clear that mentors experienced improved civic attitudes, increased problem solving skills (Weiler et al., 2013), increased understanding of diversity (Banks, 2010; Hughes et al., 2012; Washburn-Moses, Fry & Sanders, 2014; Weiler et al., 2013), increased self-confidence (Banks, 2010), and improved communication skills (Washburn-Moses, Fry & Sanders, 2014). Youth experienced improved outcomes in perceptions of parental relationships, scholastic competence and school attendance (Rhodes, Grossman & Resch, 2000), as well as academic achievement (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). With the benefits of service learning and mentoring underserved youth clearly established, this evidence serves as the foundation, and the motivation which inspired me to create a mentoring program where college students mentor underserved youth. In the next part of this proposal, I will describe the program and the metrics I used to determine the impact for students and for youth.

Methods

For my project I created and implemented a mentoring program at a low-income school in an underserved community. Through the program, I helped to close the mentoring gap and gave more children and college students the chance to be productive and beneficial members of society. Having a standard mentoring program that trains and supports mentors throughout the relationship is critical for obtaining positive child outcomes and preventing harm that could potentially occur if the relationship turns out to be ineffective. With the importance of mentoring programs and relationships clearly outlined, I created my own program that could help to empower youth in the surrounding community. The program is school-based, meaning it solely operates at the elementary school within the context of their after school program. However, it is

important to note that school-based mentoring is not simply a tutoring program. The primary

goal for the mentor and mentees time spent together is the development of a trusting relationship,

not simply to aid in academic performance. Academic performance may improve as a result of

the relationship, but not be the direct focus.

Seven college students who signed up through their service learning center served as

mentors in the Fall 2015 semester. I introduced the program to all of the service learning classes

on campus and posted flyers to recruit the mentors. After being recruited, I matched them one-

on-one in a mentoring relationship with second to sixth grade students at an elementary school in

a low-income community during their after school program on Wednesdays from 3:30-5:30 pm.

One of the mentors was not matched one-on-one, but rather with two twin sisters since she

connected to both and we did not think it was fair to choose between the sisters. Their after

school program runs everyday and has a total of 40 students who participate. I provided a

training at the beginning of the semester for the mentors and included topics such as: what makes

a quality mentor, liability issues, communication skills, and the do's and don'ts of mentoring

(see Appendix B). I asked the mentors to evaluate the training and all of them said that it was

helpful and informative and they had no suggestions for improvement. Also, during the training

mentors filled out a CORI background check given by the elementary school in order to proceed.

After mentors were cleared and the program began, I developed a curriculum with activities for

the mentors and mentees to do together during the curriculum activity time, with themes such as

anger management, teamwork and self-awareness (see Appendix C). During the after school

program, mentors and mentees have snack together, then they participate in the curriculum

activity together, then they do homework together, and finally they end with physical activity or

computer lab. During the curriculum time mentors and mentees are separated from the rest of the

students in the program who do not have mentors. Every week, I checked in verbally with the

pairs to make sure everything was going smoothly and I attended at least the beginning of the

program to supervise.

The last day of the program for the mentors and mentees was December 9, 2015. Upon

completion of the program I conducted a qualitative interview study, inviting five of the mentors

and six of the mentees to take part in a 30-45 minute interview to discuss the experiences they

had with the program (see Appendix A for the full interview protocol). I used non-random

purposive selection since a subset of the seven mentors and eight mentees were selected to

receive an invitation to participate. All mentors and mentees accepted the initial invitation. I

initiated contact with the college students by using the list of the students in the mentoring

program that I piloted and I had them sign an informed consent form that explained their rights

as a participant and made certain they realized that they could withdraw from the study at any

time. However, I did not initiate contact with the mentees' parents. The supervisor of the after

school program initiated contact with the mentees' parents and asked the parents to read and sign

the informed consent for the mentees if they wanted their child to participate. The youth were

also presented with a minor assent form so that they understood and agreed to participate. The

mentee was informed that if they agreed, they could still stop the interview at any time, even if

the parent signed the informed consent.

By using qualitative research methods for this study, I was better able to understand the

mentors and mentees experiences with the program and the relationship they formed. For this

project I was operating under the constructivist paradigm because I was aiming to understand the

mentors and mentees multiple constructions of meaning. The data collection was personal and

interactive and looked to understand the participants' experiences. Every student perceived the

mentoring program from his or her own perspective and qualitative methods through

constructivism allowed me to capture these different experiences. As Mertens (2015) described,

constructivism posits that there are multiple, socially constructed realities and all meaning is

fundamentally interpretative. The knowledge was socially constructed through the participants

and I, the investigator, in the research process.

During the interview mentees who range in age from 6-12 were asked age-appropriate

questions that focused on their experiences with their mentor, the changes, if any, they see in

their school performance, and an evaluation of the mentoring program itself (see Appendix A).

They were asked specifics about what they did and talked about with their mentor during their

weekly meetings, what their favorite part of the program was, and if they looked up to their

mentor as a role model. The mentees were considered a vulnerable population because they were

under the age of 18, but they did not experience greater than minimal risk.

Mentors were asked a longer series of questions that focus on their experiences with their

mentee, the changes, if any, they saw in their mentee, the changes they saw in themselves

personally and civically, and an evaluation of the mentoring program itself (see Appendix A).

They were asked what they expected to gain from the program initially and if they believe they

made a difference in their mentees' life.

All identifying information for participants was kept confidential. Participants were not

exposed to any more risk of harm or discomfort than ordinarily encountered in daily life. The

information collected from the interviews was used for research purposes only. To protect

identities, the participants' actual names were not used in the report of the findings. The

participants' information included identifiers initially, but the identifiers were then masked

through coding. The data was kept secure on a laptop computer and will be destroyed 6 months to 2 years after completion of the project.

Participants did not receive incentives, inducements or rewards for participation in interview study and there were no penalties for non-participation. This experience gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on the meaningful relationship they developed throughout the semester and the impacts it had on them. This study assessed the perceived outcomes of the mentoring program from both the mentors' and mentees' perspectives. This project contributed to my own knowledge, as well as organizational knowledge about the best way to implement and run a mentoring program and the benefits that can result from participating for both the mentor and mentee.

To analyze the data collected, I transcribed the interviews in order to apply prevailing methods of coding qualitative data (Saldana, 2015). I conducted line-by-line coding to identify themes. My findings presented in the next section were based off of these themes and influenced the recommendations.

Findings

In order to assess the mentoring program and the impacts it had on both the mentors and mentees, I interviewed five mentors as well as their corresponding six mentees, since one mentor was matched with two twin sisters. In the interviews, the mentees discussed their mentor qualities, what they did with their mentor weekly, as well as providing an evaluation of the program itself. Similarly, the mentors discussed what they did during their weekly interactions with their mentee including their expectations, the relationship formation and communication process, as well as the activities they participated in. They also discussed their perceptions of their mentee outcomes, as well as their own self-perception of their service learning outcomes in

personal growth, community awareness and academic connection. Finally, they also provided an evaluation of the program itself. After analyzing the data from both the mentors and mentees, several common themes emerged related to their experiences. The mentors and mentees had many shared experiences and responses, as well as responses that diverged significantly depending on their own personal relationship and perception.

Mentee Interview Findings

Mentee perceptions of weekly interactions. One category of questions posed to the mentees was regarding what the mentees said they did during their weekly interactions, especially what they liked doing most together. When asked what they have been doing with their mentors during their weekly meetings, the mentees revealed how they did athletics, art and relational activities together. As Jason summed up, "We painted our hands, did homework, talked about our favorite commercials and played football and other games together." Then when asked what activities the mentees liked doing most with their mentor most of the mentees mentioned the curriculum activities. Specifically, Robert liked the cupcake activity, Ashley liked any of the game curriculum activities, and Kayla and Jason specifically liked the handcuff activity, where mentors and mentees were tied together by their hands and they had to complete different challenges together in order to help the students learn about the importance of teamwork. Even though a majority liked the curriculum activities the most, Joseph mentioned not liking the curriculum activities as he stated:

> We really didn't like doing like the activities in the thing, but we liked to play soccer. I really don't like doing that stuff. For me it's kind of boring and I don't like have the patience to do it. We liked playing just the sports. I really like game activities and doing the games, but I never really liked coloring.

This comment reveals that he preferred game curriculum activities or simply playing sports, over the crafts. Since others did enjoy crafts, this indicates that mentees seem to vary widely in their preferred activities. Other activities that the mentors and mentees participated in together were relational, such as talking or doing homework together. Discussion seems central to the mentor/mentee relationship. When asked what they talk about with their mentor, their answers varied, but included their different interests, and telling stories about what's happening in school and life. Joseph described, "We would like talk about like soccer players and like sports stuff" and Julia stated, "Like if we were sad she would talk about what was going on."

In addition to the content of what was discussed, mentees were also asked if they found it easy to talk to their mentor. All mentees said that they found it easy to talk to their mentors. Joseph described, "Yeah it was kind of fun to like talk to him…he was nice and easy to talk to" and Kayla expanded, "Yes because she's understandable. Like she understands me." This reveals that effective relationships must have been formed in order for the mentees to feel comfortable enough to open up and talk to their mentor.

Mentee perceptions of mentor qualities. Another category of questions that the mentees were asked was related to mentor qualities. Mentees were asked to tell us what their mentor was like, if they are happy with their mentor, and if they look up to their mentor. Mentees were first asked to talk about what their mentor was like. The most common quality mentioned by all of the mentees was that their mentor was fun. A majority also stated that their mentor was nice or kind. Jason affirmed this finding stating: "She was a good mentor. We did a lot of fun stuff together. We did *a lot* of fun stuff together."

Mentees were asked not only what their mentor was like, but also if they were happy with the time they spent with their mentor. All of the mentees said yes they were happy with reasons

ranging from the fact that their mentor was a nice person, or that they were fun to hang out with, which overlaps with the qualities the mentees mentioned above. In addition to being happy with their mentor, mentees were also asked if they looked up to their mentor as a role model. All of the mentees said yes with the major reason once again being that they were a kind/nice person. Kayla affirmed, "Yes, because I want to be like her growing up as a kind person." This is reminiscent of the findings of Thompson and Kelly-Vance (2001) as they emphasized the importance of having a role model and the ways it appeared to impact the student's academic achievement. Rhodes, Grossman and Resch (2000) also found that the role modeling influenced cognitive and behavioral outcomes whether directly or indirectly. Although the present study did not necessarily examine the effects of the role modeling, the previous studies reveal some of the positive outcomes that could result since we did find that mentees looked up to their mentor. However, when asked if he looked up to his mentor, Robert said no. When asked the reasons, he said that there is no reason, he would not expand any further. This could be attributed to his lack of understanding of the question. Robert was more difficult to engage because he was shy and has social anxiety, so it is unfortunate I could not probe further into the reasons.

      Mentee perceptions of academic improvement. When asked if their mentor helped them improve in school, mostly all of the mentees said yes with the major theme being homework help. This self-perceived finding mirrors what Thompson and Kelly-Vance (2001) found in their study. They found that having a mentor positively impacted academic achievement. Even though the students in the present study were not tested on their academic achievement before and after, the self-perceived improvements could impact their overall academic performance. The mentors helped their mentees with their homework during a designated time of the after school program. Ashley specifically said that her mentor also helped

her stay focused as she states, "Yeah, by staying focused in class. Like if I don't stay focused she tells me." Jason expanded, "She helped me with homework, math. She teached me how to be good in school...More better." Joseph, however, did not have his mentor help him with homework so he said that his mentor did not help him improve in school. This may indicate the need to make certain that mentors are helping their mentee with their homework, to serve as a role model in teaching them that completing homework is important, as well as help the mentees improve in an area they may be struggling in.

Mentee perceptions of overall program. The final category of questions that mentees were asked were in regards to the overall program, including what their favorite part of the program was and what they would change about the program. When asked what their favorite part of the program was a majority of the mentees said playing games and sports. As Julia described, "When we went to the gym because she would always play games with us." In contrast, Kayla did not mention a part of the program, her favorite part was her mentor coming all the time. It was not just the activities themselves, but being able to do everything with her mentor, as she stated: "Her coming because she would like help me if I had trouble and all that and … she made me laugh."

When asked what they would change about the visits or activities, a couple of the mentees did not respond. A few other mentees mentioned that they would like their mentors to stay for longer periods of time as Ashley stated, "That it can be twice a week" and Kayla affirmed, "That they could stay the whole school year." This indicates that the mentees really enjoy the program and time they spend with their mentor. Robert stated that he would like to do the same thing that he did, especially more cupcake activities. Joseph gave a suggestion, stating that he wants more games to do for the curriculum activities since he found some of the art

activities boring. Even though there were a variety of activities each time, this reveals that we may need to still provide more alternatives to cater to different interests. Toward the end of the interview, Kayla indicated that she would like to have a field trip with the mentors and get a tour of the college to see what it is like. This indicates that the having a college student mentor does impact the mentees view of college positively and could affect their future aspirations of obtaining a college education.

In summary, the mentees clearly like to spend time with their mentor, they look up to their mentor as a role model, and they enjoy the program overall. This suggests that the program was successful in having an impact on the mentee and therefore such programs can have immense value for underserved youth. Whether the impact is lasting could be examined in future studies, but the current study truly does reveal the importance of future programs being implemented to help close the mentoring gap.

Mentor Interview Findings

Mentor perceptions of weekly interactions. Throughout the interviews mentors were asked questions in regards to their weekly interactions, including what they hoped to gain by becoming involved in the mentoring program, how they perceived the weekly activities, as well as how they perceived the ongoing process of relationship formation and communication with their mentee.

Mentor expectations. When asked what they hoped to gain by becoming involved in the mentoring program all of the mentors mentioned the common theme of helping, whether it was helping the mentees with homework, social skills, being a good role model, or helping to shape their mentees view about college. As Rebecca stated:

I've never really been close with a younger person that wasn't my family. So I was excited to get to know someone and help shape their views about what it is like to be a college student and give them someone to look up to.

While the mentors in the present study emphasized being able to help, the mentors in the Washburn-Moses, Fry and Sanders (2014) study participated because they felt it would be a challenge and enhance their learning. This difference could have been attributed to the fact that the students in Washburn-Moses et al. (2014) study were all education majors and were hoping to learn from the experience. The mentors in the current study were not all in a teacher education program, but from all different disciplines and were therefore only looking to "help" the children in the community rather than enhance their learning.

Mentor perceptions of activities. When asked what the mentors have been doing with their mentees during their weekly meetings all of the mentors said homework, talk and activities. When asked what activities the mentors and mentees liked doing most together a couple of the mentors said the art activities, while the others said gym or sports. Tom described their favorite activity of gym and sports as he stated, "He really enjoyed playing any sports, whether it was football, soccer, or basketball. So he was looking forward every time to being able to go to the gym." In contrast, Jessica revealed how they really enjoyed the art activities as she described:

She likes to draw a lot. Whenever there is an artsy activity to do we would always do that because she loved to give them to me because she was very sentimental like that. She liked to read and write and just express her feelings that way.

This indicates that the mentors and mentees had varying interests that they enjoyed and it is really important to make sure that the mentors and mentees can bond on the same interests.

Mentor perceptions of relationship formation and communication. When asked what it was like to get to know their mentee the major theme that emerged was easy and fun. As Jessica exclaimed:

It was fun. Within the second or third week she started telling me everything like she
didn't care that she didn't really know me, she just kind of shared everything with me...I
could tell she trusted me, which was like a nice feeling.

Rebecca also confirmed it was fun, but for different reasons, as her opinion about her

mentee changed, as she stated:

It was fun because my opinion about her changed from the beginning to the end because
in the beginning she was very outgoing and I was like oh she seem like a tough girl, well
not tough, she was only 12, but like intense in that way. But when I got to know her she
was really like emotional in that way. I learned that her feelings can be hurt like really
easily but she didn't like give off that vibe from the beginning. She was a lot more of an
emotional person than I expected which like I relate to and enjoyed.

This may indicate that their relationship truly deepened over time as she made

assumptions upon her first interaction with her mentee. Then as time went on, she realized there

was so much more to her mentee than she initially expected.

Tom mentioned interactions with his mentee being awkward at first, but as time went on

he got more comfortable. This awkwardness is to be expected and common in interactions

between a mentor and mentee who are not acquainted. This is reminiscent of Washburn-Moses,

Fry and Sanders' (2014) study, who found that communication was the main skill that the

students believed had improved throughout the experience. Communication may be difficult at

first, but it improves over time and becomes more comfortable. Meeting new people, especially

if you have a shy personality can be difficult for many people, as Tom stated:

It was awkward at first because I am a little shy at first, but then after we started coming
to the program every week we started to get more comfortable with each other and we
talked more about our likes and interests and hobbies.

In contrast, Melissa said that getting to know her mentee started out really easy, but then

got more difficult over time. This may indicate an unsuccessful relationship since quality

relationships should deepen over time. She had initially thought they bonded, as she stated:

Well at first I thought it was really easy because I thought that him and I like bonded over blocks or something that we were making. But over time it got a little more difficult. I thought we bonded at first, but then I recognized it was hard for us to get any closer.

When prompted further she explained that it was really about the student's personality, since he was socially awkward, which may be attributed to the fact that has social anxiety that keeps him from connecting deeply to others.

When asked how they knew they had developed an effective relationship with their mentee, a few of the mentors mentioned how their mentee was always excited to see them and would run up to them and then not want them to leave. As Jessica described the excitement, "She remembered who I was just after the first day of sitting down and talking to me and then she always was excited to see me and everything." Rebecca expanded this feeling by mentioning how her mentees never wanted her to leave:

On the last day she wrote me a card and it was really nice, she was I don't want you to leave and she just never really wanted me to go which is sweet. They said they would never forget what we like all did together and so it made an impact on them, and I felt the same way.

Not only was it the excitement and never wanting them to leave, Tom discussed the interests they bonded on and how that helped him recognize that they developed an effective relationship. Interests provide a common ground on which mentors and mentees can bond, as Tom described:

I think he saw me as a really good role model and good person and he liked me and we had things in common, and liked the same color, food, sports. He kind of was really happy that I knew soccer and he always really wanted to play soccer with me and that's kind of how our relationship became strong.

In contrast, Melissa did not really know if she developed an effective relationship. Since the relationship got more difficult over time, it appears the relationship may not have been the

most successful. She initially thought they bonded, causing the initial match to form, and then

the relationship was hard to maintain because of his social awkwardness. As Melissa explained:

> I didn't really [develop an effective relationship], well the first day I was just sitting at
> the game table and I was just talking to him more and he was like talking to me back. So
> I just kind of thought it was there and he was showing me how he built something so I
> just guessed.

Perception of mentee outcomes. Mentors were also asked questions in regards to their

perceptions of the mentees' outcomes. They were asked questions regarding how they perceived

their mentee was preforming in school, how their mentee was doing interacting with peers, as

well as at home with relationships with their parents and siblings. Based on these perceived

outcomes, mentors were also asked if they felt they made a difference in their mentees' life.

School performance. When asked how they think their mentee is performing in school, a

couple of the mentors said they are "not too sure," but they could guess. They never asked their

mentee how they are performing in school, but rather made assumptions based off of how their

mentee did during the homework time. As Rebecca described:

> Some areas I don't really know, because she likes English and reading a lot and she said
> she always did good in that, but like math was not as her strong suit. But I would help her
> with her reading homework a lot because that was what she liked the most and I feel like
> I was able to teach her new things about that, like synonyms and metaphors.

A couple of the mentors also stated that they think their mentee does pretty/fairly well,

while Melissa was confident that her mentee was really focused and good in school. She would

look in his agenda during homework time and see whether he did his homework correct or not,

as she revealed:

> Well I would look through his planner...and he was telling me that a green check means
> that he got no wrong answers on his homework, and a blue check is one wrong answer,
> and like orange was like three wrong or something, and he had a lot of green checks so I
> think he is really focused and good, whereas a lot of other kids seem to have gotten really
> distracted on their work.

Relationships with parents and siblings. When asked how they think their mentee is handling home life and relationships with parents and siblings it seemed for the most part that none of the mentees brought up a lot about their home life so the mentors assume everything is fine. Many of the mentors felt that home life was a more private area that they felt would only be brought up if the mentee felt as though it needed to be. As Jessica described:

> I think fine, she never really brought up a lot about her home, but whenever I saw her mom and dad pick her up it seemed like they were a good and set family. I think she has a sister, but she never really brought her up a lot. If she didn't bring them up then I am assuming that everything is fine.

Interactions with peers. When asked how they think the student does interacting with peers a few of the mentors said "good," but they said their mentees can also get a little "aggressive" or argumentative. As Tom described the aggressive behavior, "Sometimes he is aggressive, but he is also friendly. I think he has a good heart, but sometimes he likes to play rough with other kids." This indicates that some of the mentees may have behavioral issues in school and could really benefit from having a positive role model. Rebecca described the argumentative side of her mentee as she stated:

> She is good. I can tell with their friends they get into little fights like arguments where they will get mad at each other, but that's kind of all girls at that age. But overall like good, and she is very protective of her sisters and sometimes they'll pretend to argue, but they'll always have each others back so they've never really had any issues.

Jessica said her mentee does really well interacting with peers and does not seem to have any problems. She revealed how her mentee likes to interact with everyone and would switch groups often, as Jessica described:

> I think good. She is willing to go mingle with anyone and she really played with a lot of people because at first she was in one group with the younger kids, but then she switched groups the third or fourth week so then I was switching groups too and I could tell that she was still fitting in with them and was talking to them and did everything with them.

Switching groups all of the time could indicate an inability to keep stable friendships, or it could just be the age where mingling with everyone is preferred over a single friend group.

Mentors' feelings of making a difference in the mentee's' life. When asked if they feel they made a difference in their mentees' life most of the mentors answered by stating that they "hope so," with reasons ranging from the fact that their mentee gained another friend to them being a good role model for their mentee. Rebecca described how she served as a positive college role model as she stated:

> I hope so, I think that it was good for them to see a college student at that age because whenever we would do an activity about future goals, they would always write go to college, get an education, and I can't say that was because of me, but I think definitely being around college kids and knowing we were at a college and doing good and coming to see them that made them want to be like me.

Mentor service learning outcomes. Mentors were also asked questions surrounding their service learning outcomes. Such outcomes include personal growth, increased community awareness and engagement, as well as academic improvement through the connections made to course content.

Personal growth. When asked if they feel as though they have grown personally as a result of participating in the mentoring program, all of the mentors believed they have even if it was just a little. For a couple of the mentors, the experience confirmed that they would like to work with kids in a school system, as Jessica described:

> I learned that, I've always liked working with kids, but ever since Junior year of high school I didn't work with them as much since I was focusing on school and then when I came here last year there was nothing really to do, but then getting back with the kids it made me remember that I love working with them.
> This is reminiscent of what Banks (2010) found in her study in which the mentoring

provided the students with an experience that could help them in their future professional career.

This career guidance and affirmation of abilities is exactly what a couple of the mentors in the present study experienced as they realized they wanted to work in a school system with children.

When asked what is something they have learned from their mentee a common theme that emerged was patience. Many of the mentors recognized that working with children requires patience, especially when teaching them unfamiliar concepts, as Rebecca described:

> I think having patience, I've always been patient, but with her I've learned that I can actually do that. When I was showing her how to read similes and metaphors, even though it is so easy for me to get it, it took a while for her so I would always just wait until she got it and I think that strengthened that part of me.

Another common theme that mentors learned from their mentee was to be open-minded. They felt as though they learned to not judge a student based on where they were from and that everyone has a different life and different experiences, as Jessica stated:

> I think to just be open minded to everything because at first, me and Rebecca were both like wow we are kind of minorities so we were kind of nervous walking in the first day. But then afterwards just talking to her, I was like it's not a big deal, she literally is just another person. These kids aren't bad people.

This is reminiscent of the study by Hughes et al. (2012) who found that students became more aware of racial and economic disparity and became more cognizant of their own life and privilege. They became more open minded about the students they were working with just like the present mentors in this study..

Melissa mentioned that she learned how to stay focused from her mentee because he was always so focused with his work, as Melissa revealed:

> Probably to stay focused because it is always good to get your work done before you play because I know he taught me that because if I wanted to go to Boston this weekend, I had to get my homework done, but if I didn't get my homework done then I couldn't have gone.

This learning reveals how not only can the mentors serve as a role model to the mentees, but there may be certain qualities of the mentees that the mentors could role model after since college students are still developing and creating themselves as well.

Community awareness/engagement. When asked if they feel they are more aware of issues in the community, the major theme that emerged was that mentors were more aware of how different it is growing up in an underserved community, but the children are still just like other typical kids, as Jessica confirmed:

> Yeah because I feel like everyone looks down on underserved communities, like oh it's a crappy town, and there's poor people and they aren't good people to be around, but those kids are just like us, but they happened to grow up in a not as safe neighborhood as some other people, and maybe with not as much money as other people, but that doesn't make them any different than us. They still act probably how I did, maybe they're a little less structured, but they still act how kids are going to act in school. I think I view the kids from the underserved community differently now. It might be a rundown town, but I feel like that shouldn't say much about the people too.

Once again, this awareness of community issues and poverty is reminiscent of what Hughes et al. (2012) found in their study as students were able to recognize and become more aware of racial and economic disparity. They recognized the low-quality education at public schools in urban areas, while still recognizing the assets that existed. They became more aware of their own life and privilege and they recognized their own stereotypes. The current study, as well as Hughes et al. (2012), revealed the importance of mentoring underserved youth in helping college students recognize issues in the community from a strengths based perspective. For most of the mentors, it was their first time working in a school system in a low-income community, so being there really opened their eyes to a new community.

Connections to academic content. When asked if they feel they can relate their experiences in the program to academic content in their classes, all of the mentors could make

some connection, even if it was for other courses they were taking and not just the course they

were receiving service learning credit for. A couple of the mentors first made connections to a

course that they were not taking for service learning credit, as Jessica described:

> I've seen some connections through the classes I'm taking, like in developmental
> psychology we were working on school aged children so I saw connections and how they
> learned to do their homework so that was helpful.

Then when prompted whether this was the class she was doing for her service learning,

she stated no. She was able to make connections to both classes which was a greater positive

academic outcome, as she stated:

> I am doing it for my Social Ethics Class. We were learning about Catholic Social
> Teachings and Human Dignity of the Person and how everyone deserves to have a
> chance... so I was kind of helping them get all of the opportunities that they can, like with
> homework and help.

This shows how service learning can be applied to various courses across various

disciplines as long as students can see and make the connections with what they are learning.

Most of the mentors were participating in service learning for their *Social Ethics* course and were

able to make connections to course content.

Tom was participating in the service learning for his *Latinos in the US* course that he

could connect back to the Latinos he was working with in the low-income community, as he

described:

> I am doing this for my Spanish course and learning about Latinos in the US. Mostly we
> talked about different races and Latinos in the community and it connects back to the
> Latinos in the underserved community we are working in.

Mentor perceptions of overall program. When asked their favorite part about the

mentoring program a couple of the mentors mentioned more intangible aspects of the program,

including being able to make a connection. These intangible aspects are the part of the program

that we hope carry through with the mentors, as Jessica described:

> I think connecting one on one with someone... You could like focus on time with them
> and like get to know them really well...You really just got to learn a lot about them like
> what they like, what they don't like and how they interact with others because you're
> focused on them.

A few of the mentors mentioned specific activities and aspects of the actual program that

they liked, including a specific activity like the balloon activity, while another mentor mentioned

the crafting and hands on activities, as well as the free time to chat, as Rebecca described:

> My favorite part was the little activities and I liked the off time we got where we could
> just sit and chat with them because that was when they would talk to you the most. I like
> the curriculum activities and I think they did help them understand because my girl was
> always interested in what the activity actually said and not just doing the actual project.

When asked what the mentors would like to change about the visits or activities a couple

of the mentors mentioned feeling sorry for the students who did not have a mentor. There are

over forty students who participate in the after school program and only eight of them were able

to have mentors, as Melissa described:

> It seems like when the other kids would get back from the gym that they felt bad and sad
> that they weren't in. So maybe after we were done with it when they come to do
> homework you could give them the sheets for activity time or something so that they feel
> included too.

A couple of the mentors specifically mentioned changing the activities somewhat.

Catherine mentioned wanting easier activities for the younger mentees as she described:

> The children that I spent time with were in either first or second grade. I feel like the
> activities that we were to do with our buddies were sometimes harder to understand and
> explain to the younger children. Maybe having two different activities or easier
> instructions of the same activity would be helpful. Other than that I really enjoyed having
> the opportunity to spend time with my mentee.

When asked if there was any additional training they think would be helpful for them and the other mentors, all of the mentors said that it was a good training with enough info, so they do not think that they would need any more training. Then when asked if they would like to continue participating all mentors said yes, but a few of the mentors had a schedule conflict and one of the mentors was transferring. Catherine said that she could and would like to continue as she stated, "Yeah because I really like the program, I thought it was a lot of fun so I want to do it again." Toward the end of the interview, Jessica expanded further making a connection to her experiences with a mentoring program and how mentoring programs are a great idea since they have a large impact on both the mentor and mentee, as Jessica described:

> I think that it was really good thing that was added just because I like the idea of having a mentoring program for kids that need it. I just know that, it's not really like this, but when I was younger I went to the Boys and Girls Club in my town and I had like a Big Sister and they would play games with you. So it is kind of like that, but I think this is more like fulfilling because you know that you are impacting someone and helping them. Everyday when we got there they were so excited for us to be there and they didn't want us to leave so it was just so nice knowing that we were actually wanted there and that they liked having us there.

Through this research overall the findings revealed that both the mentors and mentees experienced positive outcomes from participating in the mentoring program. The mentees benefited academically and looked up to their mentor as a role model, while the mentors felt they benefited personally, civically and academically, and they also felt as though they made a difference in their mentees' life. Both the mentors and mentees seemed to like the curriculum activities, with the only suggestions being that some of the activities be made easier for the younger grades and including other different types of activities. Clearly more structured mentoring programs should be established in order to provide more youth in more communities, as well as college students, with a chance to be productive, beneficial members of society.

Recommendations

After reviewing the literature and conducting interviews, I was able to assess the impact

of mentoring underserved youth through service learning on both the mentors and mentees. I

learned how mentors felt about their mentee, their perceptions of the activities, the changes in

themselves and their perceptions of the program itself. I was also able to view the program from

the perspective of the mentees and determine areas for growth in the program. By conducting

this study, I attempted to answer the following research questions: What is the impact of service

learning on higher education students who participate in a mentoring program with underserved

youth? What is the impact on the youth in this program?

In this section, I will provide recommendations for further implementation and

improvement of the mentoring program so that the positive effects on both the mentors and

mentees can be maximized. The recommendations will be based on the current data, literature

and evidence based best practices. Ideally the next person who takes over the program will

implement some of the ideas presented here in order to improve the program in the 2016 -2017

school year. An undergraduate mentor who participated in the program this past year will run the

program and she will report to the service learning center. Mentoring through service learning

can clearly work to empower both the college student and youth to help them to become

productive and beneficial members of society. With that being said, I now present

recommendations that can be made to amplify the impacts of the program.

***Recommendation 1: Modify the mentor training to include teaching the college students how
to help younger students with homework.***

During the mentoring program, the mentor/mentee pairs follow the structure of the after

school program, which includes snack, homework, curriculum time, and then physical activity

time. During the mentor training (see Appendix B for current training outline) the students were

taught how to build relationships and communicate, but they were not taught how to help a

younger student complete homework assigned during school. Although, it must be noted that the

intention for the mentoring program is not solely to provide homework help, but is to provide

space for sustained human relationship. Since the after school program does require the students

to do homework, homework help is a concept that needs to be directly taught. Through the

process of conducting this study, I observed that helping a younger student with homework is not

something that comes naturally, especially if the college student is not an education major. One

evidence based practice that Dubois, Holloway, Valentine and Cooper (2002) found through

their meta-analysis of sixty mentoring programs is to consider recruiting mentors with education

backgrounds. The inclusion criteria for the programs examined in the meta-analysis were that the

mentoring was one-on-one, mentors were older and more experienced, mentors' official job

responsibility was not working professionally with the mentee, and mentees were younger than

nineteen. This current study fits all of these criteria and therefore some of the best practices

found, such as mentors from education backgrounds, would benefit the program.

A few of the students in the current study were not from a teacher education background

and this made them hesitant and lack confidence when it came to helping the student complete

homework. As Cannata (2006), from the Mentoring Resource Center, revealed in their handbook

entitled *Ongoing Training for Mentors*, "The overall goal of homework is to teach students to

work independently, plan effectively, get organized, and think on their own" (p. 65). The

mentor's main role is to offer support that encourages the growth of basic study skills. Here are

some questions adapted from the Mentoring Resource Center (2006) that could possibly be asked

during the homework help portion of the training in order to elicit the mentors' prior experience

with homework:

- Think back to when you had to do homework. What are the feelings you associated with having to do it? What do you remember about your homework?
- Do you think anything is different about homework today as compared to when you were in school?
- How do you think kids today feel about homework?
- Have you ever assisted a student in completing their homework?

Here are useful tips adapted from the Mentoring Resource Center (2006) that could be shared with the mentors in order to help their mentee eventually achieve homework independence:

- A mentor does not have to be an expert in a particular subject to be helpful
- Make sure the student has all the materials they need
- Make sure the student understands the directions
- A mentor may model a variety of strategies, including rechecking work, utilizing appropriate resources, focusing on one task at a time
- A mentor should be empathetic if the student is overwhelmed or nervous about the homework
- A mentor should help the student work through their homework, not give the student the answers

These tips and questions would be provided within the PowerPoint already created for the training (see Appendix B). Since many of these tips are difficult to teach, the service learning center and the next program leader should consult with a faculty from the School of Education to provide more hands on training for mentors on how to teach elementary students how to do their homework. The faculty in the education department are professionals in teaching students how to teach children, so allowing them to share their knowledge would truly benefit the mentors and enable them to better understand the best way to help. The faculty member could model the steps to take to get started with the homework and then provide scenarios of different examples that students may run into while trying to help.

If mentors are trained to help their mentees with homework by a faculty member in the School of Education, it will increase the positive effects that they have on their mentees' academic performance. In the current study, most mentees felt as though their mentor helped

them improve in school and this was mainly through the homework help provided by the after

school program. If mentors are trained in such help, this will truly amplify the impact. To

measure the effects of adding this concept to the training, the mentors will be asked an evaluative

question of whether the training was helpful in educating them on how to help students with their

homework.

Recommendation 2: Conduct reflection with the mentors in order to increase their learning personally, civically and academically.

Reflection is a key component to service learning (Banks, 2010; Hughes et al., 2012). In

the literature Banks (2010) recommends that future iterations of mentoring programs can be

intentional and systematic about fostering reflection through exercises and assignments in order

to maximize the benefits to the mentors taking part in the service learning. During the current

mentoring program, I did not have intentional reflection with the mentors and asked mentors to

talk about what they learned at the end of the semester. Students' answers to the interview

questions may have gone into more depth had they reflected on their learning and their

relationship with their mentee throughout the semester. Hughes et al. (2012) had students submit

journal entries and recommended that the entries be submitted on a weekly basis. Since as a

program, I do not want to add to the college students' workloads, I would simply recommend

informal, verbal reflection at the end of each weekly meeting before the mentors leave the

elementary school. The student leader could ask the questions and provide time for reflection.

This reflection will cost the students no extra time and will truly benefit their growth that results

from participating in the mentoring program. During reflection, Hughes et al. (2012)

recommends that we focus on solutions, not only problems, and they believe that students can

begin to come up with strategies to lessen the effects of poverty on youth and their families. This

should be incorporated into the mentor reflection questions. Some questions that should be asked

are:

- What do you notice about your mentees' engagement in activities?
- How do you think the student is doing in school, home life, and relationships with parents, siblings and peers?
- What changes do you perceive in your mentee, both positive and negative?
- What are some challenges or successes you are having with your match?
- What community issues, if any, do you notice surfacing during your time at the school? If any, how can we work to combat such issues?
- What connections do you notice between your experiences in the program and with your mentee and your course content?

Providing time for these reflection questions will also develop a form of support group

for the mentors and allow them to recognize that they are not alone in the relationship formation

process. This development of a support group is another one of the twelve best practices found in

Dubois et al.'s (2002) meta analysis. If mentors and mentees are able to share their successes and

challenges it can prevent mentor frustration and prevent mentors from ending the relationship

and dropping out of program prematurely. The student leader could determine the effectiveness

of such reflection by gauging the students' level of engagement in grappling with the issues and

topics discussed. Students should also be asked at the end of the semester whether they found the

reflection thoughtful and engaging in allowing them to reflect on their relationship and the

impacts such a relationship is having on both themselves and their mentee.

Recommendation 3: Provide more diverse, structured activities during the curriculum time, including more developmentally appropriate activities, as well as more of a mix of physical and relational activities.

The data revealed that the younger mentees in the program do struggle with harder

curriculum activities, so more developmentally appropriate activities should be provided each

time for the different age groups. The program ranges from second to sixth grade students so

different adaptations of each activity could be given, or mentors could be taught how to adapt an

activity to a different age group. This would require more time and effort by the next program

leader planning the curriculum activities in order to make certain that the activities are age appropriate for the various levels of students. Also, more physical activities to cater to different interests is recommended. Through the data, one mentee revealed how he wants more game activities rather than art activities. However, we have the larger purpose of enabling students to learn about key areas of improvement like self-esteem and teamwork, so the games must be tied to educational topics. I also recommend that the curriculum activities remain optional because as the Mentoring Resource Center (2006) revealed, effective matches allow the mentee to be the main decision maker for activities. When a mentee does not want to do a certain curriculum activity, they should not be forced to participate. We want mentees to form their own relationship and have fun. Yet, the mentor plays a major role in providing ideas, so we recommend that the mentor be informed to at least go over the activity with their mentee and encourage the importance of the activity, while then deciding together whether or not to participate.

Furthermore, Dubois et al. (2002) found that the programs that provided structured activities for mentors and mentees had a larger impact. As the Mentoring Resource Center (2006) noted, mentor and mentee pairs are challenged often with planning and deciding activities. If programs plan activities for their matches, this will eliminate the challenge. The curriculum activity time allows for structure and therefore providing more diverse activities that cater to more interests and age-levels would make an even larger impact. One potential activity that should be organized is a field trip to the college so that the mentees can experience the college environment first hand. Many of the mentees are very interested in visiting a college and learning what it is like to be a college student like their mentor. Allowing mentees to see the campus would provide them with a vision for their future, which is especially important among

underserved youth. This field trip would require resources on the part of the after school

program, as they would need transportation to the school. The mentors could give the mentees a

tour of the school and if possible the students could be allowed to eat in the cafeteria, play some

games in the gym, or even visit the sports arena to watch an event. This field trip would be

during the scheduled after school time of the two hour after school program and would be very

brief, but rewarding for the mentees. Both the mentors and mentees could evaluate their

experience at the end of the field trip in order to see if the field trip should be planned in the

future with different mentor/mentee pairs.

Recommendation 4: Expand the program to different schools on different days to increase the impact around the community.

The mentoring program is currently only located in one school in the underserved

community. With the impact of mentoring programs clearly established through the data and

literature (Banks et al., 2010; Hughes et al., 2012; Washburn-Moses et al., 2014; Weiler et al.,

2013), it is clear that such structured mentoring programs should be expanded in order to

increase the impact around the community. Rhodes, Grossman and Resch (2000) specifically

recommended the expansion of high quality mentoring programs since positive relationships

play a crucial role in helping underserved youth develop. The one area the researchers do caution

is that programs need to make certain that they have sufficient resources before expanding.

Currently, the program is in a great position to expand because it receives many resources from

after school program. The after school program believes that the mentoring program is having a

positive impact and they would like to expand as well so that more of their students in other

schools could have a mentor and truly benefit from the relationship. The after school program

serves various schools throughout the underserved community, and it operates at seven

elementary school sites. These are all of the schools that the program could potentially be expanded to.

Providing this program at various schools would also require offering the program on various days since we will need to make certain that we can find enough college students participating in service learning to serve as mentors. Many college students have busy schedules, so the more days the program can be offered the better the chances of finding more mentors available. No matter the day, the program will operate from 3:30-5:30 pm since that is when the after school program is offered. Student leaders would have to be selected at each location in order to help administer the curriculum activity at the different schools that the mentors and mentees participate in together. Other than the mentoring program curriculum activity, the mentors and mentees will be able to follow the after school program schedule at the school that they are at and the after school staff will be aware that the program is running as well. Since we have the support of the after school program, it will allow the program to more easily expand and have a larger impact on the community.

All of these recommendations put forth would truly amplify the program and allow it to have a greater positive impact on both the mentors and mentees. It is recommended that the individual who takes over the mentoring program should modify the mentor training to include teaching the college students how to help younger students with homework. Not only should the training be improved, but there should also be an added component of reflection so that the mentors can increase their learning personally, civically and academically. Furthermore, during the actual mentoring program, the pairs should be provided with more diverse, structured activities during the curriculum time, including more developmentally appropriate activities, as well as more of a mix of physical and relational activities. Since the program has clearly had

positive impacts on both the mentors and mentees participating, it is also recommended that the

program be expanded to different schools on different days to increase the impact around the

community. With all of these recommendations, the program will be in great shape to continue

creating positive relationships that will be ideally sustained over the long term.

Conclusion

Through this qualitative interview study I was able to hear the voices of the participants

and assess the perceived outcomes of the mentoring program from both the mentors' and

mentees' perspectives. In this process, I answered the following research questions: What is the

impact of service learning on higher education students who participate in a mentoring program

with underserved youth? What is the impact on the youth in this program? Through the

interviews positive perceived outcomes were found for both the mentors and mentees, which is

consistent with what was found in the literature (Banks, 2010; Hughes et al., 2012; Rhodes,

Grossman & Resch, 2000; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001; Washburn-Moses, Fry & Sanders,

2014; Weiler et al., 2013). Mentees enjoyed spending time with their mentor, looked up to their

mentor as a role model and felt their mentor helped them improve in school. The mentors

perceived they developed personally, civically and academically, and they felt they made a

difference in their mentees' life. This suggests that the program was successful in having an

impact on the mentees and mentors and therefore such programs can have immense value for

both college students and underserved youth alike.

Recommendations were created and advanced based on the literature, data and best

practices in order to maximize the benefits for both mentors and mentees who will take part in

the program in the future. A major recommendation made is that the program be expanded to

different schools on different days, as well as provide more of a variety of activities so that the benefits can be maximized. Since a major goal of the program is to help with academic improvement, it is also recommended that mentors be trained in homework help. Reflection is also a key component of service learning (Lies et al., 2012; Meyers, 2009) and therefore should be implemented in order to allow for the mentors to further develop personally, civically and academically. Hopefully further research will continue to be done on the impact of college students mentoring underserved through service learning as more programs are established.

By providing college students with opportunities to mentor underserved youth through service learning, colleges can contribute to the positive development of college students while also supporting the development of underserved youth in the community. As Weiler et al. (2013) noted, "mentoring within the context of service learning courses is rare, and yet holds great potential" (Weiler et al., 2013). With the clear benefits recognized, it is evident that establishing more programs that match college students one-on-one in a mentoring program with underserved youth could be truly beneficial in higher education. Higher education needs to solve a larger purpose in democratizing society and this mentoring program truly provides an opportunity for colleges to use the resources that they do have to serve the community. Higher education institutions must extend their resources to those who are underserved. By having its relatively privileged college students go out into the community to mentor underserved youth, the college is allowing one of its most valuable resources to truly impact the surrounding community, which also benefits its own students. The relationship is reciprocal, as the community must be viewed from an asset based perspective. The relationships created through mentoring will produce more beneficial and active citizens in both the mentor and mentee allowing us all to work together towards serving the public good.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Mentor Interview Questions

1. Any fun plans for the weekend?
2. Think about what it was like for you before you became a mentor. What did you hope to gain by becoming involved in the mentoring program?
3. How do you feel when you spend time with your mentee? How do you feel before you meet? After you meet?
4. What have you and your mentee been doing during your weekly meetings?
5. What activities do you and your mentee like doing most together? How come?
6. What would you like to change about the visits or activities?
7. What was it like to get to know your mentee? Say more about that.
8. How did you know that you had developed an effective relationship with your mentee?
9. How did your relationship deepen over time?
10. How well do think you're communicating with each other?
11. What do you and your mentee talk about?
12. How do you think the student is performing in school?
13. How do you think the student is handling home life and relationships with parents and siblings?
14. How do you think the student does interacting with peers?
15. What is something you've learned from your mentee?
16. Do you believe you made a difference in the mentee's life? How so?
17. Is there any additional training you think would be helpful for you and other mentors, such as additional training in youth development, relationship formation, communication skills, roles and responsibilities of being a mentor?
18. Would you like to continue participating in the mentoring program next year and be matched with the same student? If not, why?
19. Do you feel you have grown personally? How so?
20. Do you feel as if you are more aware of issues in the community? If so, in what way?
21. Do you feel as if you can relate your experiences to academic content in your courses? If so, in what way? If not, can you explain further?
22. Do you think other students should become involved in the mentoring program? Why or why not?
23. What was your favorite part about the mentoring program?
24. Is there anything I have not asked you that you would like to share?

Mentee Interview Questions

1. How was your weekend?
2. Tell me what your mentor is like?
3. What have you and your mentor been doing during your weekly meetings?
4. What activities do you and your mentor like doing most together?
5. What would you like to change about the visits or activities?
6. What do you and your mentor talk about?

7. Do you find it easy to talk to your mentor? If not, how come?
8. Are you happy with the time you spend with your mentor?
9. Do you look up to your mentor?
10. What have you learned about your mentor that surprised you?
11. What was your favorite part about the mentoring program?
12. Has your mentor helped you improve in school?
13. Is there anything I have not asked you that you would like to share?

Appendix B

Mentoring Program Training Outline Fall 2015

- What is Mentoring?
    - What is School-Based Mentoring?
- Need for Mentoring
    - Youth Development - 5 C's
        - Competence
        - Confidence
        - Connection
        - Character
        - Caring and Compassion
    - Issues Affecting Adolescents
        - Peer Pressure
        - Substance Abuse
        - Sexuality
        - Child Abuse and Family Violence
        - School Safety and Violence
        - Depression and Suicide
        - Nutrition and Health Care
- Impact of Mentoring on Mentee
- Impact of Mentoring on Mentor
- Qualities of Effective Mentors
    - Effective Practices of Mentors
- Do's and Don'ts of Mentoring
- Communication Skills for Building Relationships
    - Active Listening
    - Communicating with Feedback
    - Rules of Communication
- Establishing and Maintaining Boundaries
- Liability Issues
    - Confidentiality
- Termination Procedures
- Mentoring Program Specifics
    - Goals of the Program
    - Expectations of the Mentors
    - As a volunteer for a mentor program I agree to…
    - Matching and Initial Meeting
    - Activities and Curriculum
- Final Wrap-Up

Appendix C

Mentoring Program Weekly Activity Curriculum Outline - Fall 2015

Week 1: Introductions - October 7th
- Human Bingo
- Blind Spin Race
- Birthday/ Age Order
- Human Knot

Week 2: Icebreakers - October 14th
- Martian Names
- Change the World
- Handprints

Week 3: Self-Awareness - October 21st
- Smirk
- My Whole Self

Week 4: Working with Others - October 28th
- Paper Tower
- Jail Break
- Special Holiday - Halloween Activity - Black Cat Bookmarks

Week 5: Anger Management - November 4th
- The Unfair Game
- Body of Anger

Week 6: Self Discovery - November 18th
- Feeling Shot
- Personal Flag
- Special Holiday - Thanksgiving Art Activity - Hand Turkey

Week 7: Self-Esteem - December 2nd
- Balloon Bust
- Me on TV

Week 8: End of Semester Holiday Party - December 9th
- Holiday Card Making
- Holiday Cupcake Decorating

Some Activities Adapted from:

Jones, Alanna (1998). *104 activities that build: Self-Esteem, teamwork, communication, anger*

   management, self-discovery, coping skills. Richland, WA: Rec Room Publishing.

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