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MENTORING OF AT-RISK STUDENTS IN AN ELEMENTARY SETTING

by
Emily Withstandley

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
April 21, 2005

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved May 2005

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ABSTRACT

Emily Withstandley
MENTORING OF AT-RISK STUDENTS IN AN ELEMENTARY SETTING
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Dr. Ronald Capasso
Master of Arts in School Administration

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of mentoring at-risk students in grades 1-5 (n=19) using action research. Students were partnered with teachers who volunteered for the study. Data regarding frequency and duration of contact, changes in academic, social, and behavioral skills, in student perceptions of school, and reactions of the mentors was collected for five months. Mentors and mentees defined their experiences of working together. The experiences for the mentors ranged from positive to negative. All mentees reported positive feelings. Mentors, mentees, and classroom teachers provided input into the strengths and weaknesses of the mentoring program. Results demonstrated a correlation between effort on the part of the mentors and changes in attitude and performance for the mentees. Implications for the use of a mentoring program are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

Maslow determined that a child cannot be expected to attain high goals if his basic needs are not being met. Within this context of needs there must be considered the need for personal attention and human connection. The intern established a mentoring program for at-risk students in grades one through five in order to encourage each child to meet his or her potential. Teachers were paired with at-risk students to act as mentors to those students. The program worked to foster a sense of belonging and pride in self and community for the students. The study focused on the academic and behavioral achievements and improvements made by these students during the course of the year. Teachers volunteered to spend time with students at regular intervals in order to cultivate a relationship in which the teacher served as a support system. Suggested activities and timelines were provided to the teachers in order to clarify the goals of the program. Contact was monitored weekly in order to ensure integrity of the program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of mentoring at-risk students using action research. The study aimed to improve the social and academic lives of the mentees through regular interactions with their mentors. Candidates were recommended

for the program based on a range of needs. Some were individuals who had difficulty with academic performance. Other mentees were students who were identified as having difficulty forming friendships or engaging in appropriate social interactions. The intern sought to ascertain whether mentoring would have an effect on students who were in need of support in addition to what they received in the regular classroom. The study resulted in a report to inform the administration of the effectiveness of mentoring.

Definitions

A *mentor* is a special contact person who serves to support and take an interest in a student's successes and challenges.

A *mentee* is the student who receives mentoring services.

At-risk refers to students who have been identified by school officials as those in need of social, emotional, and academic support beyond that of the regular classroom.

Resiliency is a term used in reference a child's ability to recover from adverse situations.

Vulnerability refers to a child's susceptibility to the harsh circumstance one may experience.

Competence is used to describe the level of development when one effectively adapts to the environment. Reasonable successes are experienced over a period of time. It may be regarded as mental and emotional fitness.

Little Brothers/Little Sisters are terms used to identify the mentees in the national program Big Brothers Big Sisters of America.

Delimitations

The study included at-risk students in grades one through five as identified by the teachers and the guidance counselor at Whitman Elementary School in the Washington Township Public School District in Gloucester County. Mentors were teachers within the building who volunteered to take part in the study. The school guidance counselor worked with the intern to identify at-risk students and match them with appropriate mentor volunteers.

Limitations

The study was limited to voluntary participation on the part of the teacher mentors. The small number of teacher volunteers limited the number of students who could be serviced. There was likewise no way to regulate the intensity of teacher-student contact. Likewise, some effects may be long-term rather than immediate and therefore difficult to evaluate.

Setting of the Study

Washington Township, Gloucester County, was established on February 17, 1836. It is located near Route 42 near the entrance to The Atlantic City Expressway. The twenty-two and a half square miles that is Washington Township is comprised of the communities of Turnersville, Hurfville, Grenloch, Cross Keys, Mayfair, Bunker Hill, and

Chapel Heights. It is a township rich in local history. It was home to approximately twenty Native American villages. Both Turnersville and Hurfville were named for early families of the area. Washington Township was also home to the Heritage family that established the local chain of Heritage Dairy Farm Stores. General Mills, Inc. was created by the Bell family who came into the community in 1899. For many years Washington Township remained largely areas of open space and farmland. In recent years efforts have been made to preserve some of that land as much of it has become residential developments.

The original government began as a five person committee which remained the form of government for 148 years until 1985. At that time residents decided they wanted an elected mayor and five elected councilpersons. This remains the type of governing body today. The municipality provides a wide array of services including a public works department, a well-established parks and recreations division, a police department, a municipal court, youth services, and volunteer fire departments with one paid fire chief and eleven full-time firemen. Washington Township is number one in services in the county, yet it ranks twelfth in the amount of property taxes. It has become one of the top ten communities in New Jersey. The community is comprised of condominiums, townhouses, apartment complexes, and single family homes. One of the draws of the community is its proximity to Philadelphia, New York City, Delaware, and the Jersey shore. Washington Township is also known for its parks and recreational facilities including an outdoor amphitheater and for its public schools.

Washington Township is the largest community in Gloucester County with approximately 48,500 people or 25% of the population of the county. According to the most recent census information, families comprise the greatest percentage of Washington Township with 81% of its residents. The average family size is 3.38 people. Of those families 84% are married-couple families. The median family income is \$74,661 which is considerably higher than the United States average of \$50,046. At least 89.9% of the people hold a high school diploma or its equivalent while 30.4% percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. The census also indicated that over 90% percent of the residents speak only English. Of those that reportedly spoke another language, only 2% did not speak any English at all. Ninety and two-tenths of the residents are Caucasian.

There are eleven school buildings within the public school system, one early childhood center, six elementary schools, three middle schools, and one high school complex.

There are eleven principals and sixteen vice principals in the district. In total the district serves approximately 10,000 students.

Within the last ten years the budget elections have yielded only three passed budgets, 1995, 2000, and 2004. The poor results are the effect of several factors. First of all, the property tax that funds the schools is the only tax people get to vote on. Saying "no" is the only way they can control some of their money. Also, the timing of the vote is bad. It is usually right around tax day, and voters do not want to pay out even more money in taxes. Thirdly, those with fixed incomes are often more motivated to get out and vote against the budget. The three successful budgets were due in part to extra meetings that were held to encourage voters to get out and say "yes". Also, Newsletters were sent out

to make voters aware of the areas that were being cut. The district has maintained its premier status by continually keeping up its test scores and by receiving additional funding from outside sources. Grants and corporate donations are obtained through fundraising efforts. The district employs a full-time person as a grant writer. Last year the district partnered with Commerce Bank. Over the next five years the district will receive over \$300,000 in exchange for changing the name of the Washington Township Performing Arts Center to Commerce Bank Arts Center. The center brings in acts from around the country to increase its revenue.

This study took place at Whitman Elementary School which is part of the public district. Whitman Elementary is located in a residential neighborhood off of Route 42 in Whitman Square. The most recently reported statistics show Whitman Elementary as home to six hundred twenty-three students with an average class size of 23.1 students. Ninety-six and eight-tenths of those students resided in households where English is the primary language spoken. The student/faculty ratio was 13.3 students per faculty member. Forty-four and seven-tenths percent of the teaching and administrative staff hold bachelor's degrees while 55.3% have attained a master's level education.

Significance

This project served to improve the general school experience for students determined to be at-risk either academically or socially. Individual needs were met as the sense of school and community are strengthened. Mentoring was used as an important preventative intervention for students who may otherwise have gone unnoticed or who may have become problem students both now and in the future. This study was

important in determining a method for reaching more students within the school community than may be normally reached by regular interactions with school personnel.

The Relationship of the Project to the ISLLC Standards

In this new age of accountability, administrators are not exempt from the spotlight. They too, must meet standards of performance. The achievement of these standards ensures that students are receiving the best education possible. Not only must administrators keep abreast of current educational trends and theories, they must also take actions based upon a core of beliefs. This knowledge and their personal commitments to excellence must be evident in the decisions they make that create atmospheres to support learning and growing. This study focused on several of those standards which guide administrators in the decision making process. First of all, the very core of this study was based on the belief that all students are educable. The involvement of the teachers demonstrated that the stakeholders must share in the responsibility of achieving the vision and mission set forth by the school. The second standard met by the mentoring program was the model of human dignity and respect. The core goal of the program was to encourage a sense of value and importance for both the mentee as well as the mentor. Thirdly, the implementation of a mentoring project served to exhibit that there was key understanding of the demands of modern society. The need to bolster the lives of children who are at risk of academic, social, and emotional failure was met with the creation of this program.

Organization of the Study

The rest of this study was organized in the following way: Chapter 2, The Review of the Literature, will focus on historic and modern evaluations of various mentoring programs. Chapter 3, The Design of the Study, will explain the methodology, implementation, and data collection plan. Chapter 4, Presentation of Research Findings, will discuss the results of the study. Chapter 5, Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study, will guide future thought to the value of the continuation of this type of program.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

The success of any strong civilization is its ability to prosper from one generation to the next. Without continuing development, there is the danger of destruction. The hope for that advancement lies within the youth of any society. It is the responsibility of the older generations to guide the youth during the developmental process in order to preserve customs, teachings, and quality of life. The United States attempts to promote success with educational directives and programs aimed at standardizing learning across all subgroups of students. These educational plans although rigorous on academics, regrettably neglect the development of competence on many other levels.

"A major goal of the educational system is to help children become competent and successful as they proceed through school and enter their adult lives" (Christiansen, 1997, ¶ 4). Competence refers to the ability to form and maintain relationships with parents, peers, and teachers. Competence also encompasses domains such as academics, problem solving skills, and the ability to contribute to the work force of a society. A problem arises when many children exist in situations that present difficulties in the normal developmental process. When there are excessive obstacles to overcome, complete competence becomes difficult to achieve (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Early intervention may be the key to reversing some of the damage.

Child Development

One may ask what evidence there is for proper development. There are signs or developmental tasks that indicate that a child is developing normally. According to Masten and Coatsworth (1998), early childhood development is critical in setting the foundation for all other development. As the human brain develops, it is setting the stage for all future competencies. Conduct, academic achievement, language development, attachments to caregivers, and peer relations are some of the domains within the broader context of the developmental tasks that are relatively universal. Within each domain there are age appropriate behaviors. For example, peer relations may begin as play in early childhood, but by adolescence a child should be able to form meaningful friendships with their peers. The domain of conduct should follow a similar pattern. Toddlers are expected to start conforming to family rules and expectations. By the time a child enters school, he or she should be able to abide by the classroom rules. As they prepare for adulthood, children should be able to follow the rules of society without direct guidance. When the natural progression of these skills does not occur, it cause for concern and possible intervention.

Competence

Two such domains of competence that are of particular concern are those of attachment to caring adults and self-regulation (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Research shows that strong early bonds establish a foundation for a host of later skills including the ability to form strong relationships with others and the ability to successfully solve problems.

"Therefore, fostering strong and healthy relationships between children and their

caregivers is a key strategy for intervention (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998, Foundation of Competence in Early Development section ¶ 6).” Regulating attention and negative emotion set the stage for social competence. Children with a good ability to pay attention usually have more success with their peers than do those children with attention problems such as attention deficit disorder. Those who have difficulty with distress and recovering from it tend to be more aggressive and disruptive. However, according to Masten and Coatsworth (1998), these skills can be strengthened in early childhood.

By the time a child enters school, the expectations for social and emotional competence are established. Children who are unable to conform to the accepted norms often experience more difficulty with their peers and with future social competence. These children may exhibit behaviors such as aggressiveness and hostility towards others. There is also a strong link between socially appropriate conduct and academic achievement. Academics are strongly influenced by personal beliefs and attitudes. Students who believe that success is dependent upon effort and hard work generally find more success. Students who experience academic difficulties may develop problems with their conduct as an outgrowth of their frustration. Likewise students who enter school at an academic disadvantage may lack the skills necessary to do well and further increase both their distress and their academic failures (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). All of these developmental areas connected by common threads: parenting, self-regulation skills, and cognitive functioning. While schools may have little influence over the quality of parenting, they are at an advantage for helping students to develop both their social and intellectual domains of competence.

Resilience

Students who have been able to overcome adversity and achieve competence on many different levels share a common attribute: resilience. Jeanne Christiansen (1997) discussed several key characteristics of resilient children. She referenced that they “use proactive approaches to problem solving, construe experiences in positive and constructive ways, are good-natured and easy to deal with, and have a sense of control over their lives” (Christiansen, 1997, ¶ 4). Researchers have looked to identify common sources of resilience to determine whether or not it can be manipulated. Many believe it can. Waln K. Brown (2004) discussed his own battles with antisocial behaviors and his resiliency. He looked at his personal history and that of others who suffered disadvantaged or traumatic childhoods. What makes some children resilient to adversity while others are more vulnerable to its effects? Brown (2004) attributed his achievements and the achievements of hundreds of others who overcame adversity to mentors in their lives, “Clients who have the good fortune to be influenced by positive role models and mentors have an increased chance to be resilient”. He likened mentors to counterbalances. Ongoing positive support began to eliminate the negative aspects of his life. Masten and Coatsworth (1998) believe that resilient children possess good intellect and are able to establish relationships with caring adults. These same attributes were present in children who developed good competencies.

Factors Contributing to At-Risk

Children who lack competencies and are vulnerable often have common factors that deem them to be at-risk youths. At-risk children are usually those defined as coming

from single-parent homes, those who experience neglect, abuse, or violence, those who have emotional or behavioral problems, and those who are in need of more support in order to achieve developmental competencies (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998, and Keating, et. al. 2002). According to Grossman and Tierney (1998), over 25% of children are born to single-parent homes. This lack of adult contact has “led to social isolation and restricted opportunities” (Grossman and Tierney, 1998, The Nature of the Problem section, ¶ 2). High school dropout rates are also alarming. According to the U.S. Department of Education over ten percent of all high school students drop out before completing the twelfth grade. These numbers have held relatively consistent for the last decade. Mentoring has become one method used to help these children build their resilience and overcome these types of adversity.

Need for Mentoring

Mentoring actually has its roots in Greek literature. Odysseus asked his friend, Mentor, to care for his son while he set out on his journey to Troy. Homer indeed created the model of what the mentors of today strive to be. A mentor serves to “support through listening, advocacy, sharing of self, establishing structure, highlighting strengths, and making the experience unique and positive” (McCluskey, Noller, Lamoureux, and McCluskey, 2004, ¶ 2). Teachers and other adults use similar strategies to help offset the factors that challenge the ability of a child to reach his or her full potential. The need extends not only to children who struggle in school. Exceptional students are not exempt from the negative pressures of society. They too, may live lives of poverty riddled with violence and poor parenting. For all children, solutions must be found to help guide each one to

reach his or her full potential whether that is as an assembly line worker or a neurosurgeon. Each deserves the chance.

Without the opportunity to explore areas of intelligence that may not be the norm for a traditional classroom, students may have talents that go virtually ignored and never have the chance to develop those skills. Serious consequences may result. Students who were deemed at –risk as children have records of growing up to become burdens on society. "They have a disproportionately high incidence of divorce, chronic unemployment, physical and psychiatric problems, substance abuse, demands on the welfare system, and further criminal activity" (Keating, Tomishima, Foster, and Alessandri, 2002, ¶ 2).

Types of Mentoring

Mentoring can however take on several different guises. Some forms promote educational and academic purposes while others concentrate on personal development (Dennis, 1993). First of all, there are two general types of mentoring. The first is natural mentoring which occurs through experiences that already exist such as friendship, teaching, or coaching. Secondly, planned mentoring results from a contrived situation in which mentors and mentees are matched through a formal process. They then participate in a regulated program that exists with its own guidelines and expectations. Several such projects are becoming more prevalent in our society and in our schools. One very well known program is Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America. There are more than four hundred ninety-five BB/BS agencies across the nation that serve to match at-risk youths with quality adult mentors. Help One Student to Succeed is also a nationwide program. It however, focuses on academic mentoring. This program can be purchased by schools

for kindergarten through high school students. Community mentors work to enhance language arts for the mentees. Another established mentoring program is One Hundred Black Men, Inc. Since 1963 it has served young black males in elementary school through high school. Businessmen in New York State are paired with the youths to enrich their lives. Another mentoring program that pairs students with adults in the workforce is *The National One-to-One Mentoring Partnership*. This program is sponsored by the United Way and encourages local agencies to get involved in or initiate new mentoring programs in their own communities. As reported by Barton-Arwood, Jolivette, and Massey (2000), mentoring can also be a relationship between peers. Students can benefit from a planned relationship with a peer who will serve as a positive role model. McCluskey et al. reviewed yet another type of mentoring. A program known as Lost Prizes which targeted high ability at-risk students ran for three years in Canada. Its aim was to “reclaim at-risk, talented high school dropouts” (McCluskey et al., Lost Prizes section, ¶ 3). No matter the type of mentoring program, each one aims to improve the lives of children who are in need of support.

Goals of Mentoring

Mentoring aims to help youngsters better negotiate life and the choices that they make. One particular goal is to guide youth in order to help them develop into adults who can be productive members of the work force. The role of the mentor is to act as a role model, teacher, friend, confidant, and coach (Slicker & Palmer 1993). Sally Barton-Arwood et al. (2000) cited several examples of the benefits of mentoring. Mentoring experiences result in new emotional supports and friendships, improved self-esteem, increased skills

and academic achievement, and an improved social network. Mentees learn by having someone who serves as a model of appropriate behaviors. They are able to expand their interactions in different cultural settings, vocational skills improve, and dropout rates decrease. Jeanne Christiansen (1997) provided specific activities that may be of value in the mentoring process. She encouraged the use of counseling sessions and classroom instruction to teach interpersonal skills necessary in making and sustaining friendships. Christiansen even suggested that students be taught social skills such as how to greet teachers when entering or exiting the classroom. Opportunities for the school to establish and promote a climate of caring and meaningful interactions greatly benefit mentees. Slicker and Palmer (1993) approached mentoring activities slightly differently. Their suggested activities included mentor initiated contacts, frequent meetings, recognition of birthdays and holidays, demonstration of interest in school projects, and report cards. As indicated by Masten and Coatsworth (1998) these supports help the students to achieve competence and the ultimate goal of successful transition into adulthood and the workforce. "Job competence in late adolescence was significantly predicted by academic achievement, conduct, and social competence earlier in development" (Masten and Coatsworth, 1998, Competence in the School Years section, ¶ 21).

Expectations of Mentees

Mentoring programs are often difficult to evaluate. Perhaps that is due to the human factor. There is no clear equation or easy formula that assures success. The diversity of the perceptions and reactions of every individual affect the outcome of each ones experience. Ultimately, the thoughts and feelings of the people involved determine the

effectiveness of the program. Optimistic expectations may set the tone for a positive and effective experience. One study demonstrates the power of positive human interactions. In addition to examining the effectiveness of a mentoring program that serviced at-risk youths in a Los Angeles County city, Diane de Anda (2001) took a close look at the expectations of both mentors and mentees prior to engaging in the mentoring relationship. The study lasted for one academic year. She then related their expectations to their feelings about their experiences at the conclusion of the year-long study. Eighteen mentor-mentee pairs participated in the study. They all came from a neighborhood and school riddled with violence and delinquent behavior. There were nine African-American mentees, eight Latinos, and one biracial mentee. Male and female participation was equal. The mentees were asked a series of questions to ascertain their motivations and expectations upon entering the program. The first common theme to emerge was that many of the youths agreed to be involved because they were looking for someone with whom they could talk and spend some time. The one thread that really stood out was the desire not to be unfairly judged. The responses given by the students indicated a great need to find someone that they felt could be trusted. Most students really wanted a friend and role model. Some were looking for guidance, "They'll tell me, 'Don't do that, because I've been there before, and you shouldn't go that route'" (de Anda, 2001, Findings section, ¶ 4).

The outcomes fulfilled many of the expectations. Three common themes were reported. The first was friendship. "I got a chance to make friends...became good friends with a grown-up" (de Anda, 2001, Findings section, ¶ 10). The second was self-improvement. "I feel I got a different meaning for life-meaning not fighting or stuff that would hurt

anyone” (de Anda, 2001, Findings section, ¶ 11). The third was improvement in personal skills such as communication. Overall the students were pleased with their experiences and their expectations had been realized.

Expectations of Mentors

The mentors too, entered the program with a set of their own expectations and motivations. Two lead mentors were interviewed prior to the program’s inception and again after its completion. Community involvement was the initial impetus to get involved with the program. Both also wanted to be an ear for a child who needed to be heard. Interestingly, the mentors began their stewardship with expectations not for themselves but solely for the youths. The relationships formed would wind up being much more. At the onset, one mentor was hoping to provide opportunities for the mentee “to grow- become a more productive citizen and a more productive student” (de Anda, 2001, Mentors’ Perspectives section, ¶ 9.) On a personal level, the mentor wanted his mentee to develop better social skills. The other mentor had similar aspirations for her mentee. Primarily school was a big concern. The mentor wanted the mentee to understand the importance of finishing school. As the project progressed, reciprocity began to emerge. Each felt he was contributing to the development of the other. Real connections were formed. By the end of the program, the eight seniors graduated from high school. Six of whom were going on to college. The ten remaining mentees all returned to high school the next fall. Although the expectations of the participants may not have been the reason for such impressive results, the results alone make a case for instituting mentoring programs for youth in need of a special friend.

Reciprocal Nature of Mentoring

Reciprocity was indeed a theme seen throughout much of the literature. Barton-Arwood et al. (2000) described a mentoring situation in which one student mentored another. This type of mentoring had important impacts on both parties. Aside from the mentee who improved his or her social skills, academic skills, and self-concept, the mentor also reaped benefits from being a part of the experience. The mentor found increased self-esteem and personal confidence. Mentors were also able to gain an appreciation for others with whom they would not ordinarily interact. One project, Lost Prizes, as discussed by McCluskey et al., described the benefits to its mentors. Lost Prizes paired college students who were in training to become teachers with at-risk youths. These youths experienced similar benefits to other students who were mentored. The mentors though received an equally important benefit. In addition to any personal achievements they might have felt, they also had the opportunity to learn first-hand what it might be like dealing with at-risk in children in their classrooms one day.

Effectiveness

As theoretically sound as mentoring may seem there are still questions as to its actual effectiveness. Studies are frequently conducted and data gathered in order to ascertain the answer. Grossman and Tierney (1998) compiled results from eight Big Brothers/Big Sisters agencies around the country. They selected agencies based on both size and geographic diversity. Agencies randomly selected one half of their applicants to serve as the control group while the other half remained on the waiting list for the eighteen month duration of the program. Most of the children involved were between the ages of eleven

and thirteen. A little over half of all participants were minorities. Sixty-two percent were male. Many of the participants had been subjects of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. A number had histories of substance abuse and violence within their families. At the conclusion of the study the display of antisocial behaviors was examined. Grossman and Tierney (1998) discovered some very encouraging statistics. Those students who received mentors were over forty-five percent less likely to engage in the use of drugs. They were at least twenty-seven percent less likely to use alcohol and thirty-two percent less likely to physically hit someone. Academically there were significant gains especially for minority Little Sisters. School attendance was improved. Many of the students reported a better sense of academic competence. Lines of communication with parents also saw an improvement. White Little Brothers experienced the only significant change in their perceived popularity among peers and in their self-concept. Generally, the results were positive and should encourage other agencies to establish programs aimed at helping at-risk youths.

Other researchers examined programs within a variety of communities. Cate Huisman evaluated a mentoring program that was instituted at four different universities in Oregon. Each university paired students with at-risk middle school youths in several different schools. Mentors underwent thorough training; however, during each successive year the program was in existence, the training sessions became much less intense. Mentors were also offered the opportunity to attend biweekly support meetings. Attendance was extremely unbalanced. While some mentors utilized the meetings, others attended at random times while still others never attended. Mentors dedicated their time to visitations between the schools, attending sporting events together, and going on field

trips. Although each college devoted different resources to the project, there were general positive results. Grade point averages increased for all students at two of the middle schools during the first two years of the program. The third year yielded improvements for only the students who had formed particularly strong relationships with their mentors. On a personal level, the mentees generally felt it was good to have developed a friendship with their mentors, to have had the advantage of having a tutor, and to have had some experience with the expectations of college life.

In a study in Texas researchers looked at an at-risk program that targeted potential high school dropouts during their tenth grade year (Slicker and Palmer, 1993). Thirty-two students were selected to receive mentors. Another thirty-two were established as the control group. The mentees were chosen on the basis of severity of need for assistance. Mentors were selected from school personnel. The study lasted for six months. Mentees and mentors were supposed to have met at least three times per week. During evaluation of the program, researchers discovered a great discrepancy in the quality of mentoring. Initially the results showed no benefit to being mentored; however, the researchers decided to evaluate the mentees as part of two different subgroups, those who were effectively mentored and those who were not. When approached this way the data showed marked improvement in reduction of dropout rates for the effectively mentored students. Only sixty-nine percent of ineffectively mentored students returned to school the following fall. All of the students who received effective mentoring were in attendance during the next school year. Self-concept was not improved for either group; however, the ineffectively mentored students actually saw a decline in their self-esteem. Academic performance was enhanced for the effectively mentored group while the other mentees

saw a decline. Researchers believe these declining scores demonstrate the vulnerability of the highly at-risk students. This research goes to demonstrate the importance of not just mentoring but of high quality mentoring, “The difference between mentors and nonmentors is not in who they are but in what they do in the mentoring relationship” (Slicker and Douglas, 1993).

Quality as Key

Research seems to indicate that mentoring certainly can positively impact children who are at-risk of falling between the cracks and never having the opportunity to reach their full potentials. Mentors and mentees alike agreed that their experiences were positive and sometimes life changing. Waln K Brown (2004) credited several important mentors, especially his high school principal, with his successful recovery from a life of delinquency. When speaking of his principal’s efforts in helping him to earn his high school diploma, Brown said, “Because of his dedication to seeing that I received an education, I graduated from high school...That singular feat has made all the difference in my life” (Brown, 2004, The Mentoring Factor section, ¶ 10). The quality of mentoring played an important part of that success and the successes of many other mentees. In the study by Slicker and Palmer (1993) data analysis was actually based on the quality of mentoring. When they had first review their results, mentoring appeared to have made no impact on the students; however, upon further examination, it was evident that the quality of mentoring “varied greatly.” Information was then reexamined based on quality. The new results showed definite benefits from quality time spent together. McCluskey et al. also discussed the dangers of poor quality mentoring. They cautioned against

haphazardly put together programs warning that mentoring relationships that did not last for a substantial amount of time were unlikely to have much impact. They also stated that “youths who were in relationships which terminated very quickly reported negative outcomes and a decline in many categories” (McCluskey et al., A Word of Caution section, ¶ 2).

In an age when children seem to be facing an ever-increasing onslaught of pressures and tensions from the world around them, there is an increased imperative to guide them to reach beyond their adverse situations for a life that is more fulfilling both for themselves and for the good of society. These children have often been placed in situations where they have little to no adult guidance in their lives. Many reported that they wanted a friend to fill that void someone to listen, to care, and to advise. Mentoring offers a promising solution. Just imagine a world in which each child truly had the chance to reach his or her potential.

CHAPTER 3

Design of the Study

Description of Research Design

This study was developed to assess the effectiveness of mentoring students deemed to be at-risk. Interpretation of data gathered through action research determined the results of the program. Both quantitative and qualitative measures were used. During the course of the study, the intern worked to determine the value of instituting a mentoring program based on the impact the program had on children involved. The data was used to evaluate any correlations between frequency and duration of mentoring sessions to the degree to which the mentees demonstrated any change in their academic performances, social relations, or behavior. The intern served as coordinator of the program. Once the initial idea was presented to the faculty, the intern asked for faculty volunteers to serve as mentors. Having determined the number of mentors, the intern then coordinated with the school guidance counselor to select students who could best be served by having another positive adult role model in their lives. The intern proceeded to obtain parental permission for students to participate. Students were asked to complete a simple survey at the onset of the program to serve as a baseline for their self-perceptions. They were also asked to complete the same survey at the conclusion of the program. The intern presented the expectations of the program to the mentors. Each week a survey was sent to each mentor via email to gather data concerning frequency, duration, and content of

any mentoring sessions. As the study progressed, a noted lack of commitment prompted the intern to review the goals of the program and the expectations with the mentors. New suggestions were given and weekly consultations were conducted with each mentor. Although the intern did not want to skew the results, she determined there would be little chance of successfully helping any students if the interactions between mentors and mentees did not intensify. The top priority during the study remained the success of the children involved. After several weeks in the program, mentees were also approached about utilization of their mentors. The classroom teachers were also interviewed in order to gain qualitative information regarding any changes at the conclusion of the study.

Focus on Research Instruments

Several different instruments were used in both obtaining volunteers and data. Volunteers were solicited at the beginning of the school year during a faculty meeting. The following week all faculty members received a written description of the program and a volunteer form. Permission slips were distributed to all parents of potential mentees. Once permission was obtained, surveys containing five questions were presented by the intern to each mentee in a private setting. Students were asked to rate their attitudes as good, indifferent, or poor toward school in general, their reading abilities, their math abilities, their friends, and how they felt their teachers perceived them. These same surveys were also administered at the conclusion of the study. Mentors were also asked to report weekly via email. The intern mailed a standard form asking for number and duration of contacts; whether the meetings focused on academic, behavioral, social, or personal issues; and any anecdotal information that might be relevant. Classroom

teachers also completed questionnaires to gain qualitative information regarding any changes evident within the class.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Students were selected by the school guidance counselor. All of the students were either seen regularly by her or were students who were brought to her attention by their classroom teachers. The criteria were students who either struggled academically or socially. The guidance counselor determined which students would benefit from having a mentor who could support them outside of the regular classroom setting. Permission slips were sent the parents or guardians of each potential mentee. All nineteen students selected obtained the necessary permission to be enrolled. The students were then gathered together by the intern and the guidance counselor to receive information on the purpose of the program. Students appeared genuinely excited at the prospect of being selected to work with a special teacher-buddy.

Teachers were presented with the program at the beginning of school year. Volunteers were then obtained through responses to a questionnaire. Again, the guidance counselor aided the intern in partnering mentees with appropriate mentors. The intern felt that the guidance counselor's first-hand knowledge of the students would enable her to establish the most suitable pairings.

Data Collection Approach

Due to the unique needs of each child in the program, the intern deemed it necessary to gain both quantitative and qualitative forms of data. To maintain privacy, each mentee

was assigned a number to be used in all records and data analysis. A systematic approach was employed in the administration of the student surveys. The intern greeted each child and escorted him or her to a quiet location. The students were then shown the survey, given directions, and provided the opportunity for any clarification. The survey asked the children to rate their feelings toward school, teachers, reading, math, and friends. Once the five questions were answered, the students were escorted back to their classrooms. The survey was administered with the goal of gaining an understanding of the needs of each mentee. The intern was also interested in seeing if the self-perception of each mentee was the same as the perception that was the impetus for their initial consideration into the program. The intern was also interested in finding any changes in the feelings of the mentees toward the five areas at the conclusion of the study.

The particulars of the mentoring sessions were left to the discretion of the mentors. Suggestions for types sessions were provided by the intern during an initial meeting, again through email, and ultimately through individual conferences. Mentors were encouraged to set aside times to have lunches or special meetings with their mentees. The intern supported the mentors throughout the program by providing reminders and suggestions for ways to spend more quality time with their mentees. The intern also spoke to the mentors during the program to check on their progress and provide any additional support necessary.

At the conclusion of each week the mentors were asked to complete a brief report regarding their mentoring sessions and the send it back to the intern. They reported

number of sessions, duration of sessions, and content if appropriate. The intern then kept all information electronically filed for each individual mentee.

During the course of the study, the intern again met with the mentees to discuss their relationships with their mentors and to answer any concerns they may have had.

The intern also administered a questionnaire to the classroom teachers at the conclusion of the study in order to determine if there had been any significant changes evident in school performance. Questionnaires were also administered to the mentors at the conclusion of the study. They were asked to reflect upon their experiences and to evaluate themselves as mentors and the program in general.

At the conclusion of the study, the intern administered the same survey to the children that they completed at the onset of the program. An additional questionnaire was also administered to the mentees. Both instruments targeted similar information. The first was given to serve as a comparison from their initial responses. The second was in order to allow the students to elaborate on their experiences to that point. Students were again greeted by the intern and read the questionnaire. The children dictated their answers due to the fact that many of them were too young to write their answers by themselves. This survey covered the initial areas of concern and the feelings that each mentee had about being in the program.

Data Analysis Plan

The weekly updates provided by the mentors gave quantitative information regarding frequency and duration of meetings. It was then analyzed by comparing the average

frequency and duration of the mentoring sessions to the degree to which change was reported by the classroom teacher and the guidance counselor. The qualitative data gathered was compiled and examined for any significant changes. Specifically, the intern looked for patterns in types of communication between mentors and mentees. Teacher interviews served as the basis for determining the effectiveness of the mentoring program in relation to the academic and social demands of the school. Student surveys provided feedback to determine effectiveness in the eyes of those who should truly have felt the greatest change, the mentees themselves.

CHAPTER 4

Presentation of Research Findings

The mentoring experience like all human experiences varied greatly for all subjects in the study. There were those who found success and struggle as well as those whose hearts were never really in it. There were common threads among the mentees, yet both teachers and mentors had a wide array of experiences. One of the most profound differences lay in the amount of time the mentors reported to have devoted to being with their mentees. Information was obtained through the weekly updates. There were twelve mentors who worked with nineteen mentees. Seven serviced two children while the other five each had one mentee. Information presented reflects each mentee rather than mentor since there were differences even within the experiences of a mentor who worked with two children.

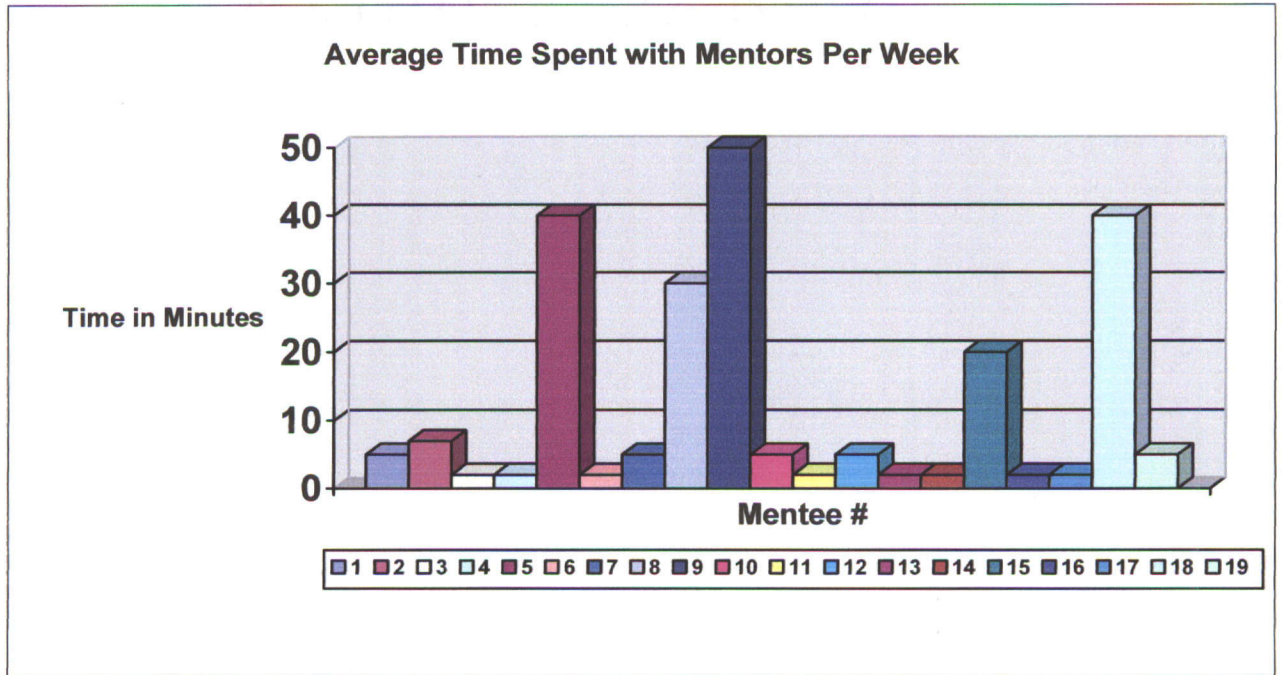


Figure 1

Approach

Some of the mentors had regularly scheduled appointment times with their mentees. Others were more apt to see the children in passing. The number of meetings per week ranged from none to daily. All mentors approached their positions with differing perspectives.

The weekly updates gave the intern some qualitative data regarding the approach each mentor used to reach their mentees. While some made little or no comments, others revealed the essence of their experiences. One mentor began with reports of frustration stating, “I extended the invitation again for him (the mentee) to come down last period to talk, for help, or to help me in the classroom, but again, he never showed.” She later reported, “I think I am making some progress. He has been asking to come see me, and has shown up to get help with his work.” Toward the end of the study the student was

observed stopping to see the mentor on an almost regular basis. During his follow-up conference, he stated, "She helps me get my work done faster, and we talk in spare time. When my work is done faster, my problems are gone." His teacher expressed the same result on the teacher questionnaire. On the flip side, one mentor wrote on the weekly update for week two, "I think it's a good idea, but it's ineffective." There was little effort put in from that point forward. According to their teachers, the mentees assigned to this mentor showed very little change in academic, social, or behavioral issues over the course of this study. A few mentors tried using reminder cards to encourage the mentee to show up for scheduled times. The success of these was dependent upon the child then making an effort.

The intern did meet with the students to remind them that they too, were responsible for showing up for scheduled meetings with their mentors. The intern also impressed upon them the inability for their mentors to leave their classroom during the teaching day. Students were encouraged to seek out their mentors on a more regular basis. Six mentees did seek out their mentors. All of them were in either fourth or fifth grade though not all fourth and fifth graders sought out their mentors. No mentees in first, second, or third grade sought out their mentors for assistance. One first grade mentee did present a mentor with an invitation to a birthday party.

Difficulties

The post-study questionnaires provided more insight into the complexities of the study. Scheduling was a major concern for most of the mentors. One mentor wrote, "In the beginning I found it difficult to meet with her (the mentee) due to her schedule and mine.

Once we worked out a schedule I enjoyed it much more. I felt bad because other teachers were able to arrange special meetings and my mentee knew it.” Most mentors felt that having a mentee within their own grade level would or did allow them to set up meeting times during lunch. “I think I could have done more to get to know my mentees if they were in the same grade level. It was difficult to coordinate schedules.” However, of the eight mentees who did share a lunch period with their mentors, only four of them had any scheduled lunch meetings.

The familiarity of a child to the mentor prior to the study also had an impact on the mindset of some of the mentors. “I already had a relationship with my mentee from teaching her for two years. It made the transition to mentor/mentee easier.” Some mentors felt that being paired with an unfamiliar child was a disadvantage. “I think it’s hard to do this with a kid you don’t know, who doesn’t know you.” Another commented, “I felt like I couldn’t find the time. I always felt uncomfortable with my mentee.”

Mentor Feedback

Effort and enjoyment were both related to the overall experience, Figure 2. The mentors reported the degree of effort with which they handled the program. They were able to rate themselves as having put forth sufficient effort, a moderate amount of effort, or not much effort at all. In conjunction, they were able to state whether the general experience had been positive, neutral, or negative. This was not necessarily an indication of how well they thought the program worked. It only reflected whether or not the general feeling was positive, neutral, or negative. All mentors who felt that they had put in a high amount of effort also felt it was an overall positive experience. Those who had put in

moderate effort reported both positive and neutral experiences but no negative ones. Of the mentors who felt they did not put in effort, the majority rated this as a negative experience while smaller percentages felt that it had been neutral and positive.

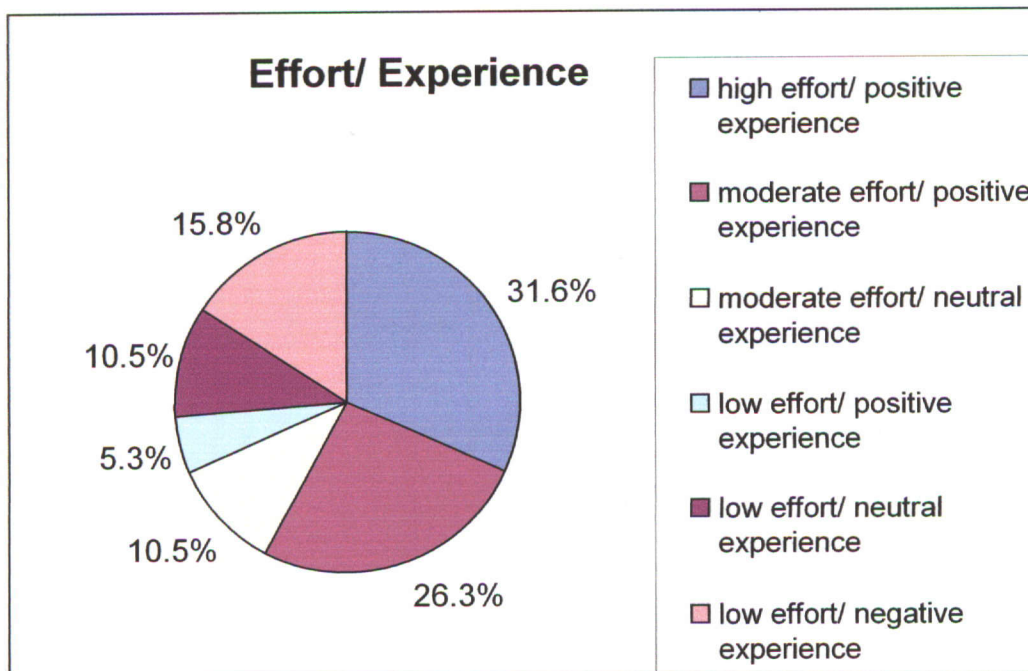


Figure 2

The mentors were also asked to rate how effective they felt the program had been for their mentees. Their overall enjoyment was reflected in how effective they felt the experience was for the mentees, Figure 3. Thirteen of the experiences were enjoyable for the mentors. Six were not. In the eyes of the mentors, eleven enjoyable experiences yielded positive effects for the mentees. The other two were reportedly neutral. Three of the six less satisfying experiences were given an overall rating of negative by the mentor. Two were seen as neutral and one as positive.

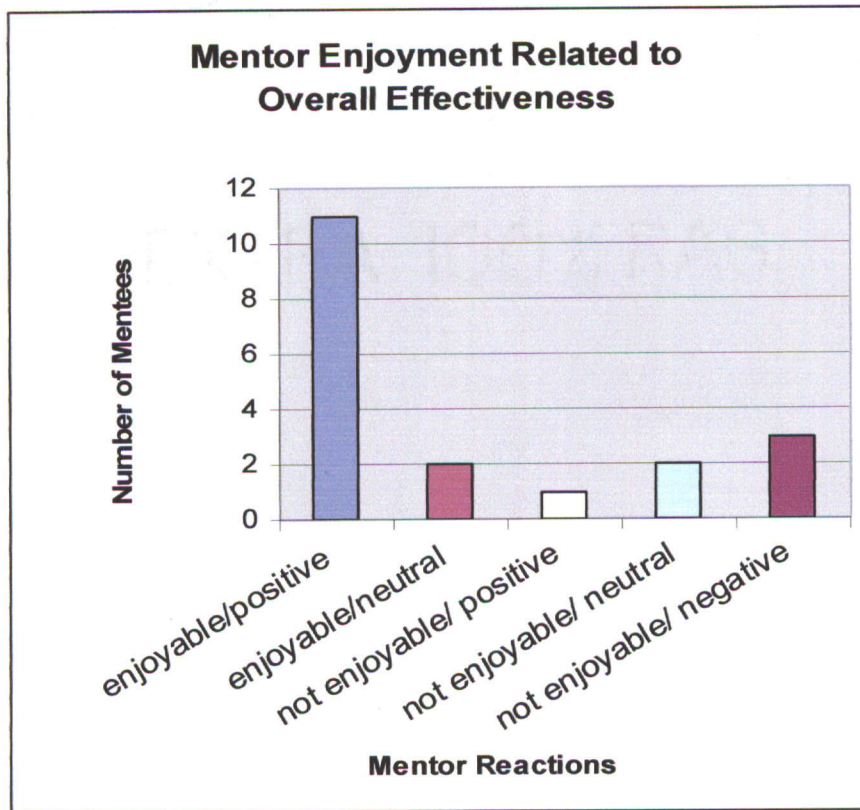


Figure 3

It was also evident that mentors who put forth effort also enjoyed the experience more than mentors who put forth less effort, Figure 4. All mentors who put in high effort also enjoyed the experience. Likewise, the majority who put in moderate effort also enjoyed working with their mentees. Of the six mentors who felt they put minimal effort into their relationships, four felt the experience was not enjoyable while two felt it was.

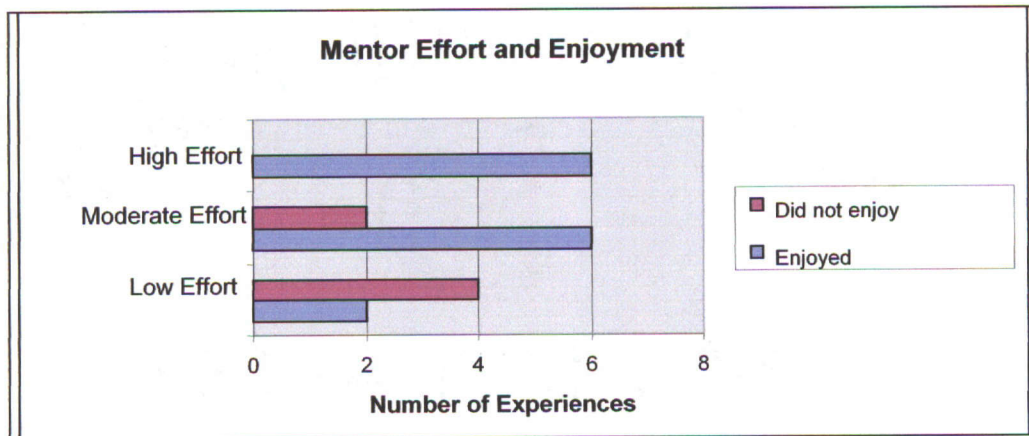


Figure 4

When all three features: effort, experience, and enjoyment were examined, there were six mentees who worked with mentors who felt they put in a high amount of effort who also felt the program had a positive effect on the mentee and who enjoyed the experience themselves. These mentees showed some promising changes, Table 1.

Mentee Number	Changes in Attitudes About School, Teachers, Reading, Math, and Friends	Teacher Comments Regarding Changes
5	Increased from negative to positive feelings about school Felt more liked by teachers Felt better about reading abilities	Improvements were seen in behavioral issues Peer relations improved Still having academic difficulties
7	Increased feeling about friends Decreased feelings toward reading abilities	Utilizing mentor to assist with assignment completion Noticeably comfortable with mentor Enjoying the positive attention
9	Increased feeling in all five areas	Seems happier Enjoying the connection with mentor
12	Felt more liked by teachers Felt better about skills in math	Improved social skills with both students and teachers
18	Felt more liked by teachers Felt better about reading abilities	Academic skills have progressed Receptive to positive attention from mentor
19	No changes- already had positive feelings in all five areas	Good peer relations

Table 1

Teacher Feedback

The intern examined where the classroom teachers observed changes in the mentees.

Although the mentees were not necessarily referred to the program because of deficiencies in all three areas, the teachers were asked to report differences in academics, social skills, and behaviors. There were seven children who demonstrated little if any overall changes. Four of these mentees were paired with the mentors who rated themselves as having put forth low effort. Two worked with mentors who felt their efforts were moderate. The seventh child did see his mentor frequently; however, the nature of their meetings was reportedly casual with general greetings rather than personal sessions.

The other twelve mentees demonstrated a variety of improvements or changes within the classroom. For six of the mentees, teachers commented that academic progress was being made. Support from the mentors was one factor in the improvements. "If I mentioned something to (her mentor) about her work, (the mentor) would speak with her, and it did help." Eight mentees experienced improved peer relations. Many of the mentors spent time discussing conflict resolution and positive interactions. "(His mentor) talked to him about his peer relationships and how important friends were at hard times." Behaviorally, the changes were as varied as the children themselves. Four mentees were specifically cited as showing progress. One demonstrated more self-confidence and less complaining. Another experienced fewer meltdowns than in the past. One child was seen as happier. Another was less frustrated and more relaxed within the classroom.

Perceptions of the Mentees

Perhaps the most telling were the perceptions the students had of themselves. The same survey was administered at both the onset and at the conclusion of the study. The survey asked for simple ratings of yes, sometimes, or no regarding five areas: I like school. My teachers like me. I am good at reading. I am good at math. I have good friends. The intern examined both overall trends and individual changes. Table 2 shows the number of mentees and their feelings toward the five different areas prior to working with a mentor. The pre-study numbers indicate that the majority of the students felt they were well adjusted at the onset. Table 3 shows the overall changes in numbers at the end of the study. The two areas that show the greatest overall change were that of how the teachers felt about the students and of having good friends. Although the other three areas do not reflect changes in overall trends, when examined on an individual basis, there were changes in student perception.

Pre-study	Yes	Sometimes	No
I like school.	8	8	3
My teachers like me.	11	8	0
I am good at reading.	10	8	1
I am good at math.	12	4	3
I have good friends.	12	6	1

Table 2

Post-study	Yes	Sometimes	No
I like school:	8	8	3
My teachers like me.	16	3	0
I am good at reading.	9	9	1
I am good at math.	13	3	3
I have good friends.	15	4	0

Table 3

Individual Changes

Post-study	Increased	Stayed the Same	Decreased
I like school.	4	11	4
My teachers like me.	7	11	1
I am good at reading.	2	14	3
I am good at math.	4	11	4
I have good friends.	5	13	1

Table 4

Table 4 depicts the changes seen per student. Although for all areas most mentees showed no change at all, again the areas of teachers and friends show the greatest amount of change with seven and five students respectively showing improved feelings. Figure 5 represents this data graphically.

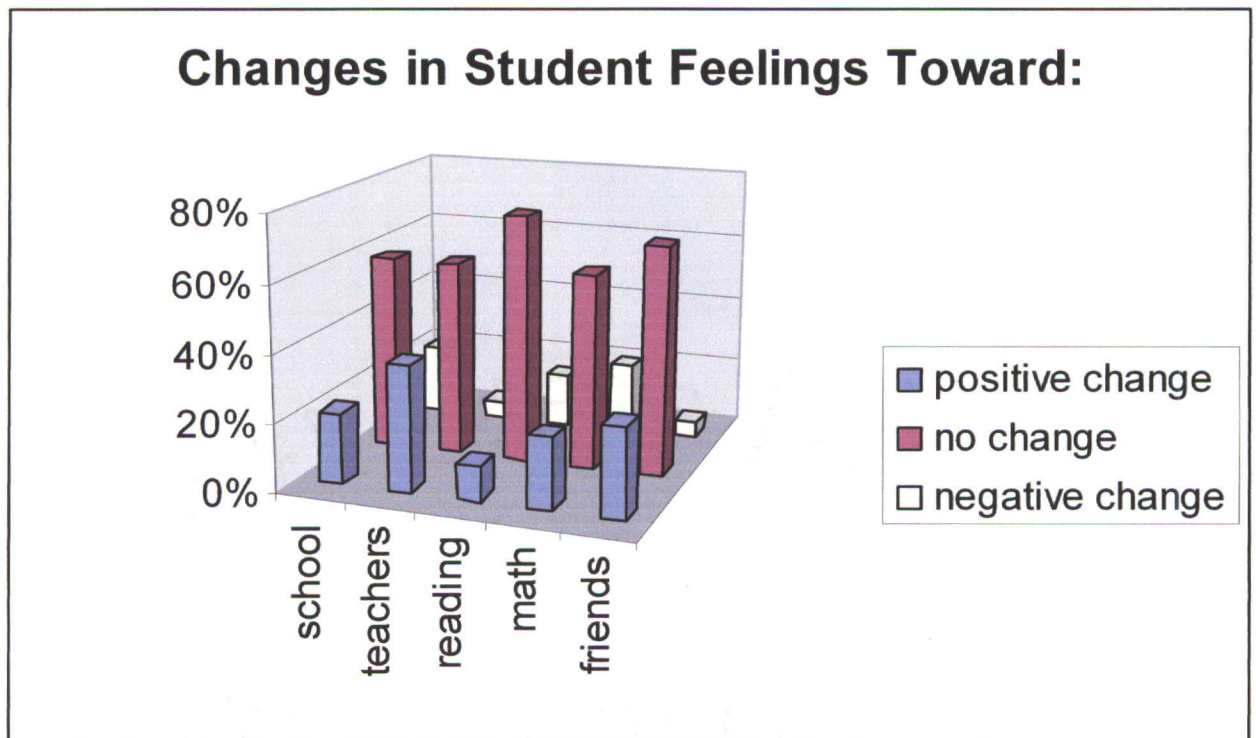


Figure 5

Mentee Responses

The mentees were also given the opportunity to respond to their experiences in the program. The intern administered individual questionnaires to each mentee. All students were asked how they felt about having a mentor. All nineteen students felt it was a positive experience. Every child responded with either the words good, happy, or special.

The second question on the questionnaire asked the students what the best part was about having a mentor. Their responses were insightful. "I got to talk to one of my favorite teachers." "I go to talk to her when I needed it instead of talking to my regular teacher." "She talked to me about a lot of stuff." "She talks to me a lot." "It made me feel happy that I could have somebody to talk to." "He talks to me, and I have somebody to talk to." "I got to meet up with someone and talk about my problems." "I like to talk to her." "She always helped me when I was in trouble. She always told people to give me a chance."

When asked what part they liked the least, most students agreed that there was nothing that they did not like. Two students made comments that they would like to spend more time with their mentors. One did not like writing notes because, "I can't write that good." One did not like that she felt afraid to ask to go see her mentor.

The mentees were also asked if their mentors helped them with problems in school, with friends, or with teachers. Eight of the mentees felt their mentors helped them with academics. Some mentors did this with words of encouragement. Others actually

worked through assignments or assisted with big projects. Peer relations again surfaced as a prominent topic between mentors and mentees. Seven of the mentees recalled working through peer problems with their mentors. Only three of the students felt that their mentors helped them with their teachers.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

Conclusion

Due to the nature of the study and the multitude of influences on the development of a child, the intern does not give causality of improvements solely to the mentoring program. It should be seen as one factor among many in working to assist the students.

There are however, some specific improvements that show a direct connection to the mentoring program. According to the classroom teachers and several of the mentees, those who received intervention concerning peer relationships showed definite improvements.

There was also a direct correlation between the amount of effort and enjoyment felt by the mentors to the changes reported by mentees and teachers. The six mentors who worked most closely with their mentees created experiences in which the mentees were able to demonstrate noticeable growth.

Also notable were the reactions of the students to having someone with whom they could talk. Human nature tells us we all want to feel validated. Knowing someone would listen provided these children that source of connection. Whether they all utilized their mentors to discuss problems or not, they at least all felt that they had someone who would listen.

Their feelings of acceptance by their teachers can be explained in similar terms. The children were able to interface with an adult, their mentor, in a supportive and non-confrontational manner. The children therefore got to know teachers better and felt a stronger connection to them. This would in turn affect how the children felt they were perceived by teachers in general.

Everyone likes to feel liked. Being in the mentoring program provided these nineteen students with an advocate, someone on their side. For some, just knowing there is someone there may be a help.

Implications

The study revealed conditions which fostered the positive effects of the program and circumstances where relationships failed to flourish. Time was a major issue for many of the mentors. They felt as though there was little opportunity in their schedules to fit in a mentee. To help alleviate this problem mentors could be paired solely with students who were in the same grade level or whose break times were compatible. For those mentors who were unwilling to give up their free time to work with their mentees, stricter guidelines could be imposed to require a minimum duration of time spent together per week. Mentors would have to sign off on this prior to being assigned a mentee. This would define the expectations for a mentor and reduce the number of situations where relationships were unable to grow due to lack of quality contact. Mentors may also require more training. They could be directed in how to find ways to form connections with their mentees. Training could also help them to focus on strengths and problem areas for each child.

In building a mentoring program, it became apparent that the effort of the mentors had much to do with the success of each individual relationship so too, did the eagerness of the mentees. Mentees who reciprocated the effort solidified connections and created opportunities for sharing. An interactive dialogue opens the door for better understanding. A strong personality connection also seemed to promote a better overall experience. Mentors needed to feel a bond with their mentees. Since some felt already knowing the child was a benefit, mentors could be given that option before pairings were made. The mentees may also benefit from additional group meetings with a program coordinator in order to understand their role.

Leadership Growth

Whether it is in considerable or minor ways, each experience one has works to shape that individual. The process of conducting a study is certainly no exemption.

The ISLLC Standards are guidelines that work to structure education to keep us all moving toward one common vision: continual improvement for us as professionals, for our students, and for our organization. These guidelines set forth some very specific ways in which leaders should conduct themselves in order to attain that vision. As a leader, the intern developed in many key areas. The experiences gained through this study provided leadership experience inline with those standards.

Standard 1 dictates that a leader must advocate the success of all students through a shared vision. The Mission Statement of Whitman School clearly articulates the vision to be one in which there will be a “safe, equitable atmosphere in which children will

develop self-worth, personal excellence, community-mindedness, and a sense of responsibility toward themselves and others for the present and the future.” The main objective of mentoring program was to work toward those very ideals. By creating these mentor-mentee relationships, the stakeholders were empowered to put the vision into practice. Each of them had the opportunity to work toward the educability of each child. As we all know, education is not only what goes on in the academic realm. Many of these children needed educational experiences in human relations both with adults and with other children. The mentors were positioned to be able to serve as role models for these children. They were able to establish social, behavioral, and academic expectations in an encouraging and supportive fashion.

The intern also developed leadership skills in accordance with Standard 2 which states that an educational leader should build a school culture focused on student learning and professional growth. These children were included in the school culture and made to feel they were important to someone. The school culture also requires the teachers to feel valued and important. Although added responsibility can at times feel a burden, in this case the majority of the mentors felt good about what they had done. The intern also worked to be an integral part of that culture for these children by being available to them as added resource. One of the key indicators of this standard deals with a safe and supportive learning environment. The mentees themselves indicated that having someone with whom they could talk was the best part of having a mentor. There is no better indication that children feel safe than when they feel they can talk to an adult about their personal lives. The program was established to help break down the barriers that

were preventing these children from being successful either socially, behaviorally, or academically.

Standard 4 recognizes the importance of family and community within the context of school. The mentoring program was conducted with the consent and understanding of each family involved. Parents were welcomed to discuss the program and its aims. In one situation the intern was asked to conduct a conference with one of the families in order to clarify the goals and to ensure confidentiality rights for the child and the family. Other mentors did engage in periodic contact with the parents in order to foster the growth of the mentee.

Such noble words as *integrity*, *fairness*, and *ethics* define Standard 5 for school administrators. The intern certainly gained experience in these dictums. In accordance with the district policy, approval for all surveys and questionnaires was obtained prior to their distribution. Confidentiality was a key component of the entire program. The students needed to be able to trust their mentors to keep personal information private. The intern specifically stated that no information was to be divulged which would compromise the integrity of the mentor- mentee relationship. The information provided on all surveys and questionnaires was also kept in confidence.

Standard 5 also emphasizes that a leader must understand leadership within the context of modern society. The creation of the mentoring program was based upon this notion. Students come to school with new pressures every day. For many of our children, gone are the days of Mayberry, hopscotch, and lemonade stands. In place of those are single parent homes struggling to keep it together, fears of child predators roaming our

neighborhoods, and isolation created by technological advances that send us all to separate rooms to enjoy our individual choices for entertainment. The students selected for this program were targeted because their difficulties in dealing with many of these pressures. The intern guided the mentors to be sensitive to the individual needs of each mentee.

The final standard governing school leadership brings us to an understanding of school within the context of outside forces that impact public education. Clearly stated, the administrator must be “committed to education as a key to opportunity and social mobility.” Perhaps one of the greatest effects of the mentoring program will be in its long-term effects for the students. If a positive relationship with a mentor can encourage an appreciation for school during the formative years of elementary school, perhaps those feelings will grow and continue to sustain these children throughout their educational experiences.

Changes within the Organization

The mentoring program created opportunities for the stakeholders to work toward a common vision. It also brought individuals to the forefront who might otherwise have gotten left behind. Students and faculty were brought together in a way that made the school community stronger and more unified. Before the program was instituted, the only resource person these children had was the school guidance counselor. All problems were brought to her either by the classroom teacher or by the children themselves. The inception of the mentoring program established another adult as a trustworthy resource and advocate. Within the organization, another level of support has been established.

Further Study

Mentoring programs function in a dynamic and evolving manner. Because individual relationships are the basis of the program, the variables for success or failure are infinite. In order to determine the best course of action and the direction that would yield the greatest potential for positive change, data would have to be gathered over a longer period of time. This would enable the program coordinator to adapt the program to better meet the needs of both the mentees and the mentors. The evidence presented following the five months that data was gathered for these students indicated a large percentage of the students demonstrating no change in their attitudes toward school, teachers, academics, or friends. Perhaps with extended duration of the program that group of children may begin to show more changes. The program can continue with the support of dedicated professionals who want to continue to serve as mentors. In order to make these organizational changes permanent, the program would require approval from the district and possible financial support in providing training opportunities for the mentors.

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APPENDIX A
Instrumentation

October 7, 2004

Dear Parents of _____,

Here at Whitman School we are piloting a new program. This program partners students with teachers other than their own in order to build a stronger community within the school. Your child has been selected to participate. Involvement in this program requires no additional time at school. Students simply will have another adult with whom they can discuss their successes and concerns. The teachers are asked to check in on their student-buddies to make sure things are going well. Please sign this note to indicate that your child has permission to be one of the first to be in this pilot program!

Sincerely,
Charlene Stumpf,

school counselor
x 3528

Emily Withstandley,

administrative intern
x 3504

I, _____, give my permission for my child,
_____, to participate in the Teacher-Student Buddy pilot program at
Whitman Elementary School.

October 19, 2004

Dear Parents of _____,

Thank you for agreeing to have your child participate in the teacher-student buddy program. In order to determine the effectiveness of this pilot program it is necessary to gather some data. I would like to present each child with a simple survey to determine their attitudes toward school and friends at the onset of the program. The same survey would be administered at the conclusion. All information gathered will be held in confidence. No names will be used. Each child will be assigned a candidate number for the sole purpose of record keeping. Attached you will find a copy of the survey to be used with your child. Please sign the bottom portion of this letter to indicate that you give your permission for this survey to be administered to your child. You do not need to have your child complete the survey. It will be administered at school. Thank you again for your support. Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

Emily Withstandley

X 3504

ewithstandley@wtps.org

I, _____, give my permission for my child,
_____, to complete the teacher-student buddy survey.

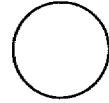
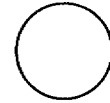
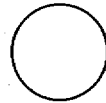
Candidate # _____

happy
face

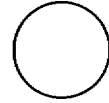
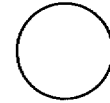
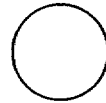
straight
face

sad
face

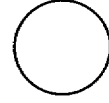
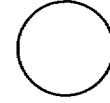
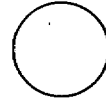
1. This is how I feel about school.



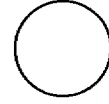
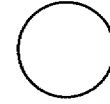
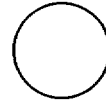
2. This is how my teachers feel about me.



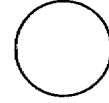
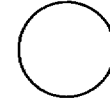
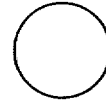
3. This is how I feel about reading.



4. This is how I feel about math.



5. This is how I feel about friends.



Candidate # _____

Yes Sometimes No

1. I like school.
2. My teachers like me.
3. I am good at reading.
4. I am good at math.
5. I have good friends.

Weekly Update for Mentors

**** You are asked not to divulge any content that should be kept in confidence.****

Name of mentee _____

How many times did you meet from 10/ 27/ 04 to 11/ 8/ 04? _____

What were the durations of those meetings?

Did you discuss academics? Y/N

Did you discuss behavioral issues? Y/N

Did you discuss personal issues? Y/N

Did you discuss social issues? Y/N

How often did the student seek you out? _____

How often did you seek out the student? _____

How often did the student utilize the privilege of before school meetings? _____

Were there specific discussions/ conflicts you would like to report?
If so, please elaborate?

March 1, 2005

Dear Parents of _____,

This letter is a follow-up to the teacher-student buddy program in which your child is involved. Although your child will continue to see his/her teacher buddy for the remainder of the year, it is necessary at this time for me to collect more data for the program. I will be meeting with your child to discuss his/her experience thus far. Please sign the bottom portion of this letter to indicate that I have your permission to ask your child how well the experience has helped him/her.

Sincerely,

Emily Withstandley

Second Grade Teacher

Administrative Intern

I, _____, give permission for _____
(parent name) (student name)

to complete the follow-up questionnaire for the teacher-student buddy program.

Mentee # _____

Follow-up Questionnaire

How do you feel about having a Teacher-Buddy? _____

Why? _____

What was the best part about having a Teacher-Buddy? _____

What was the part you liked least? _____

Did your Teacher-Buddy help you with problems:

In school? _____

With friends? _____

With teachers? _____

Mentor # _____

Follow-up Questionnaire

Please provide any information you feel would be helpful in evaluating the effectiveness of the mentoring program.

Did you enjoy time with your mentee? _____

Do you feel you put in the effort necessary to get to know your mentee? _____

How often did you schedule a special meeting or lunch with your mentee? _____

Would you rate this as a positive, neutral, or negative experience? Why? _____

Do you feel you were able to help your mentee? _____

Teacher _____

Mentee # _____

Follow-up Questionnaire

Please provide any information you think would be helpful in the evaluation of the mentoring program.

Were there any noticeable differences in _____'s:

academic performance? _____

social skills? _____

behaviors? _____

Did _____ seem to utilize his/her mentor? _____

APPENDIX B

Board of Education Report

MENTORING

Board of Education Report

Focus of the Study

This study took place at Whitman Elementary School.

Maslow determined that a child cannot be expected to attain high goals if his basic needs are not being met. Within this context of needs there must be considered the need for personal attention and human connection. The intern established a mentoring program for at-risk students in grades one through five in order to encourage each child to meet his or her potential. Teachers were paired with at-risk students to act as mentors to those students. The program worked to foster a sense of belonging and pride in self and community for the students. The study focused on the academic and behavioral achievements and improvements made by these students during the course of the year. Teachers volunteered to spend time with students at regular intervals in order to cultivate a relationship in which the teacher served as a support system. Suggested activities and timelines were provided to the teachers in order to clarify the goals of the program. Contact was monitored weekly in order to ensure integrity of the program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of mentoring at-risk students using action research. The study aimed to improve the social and academic lives of the

mentees through regular interactions with their mentors. Candidates were recommended for the program based on a range of needs. Some were individuals who had difficulty with academic performance. Other mentees were students who were identified as having difficulty forming friendships or engaging in appropriate social interactions. The intern sought to ascertain whether mentoring would have an effect on students who were in need of support in addition to what they received in the regular classroom.

Significance

This project served to improve the general school experience for students determined to be at-risk either academically or socially. Individual needs were met as the sense of school and community were strengthened. Mentoring was used as an important preventative intervention for students who may otherwise have gone unnoticed or who may have become problem students both now and in the future. This study was important in determining a method for reaching more students within the school community than may be normally reached by regular interactions with school personnel.

Need for Mentoring

Mentoring actually has its roots in Greek literature. Odysseus asked his friend, Mentor, to care for his son while he set out on his journey to Troy. Homer indeed created the model of what the mentors of today strive to be. A mentor serves to “support through listening, advocacy, sharing of self, establishing structure, highlighting strengths, and making the experience unique and positive” (McCluskey, Noller, Lamoureux, and McCluskey, 2004, ¶ 2). Teachers and other adults use similar strategies to help offset the factors that

challenge the ability of a child to reach his or her full potential. The need extends not only to children who struggle in school. Exceptional students are not exempt from the negative pressures of society. They too, may live lives of poverty riddled with violence or poor parenting. For all children, solutions must be found to help guide each one to reach his or her full potential whether that is as an assembly line worker or a neurosurgeon. Each deserves the chance.

Without the opportunity to explore areas of intelligence that may not be the norm for a traditional classroom, students may have talents that go virtually ignored and never have the chance to develop those skills. Serious consequences may result. Students who were deemed at –risk as children have records of growing up to become burdens on society. "They have a disproportionately high incidence of divorce, chronic unemployment, physical and psychiatric problems, substance abuse, demands on the welfare system, and further criminal activity" (Keating, Tomishima, Foster, and Alessandri, 2002, ¶ 2).

Goals of Mentoring

Mentoring aims to help youngsters better negotiate life and the choices that they make. One particular goal is to guide youth in order to help them develop into adults who can be productive members of the work force. The role of the mentor is to act as a role model, teacher, friend, confidant, and coach (Slicker & Palmer 1993). Sally Barton-Arwood et al. (2000) cited several examples of the benefits of mentoring. Mentoring experiences result in new emotional supports and friendships, improved self-esteem, increased skills and academic achievement, and an improved social network. Mentees learn by having someone who serves as a model of appropriate behaviors. They are able to expand their

interactions in different cultural settings, vocational skills improve, and dropout rates decrease. Jeanne Christiansen (1997) provided specific activities that may be of value in the mentoring process. She encouraged the use of counseling sessions and classroom instruction to teach interpersonal skills necessary in making and sustaining friendships. Christiansen even suggested that students be taught social skills such as how to greet teachers when entering or exiting the classroom. Opportunities for the school to establish and promote a climate of caring and meaningful interactions greatly benefit mentees. Slicker and Palmer (1993) approached mentoring activities slightly differently. Their suggested activities included mentor initiated contacts, frequent meetings, recognition of birthdays and holidays, demonstration of interest in school projects, and report cards. As indicated by Masten and Coatsworth (1998) these supports help the students to achieve competence and the ultimate goal of successful transition into adulthood and the workforce. "Job competence in late adolescence was significantly predicted by academic achievement, conduct, and social competence earlier in development" (Masten and Coatsworth, 1998, Competence in the School Years section, ¶ 21).

Sample and Sampling Technique

Students were selected by the school guidance counselor. All of the students were either seen regularly by her or were students who were brought to her attention by their classroom teachers. The criteria were students who either struggled academically or socially. The guidance counselor determined which students would benefit from having a mentor who could support them outside of the regular classroom setting. All survey instruments were submitted to the district for approval according to policy regulations.

Permission slips were sent the parents or guardians of each potential mentee. All nineteen students selected obtained the necessary permission to be enrolled. The students were then gathered together by the intern and the guidance counselor to receive information on the purpose of the program. Students appeared genuinely excited at the prospect of being selected to work with a special teacher-buddy.

Teachers had been presented with the program at the beginning of school year.

Volunteers were then obtained through responses to a questionnaire. Again, the guidance counselor aided the intern in partnering mentees with appropriate mentors. The intern felt that the guidance counselor's first-hand knowledge of the students would enable her to establish the most suitable pairings. The intern then presented the expectations of the program to the mentors.

Description of Research Design

Interpretation of data gathered through action research determined the results of the program. Both quantitative and qualitative measures were used. Students were asked to complete a simple survey at the onset of the program to serve as a baseline for their self-perceptions. They were also asked to complete the same survey at the conclusion of the program. During the course of the study, the intern worked to establish the value of instituting a mentoring program based on the impact the program had on children involved. The data was used to evaluate any correlations between frequency and duration of mentoring sessions to the degree to which the mentees demonstrated any change in their academic performances, social relations, or behavior. Each week a survey was sent to each mentor via email to gather data concerning frequency, duration, and content of

any mentoring sessions. As the study progressed, a noted lack of commitment prompted the intern to review the goals of the program and the expectations with the mentors. New suggestions were given and weekly consultations were conducted with each mentor. Although the intern did not want to skew the results, she determined there would be little chance of successfully helping any students if the interactions between mentors and mentees did not intensify. The top priority during the study remained the success of the children involved. After several weeks in the program, mentees were also approached about utilization of their mentors. The classroom teachers were also interviewed in order to gain qualitative information regarding any changes at the conclusion of the study.

Data Collection Approach

Due to the unique needs of each child in the program, the intern deemed it necessary to gain both quantitative and qualitative forms of data. To maintain privacy, each mentee was assigned a number to be used in all records and data analysis. A systematic approach was employed in the administration of the student surveys. The intern greeted each child and escorted him or her to a quiet location. The students were then shown the survey, given directions, and provided the opportunity for any clarification. The survey asked the children to rate their feelings toward school, teachers, reading, math, and friends. Once the five questions were answered, the students were escorted back to their classrooms. The survey was administered with the goal of gaining an understanding of the needs of each mentee. The intern was also interested in seeing if the self-perception of each mentee was the same as the perception that was the impetus for their initial consideration

into the program. The intern was also interested in finding any changes in the feelings of the mentees toward the five areas at the conclusion of the study.

The particulars of the mentoring sessions were left to the discretion of the mentors. Suggestions for types sessions were provided by the intern during an initial meeting, again through email, and ultimately through individual conferences. Mentors were encouraged to set aside times to have lunches or special meetings with their mentees. The intern supported the mentors throughout the program by providing reminders and suggestions for ways to spend more quality time with their mentees. The intern also spoke to the mentors during the program to check on their progress and provide any additional support necessary.

At the conclusion of each week the mentors were asked to complete a brief report regarding their mentoring sessions and to send it back to the intern. They reported number of sessions, duration of sessions, and content if appropriate. The intern then kept all information electronically filed for each individual mentee.

During the course of the study, the intern again met with the mentees to discuss their relationships with their mentors and to answer any concerns they may have had.

The intern also administered a questionnaire to the classroom teachers at the conclusion of the study in order to determine if there had been any significant changes evident in school performance. Questionnaires were also administered to the mentors at the conclusion of the study. They were asked to reflect upon their experiences and to evaluate themselves as mentors and the program in general.

At the conclusion of the study, the intern administered the same survey to the children that they completed at the onset of the program. An additional questionnaire was also administered to the mentees. Both instruments targeted similar information. The first was given to serve as a comparison from their initial responses. The second was in order to allow the students to elaborate on their experiences to that point. Students were again greeted by the intern and read the questionnaire. The children dictated their answers due to the fact that many of them were too young to write their answers by themselves. This survey covered the initial areas of concern and the feelings that each mentee had about being in the program.

Presentation of Research Findings

The mentoring experience like all human experiences varied greatly for all subjects in the study. There were those who found success and struggle as well as those whose hearts were never really in it. There were common threads among the mentees, yet both teachers and mentors had a wide array of experiences. One of the most profound differences lay in the amount of time the mentors reported to have devoted to being with their mentees. Information was obtained through the weekly updates. There were twelve mentors who worked with nineteen mentees. Seven serviced two children while the other five each had one mentee. Information presented reflects each mentee rather than mentor since there were differences even within the experiences of a mentor who worked with two children.

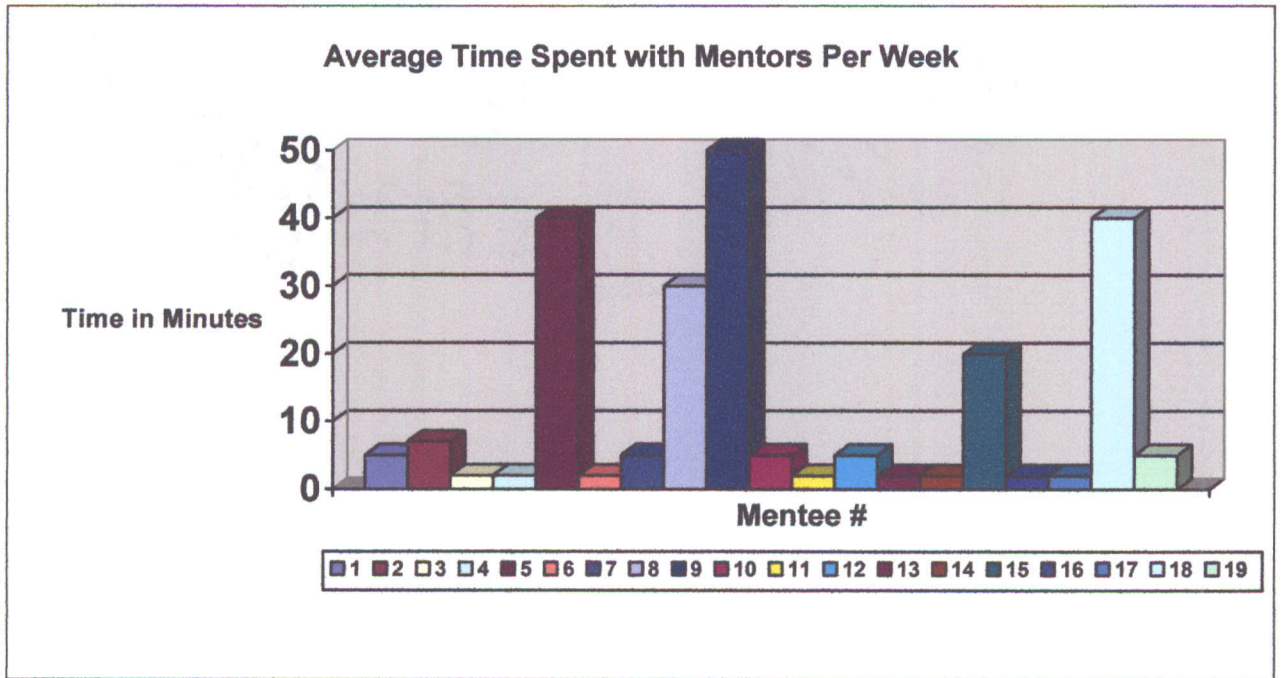


Figure 1

Approach

Some of the mentors had regularly scheduled appointment times with their mentees.

Others were more apt to see the children in passing. The number of meetings per week ranged from none to daily. All mentors approached their positions with differing perspectives.

The weekly updates gave the intern some qualitative data regarding the approach each mentor used to reach their mentees. While some made little or no comments, others revealed the essence of their experiences. One mentor began with reports of frustration stating, "I extended the invitation again for him (the mentee) to come down last period to talk, for help, or to help me in the classroom, but again, he never showed." She later reported, "I think I am making some progress. He has been asking to come see me, and has shown up to get help with his work." Toward the end of the study the student was

observed stopping to see the mentor on an almost regular basis. During his follow-up conference, he stated, "She helps me get my work done faster, and we talk in spare time. When my work is done faster, my problems are gone." His teacher expressed the same result on the teacher questionnaire. On the flip side, one mentor wrote on the weekly update for week two, "I think it's a good idea, but it's ineffective." There was little effort put in from that point forward. According to their teachers, the mentees assigned to this mentor showed very little change in academic, social, or behavioral issues over the course of this study. A few mentors tried using reminder cards to encourage the mentee to show up for scheduled times. The success of these was dependent upon the child then making an effort.

The intern did meet with the students to remind them that they too, were responsible for showing up for scheduled meetings with their mentors. The intern also impressed upon them the inability for their mentors to leave their classroom during the teaching day. Students were encouraged to seek out their mentors on a more regular basis. Six mentees did seek out their mentors. All of them were in either fourth or fifth grade though not all fourth and fifth graders sought out their mentors. No mentees in first, second, or third grade sought out their mentors for assistance. One first grade mentee did present a mentor with an invitation to a birthday party.

Difficulties

The post-study questionnaires provided more insight into the complexities of the study. Scheduling was a major concern for most of the mentors. One mentor wrote, "In the beginning I found it difficult to meet with her (the mentee) due to her schedule and mine.

Once we worked out a schedule I enjoyed it much more. I felt bad because other teachers were able to arrange special meetings and my mentee knew it.” Most mentors felt that having a mentee within their own grade level would or did allow them to set up meeting times during lunch. “I think I could have done more to get to know my mentees if they were in the same grade level. It was difficult to coordinate schedules.” However, of the eight mentees who did share a lunch period with their mentors, only four of them had any scheduled lunch meetings.

The familiarity of a child to the mentor prior to the study also had an impact on the mindset of some of the mentors. “I already had a relationship with my mentee from teaching her for two years. It made the transition to mentor/mentee easier.” Some mentors felt that being paired with an unfamiliar child was a disadvantage. “I think it’s hard to do this with a kid you don’t know, who doesn’t know you.” Another commented, “I felt like I couldn’t find the time. I always felt uncomfortable with my mentee.”

Mentor Feedback

Effort and enjoyment were both related to the overall experience, Figure 2. The mentors reported the degree of effort with which they handled the program. They were able to rate themselves as having put forth sufficient effort, a moderate amount of effort, or not much effort at all. In conjunction, they were able to state whether the general experience had been positive, neutral, or negative. This was not necessarily an indication of how well they thought the program worked. It only reflected whether or not the general feeling was positive, neutral, or negative. All mentors who felt that they had put in a high amount of effort also felt it was an overall positive experience. Those who had put in

moderate effort reported both positive and neutral experiences but no negative ones. Of the mentors who felt they did not put in effort, the majority rated this as a negative experience while smaller percentages felt that it had been neutral and positive.

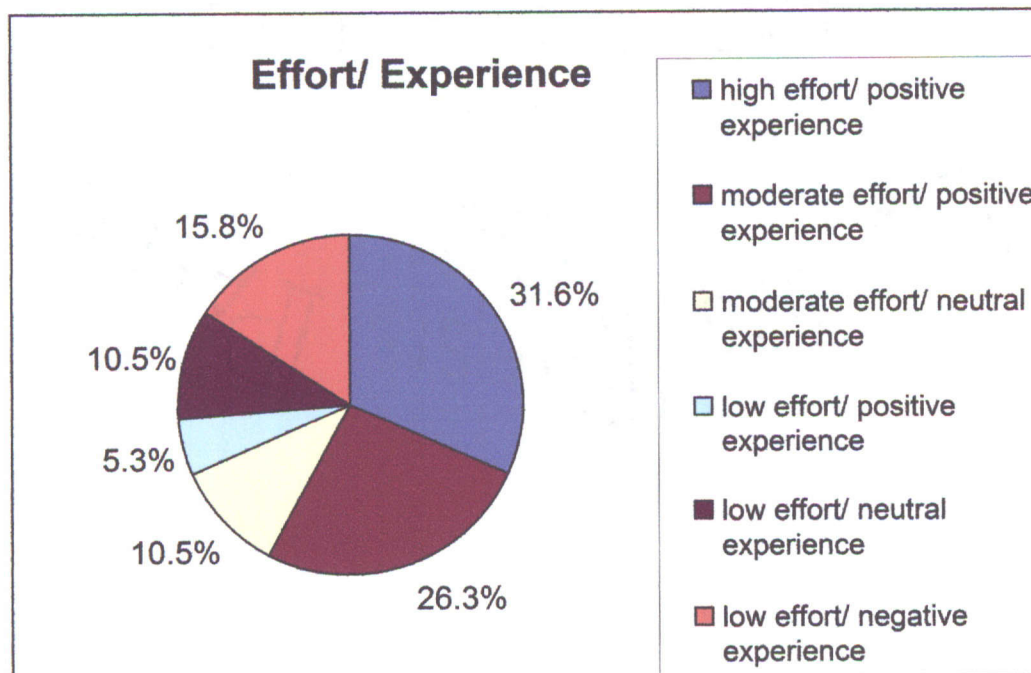


Figure 2

The mentors were also asked to rate how effective they felt the program had been for their mentees. Their overall enjoyment was reflected in how effective they felt the experience was for the mentees, Figure 3. Thirteen of the experiences were enjoyable for the mentors. Six were not. In the eyes of the mentors, eleven enjoyable experiences yielded positive effects for the mentees. The other two were reportedly neutral. Three of the six less satisfying experiences were given an overall rating of negative by the mentor. Two were seen as neutral and one as positive.

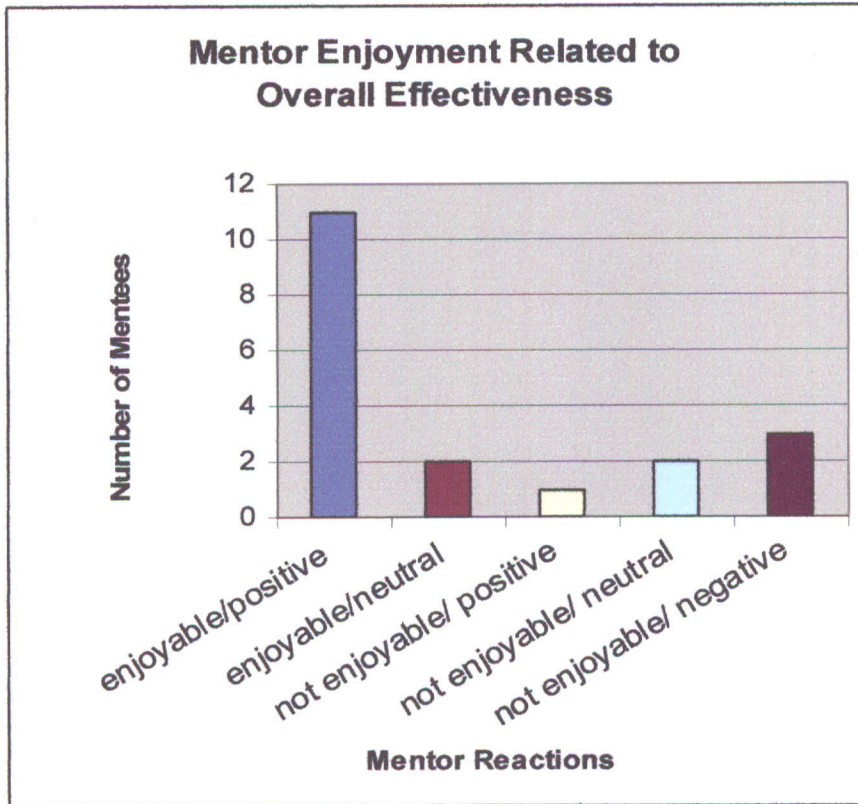


Figure 3

It was also evident that mentors who put forth effort also enjoyed the experience more than mentors who put forth less effort, Figure 4. All mentors who put in high effort also enjoyed the experience. Likewise, the majority who put in moderate effort also enjoyed working with their mentees. Of the six mentors who felt they put minimal effort into their relationships, four felt the experience was not enjoyable while two felt it was.

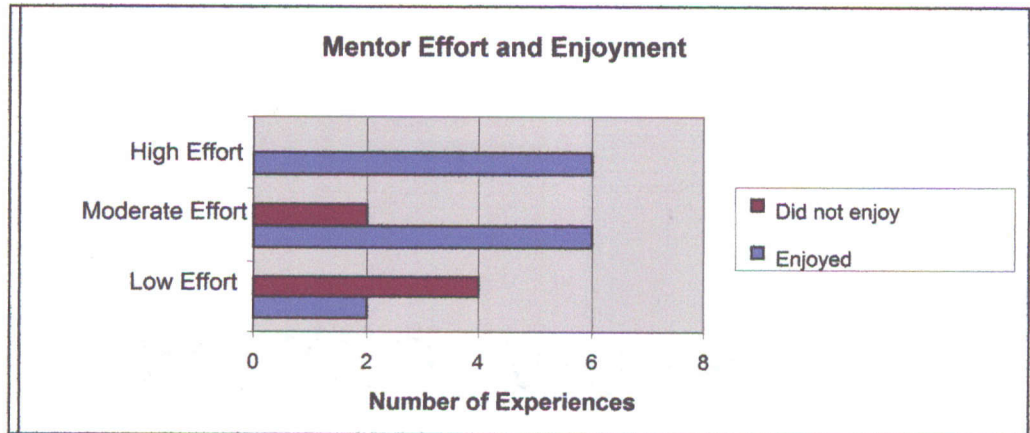


Figure 4

When all three features: effort, experience, and enjoyment were examined, there were six mentees who worked with mentors who felt they put in a high amount of effort who also felt the program had a positive effect on the mentee and who enjoyed the experience themselves. These mentees showed some promising changes, Table 1.

Mentee Number	Changes in Attitudes About School, Teachers, Reading, Math, and Friends	Teacher Comments Regarding Changes
5	Increased from negative to positive feelings about school Felt more liked by teachers Felt better about reading abilities	Improvements were seen in behavioral issues Peer relations improved Still having academic difficulties
7	Increased feeling about friends Decreased feelings toward reading abilities	Utilizing mentor to assist with assignment completion Noticeably comfortable with mentor Enjoying the positive attention
9	Increased feeling in all five areas	Seems happier Enjoying the connection with mentor
12	Felt more liked by teachers Felt better about skills in math	Improved social skills with both students and teachers
18	Felt more liked by teachers Felt better about reading abilities	Academic skills have progressed Receptive to positive attention from mentor
19	No changes- already had positive feelings in all five areas	Good peer relations

Table 1

Teacher Feedback

The intern examined where the classroom teachers observed changes in the mentees. Although the mentees were not necessarily referred to the program because of deficiencies in all three areas, the teachers were asked to report differences in academics, social skills, and behaviors. There were seven children who demonstrated little if any overall changes. Four of these mentees were paired with the mentors who rated themselves as having put forth low effort. Two worked with mentors who felt their efforts were moderate. The seventh child did see his mentor frequently; however, the nature of their meetings was reportedly casual with general greetings rather than personal sessions.

The other twelve mentees demonstrated a variety of improvements or changes within the classroom. For six of the mentees, teachers commented that academic progress was being made. Support from the mentors was one factor in the improvements. "If I mentioned something to (her mentor) about her work, (the mentor) would speak with her, and it did help." Eight mentees experienced improved peer relations. Many of the mentors spent time discussing conflict resolution and positive interactions. "(His mentor) talked to him about his peer relationships and how important friends were at hard times." Behaviorally, the changes were as varied as the children themselves. Four mentees were specifically cited as showing progress. One demonstrated more self-confidence and less complaining. Another experienced fewer meltdowns than in the past. One child was seen as happier. Another was less frustrated and more relaxed within the classroom.

Perceptions of the Mentees

Perhaps the most telling were the perceptions the students had of themselves. The same survey was administered at both the onset and at the conclusion of the study. The survey asked for simple ratings of yes, sometimes, or no regarding five areas: I like school. My teachers like me. I am good at reading. I am good at math. I have good friends. The intern examined both overall trends and individual changes. Table 2 shows the number of mentees and their feelings toward the five different areas prior to working with a mentor. The pre-study numbers indicate that the majority of the students felt they were well adjusted at the onset. Table 3 shows the overall changes in numbers at the end of the study. The two areas that show the greatest overall change were that of how the teachers felt about the students and of having good friends. Although the other three areas do not reflect changes in overall trends, when examined on an individual basis, there were changes in student perception.

Pre-study	Yes	Sometimes	No
I like school.	8	8	3
My teachers like me.	11	8	0
I am good at reading.	10	8	1
I am good at math.	12	4	3
I have good friends.	12	6	1

Table 2

Post-study	Yes	Sometimes	No
I like school.	8	8	3
My teachers like me.	16	3	0
I am good at reading.	9	9	1
I am good at math.	13	3	3
I have good friends.	15	4	0

Table 3

Individual Changes

Post-study	Increased	Stayed the Same	Decreased
I like school.	4	11	4
My teachers like me.	7	11	1
I am good at reading.	2	14	3
I am good at math.	4	11	4
I have good friends.	5	13	1

Table 4

Table 4 depicts the changes seen per student. Although for all areas most mentees showed no change at all, again the areas of teachers and friends show the greatest amount of change with seven and five students respectively showing improved feelings. Figure 5 represents this data graphically.

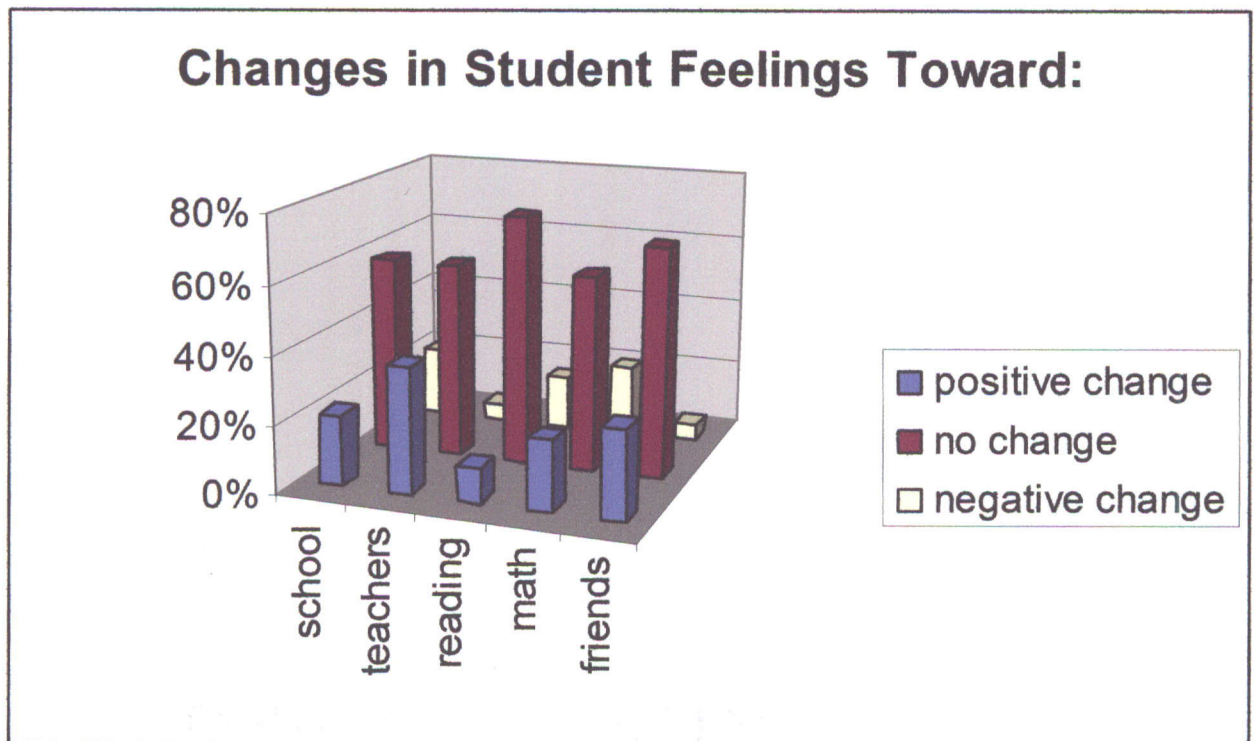


Figure 5

Mentee Responses

The mentees were also given the opportunity to respond to their experiences in the program. The intern administered individual questionnaires to each mentee. All students were asked how they felt about having a mentor. All nineteen students felt it was a positive experience. Every child responded with either the words good, happy, or special.

The second question on the questionnaire asked the students what the best part was about having a mentor. Their responses were insightful. "I got to talk to one of my favorite teachers." "I go to talk to her when I needed it instead of talking to my regular teacher." "She talked to me about a lot of stuff." "She talks to me a lot." "It made me feel happy that I could have somebody to talk to." "He talks to me, and I have somebody to talk to." "I got to meet up with someone and talk about my problems." "I like to talk to her." "She always helped me when I was in trouble. She always told people to give me a chance."

When asked what part they liked the least, most students agreed that there was nothing that they did not like. Two students made comments that they would like to spend more time with their mentors. One did not like writing notes because, "I can't write that good." One did not like that she felt afraid to ask to go see her mentor.

The mentees were also asked if their mentors helped them with problems in school, with friends, or with teachers. Eight of the mentees felt their mentors helped them with academics. Some mentors did this with words of encouragement. Others actually

worked through assignments or assisted with big projects. Peer relations again surfaced as a prominent topic between mentors and mentees. Seven of the mentees recalled working through peer problems with their mentors. Only three of the students felt that their mentors helped them with their teachers

Conclusion

Due to the nature of the study and the multitude of influences on the development of a child, the intern does not give causality of improvements solely to the mentoring program. It should be seen as one factor among many in working to assist the students.

There are however, some specific improvements that show a direct connection to the mentoring program. According to the classroom teachers and several of the mentees, those who received intervention concerning peer relationships showed definite improvements.

There was also a direct correlation between the amount of effort and enjoyment felt by the mentors to the changes reported by mentees and teachers. The six mentors who worked most closely with their mentees created experiences in which the mentees were able to demonstrate noticeable growth.

Also notable were the reactions of the students to having someone with whom they could talk. Human nature tells us we all want to feel validated. Knowing someone would listen provided these children that source of connection. Whether they all utilized their mentors to discuss problems or not, they at least all felt that they had someone who would listen.

Their feelings of acceptance by their teachers can be explained in similar terms. The children were able to interface with an adult, their mentor, in a supportive and non-confrontational manner. The children therefore got to know teachers better and felt a stronger connection to them. This would in turn affect how the children felt they were perceived by teachers in general.

Everyone likes to feel liked. Being in the mentoring program provided these nineteen students with an advocate, someone on their side. For some, just knowing there is someone there may be a help.

Implications

The study revealed conditions which fostered the positive effects of the program and circumstances where relationships failed to flourish. Time was a major issue for many of the mentors. They felt as though there was little opportunity in their schedules to fit in a mentee. To help alleviate this problem mentors could be paired solely with students who were in the same grade level or whose break times were compatible. For those mentors who were unwilling to give up their free time to work with their mentees, stricter guidelines could be imposed to require a minimum duration of time spent together per week. Mentors would have to sign off on this prior to being assigned a mentee. This would define the expectations for a mentor and reduce the number of situations where relationships were unable to grow due to lack of quality contact. Mentors may also require more training. They could be directed in how to find ways to form connections with their mentees. Training could also help them to focus on strengths and problem areas for each child.

In building a mentoring program, it became apparent that the effort of the mentors had much to do with the success of each individual relationship so too, did the eagerness of the mentees. Mentees who reciprocated the effort solidified connections and created opportunities for sharing. An interactive dialogue opens the door for better understanding. A strong personality connection also seemed to promote a better overall experience. Mentors needed to feel a bond with their mentees. Since some felt already knowing the child was a benefit, mentors could be given that option before pairings were made. The mentees may also benefit from additional group meetings with a program coordinator in order to understand their role.

Changes within the Organization

The mentoring program created opportunities for the stakeholders to work toward a common vision. It also brought individuals to the forefront who might otherwise have gotten left behind. Students and faculty were brought together in a way that made the school community stronger and more unified. Before the program was instituted, the only resource person these children had was the school guidance counselor. All problems were brought to her either by the classroom teacher or by the children themselves. The inception of the mentoring program established another adult as a trustworthy resource and advocate. Within the organization, another level of support has been established.

Further Study

Mentoring programs function in a dynamic and evolving manner. Because individual relationships are the basis of the program, the variables for success or failure are infinite.

In order to determine the best course of action and the direction that would yield the greatest potential for positive change, data would have to be gathered over a longer period of time. This would enable the program coordinator to adapt the program to better meet the needs of both the mentees and the mentors. The evidence presented following the five months that data was gathered for these students indicated a large percentage of the students demonstrating no change in their attitudes toward school, teachers, academics, or friends. Perhaps with extended duration of the program that group of children may begin to show more changes. The program can continue with the support of dedicated professionals who want to continue to serve as mentors. In order to make these organizational changes permanent, the program would require approval from the district and possible financial support in providing training opportunities for the mentors.