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Vision Academic Mentoring Program: Mentor and Mentee Perceptions of Relationships, Attitudes and Academic Performance

Nikyda Scott
Trinity College

Trinity College
HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

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Nikyda Scott

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Professor Jack Dougherty

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Perceptions of Relationships, Attitudes, and Academic Performance

Research question:

How do Vision Academic Mentoring Program mentors and mentees perceive the quality of their relationship, and does this affect the mentees' attitudes and perceived academic performance?

Thesis:

The Vision Academic Mentoring Program mentors and mentees will see their relationship, overall, to be a positive and worthwhile experience. The mentors will believe their mentees have done better in school, understand they can have a future, and people care for them. The mentees will believe their mentors have helped them understand people care about them, they can have a future (go to college), and they will think they've done better in school.

Significance:

This is significant to Educational Studies because even though Hartford's dropout rates are reported to be getting lower each year (Connecticut State…,2003) inner-city youth need a positive influence to show them there's more to life after high school, even middle school; they too can have a promising and successful future just like anyone else. With the interaction of different backgrounds, mentors and mentees can learn from each other, in the sense where they both understand not everyone has dealt with the same

issues as themselves and need to open up in order to form a bond. This is especially in regards to the mentors, since majority is white and come from middle to upper class families. It's also positive reinforcement to the mentees because the mentors, coming from Trinity College which helped with the planning and building of the Learning Corridor where Hartford Magnet Middle School (HMMS) is located, shows Trinity communities' dedication to HMMS by have its own students work with HMMS students. Most importantly, it's important to know whether mentors and mentees have a good relationship, since without some sort of communicative and productive relationship, it's seems unlikely something good or worthwhile would come out of the program for the mentors or mentees.

Vision Academic Mentoring Program:

The Vision Academic Mentoring Program (V.A.M.P.) is run by Shanta Evans. She is the Program Coordinator as well as a fellow Trinity alumna. The program started in the fall of 2001 and is currently in its third year. V.A.M.P.'s mission is to foster the academic achievement of students at HMMS. The overall goals of V.A.M.P. are to encourage these students to achieve academic excellence and ultimately affect the way the students think about themselves and their academic lives. Through the program there is continuous encouragement to aspire higher education. V.A.M.P. is some what different from other mentoring programs because there's a research component behind it. It's a grant funded program (Zimmerman/Jones Foundation) and presentations are given to the grant committee at the end of each year to see what results the program has produced. The presentation reports on the perceived notions of how the program is doing by studying surveys given to the mentors, mentees, mentees' teachers and parents. The

mentees were 6th graders, who were chosen through a lottery system based on CMT reading and math scores that were below grade level. Once the students were chosen, no additional students were added into the program. The purpose was to be able to track students' performance easier, but students were able to leave the program (some did due to moving to a new residence and changed schools). The mentors are Trinity College students who were interviewed and after selected, underwent a three week training program to prepare them to work with inner-city youth (i.e. peer mediation, role playing, etc…).

Background:

The three following articles show the importance to having mentoring programs. By using the V.A.M.P. Program, which I have had personal contact with, my project goes beyond what these studies have reported. I have seen the program in session, talked to mentors and mentees about the program, and was even a mentor for a short period of time before I became an Administrative Assistant for the V.A.M.P. Program. My project asks, what I deem are three very important questions, my research question, which only the second and third articles seem to answer. Yet, they are each still important to my research in some way.

The Barton-Arwood & Massey (2000), article defines a mentoring relationship as a relationship between a person who has experience and an individual with less experience and benefit from each other. They talk about the benefits of mentoring being to develop friendships, emotional supports, higher self-esteem, and increase knowledge of skills for the mentee. They state there are three principles of mentoring: 1) build reciprocal relationships, 2) completing tasks and reaching outcome goals, and 3)

reinforce and build social values/norms from society's point of view. They also talk about how existing peer programs have similar outcomes as mentoring programs such as peer-assisted learning, peer tutoring, peer mediation, and peer modeling programs. Lastly, they state how mentoring programs need to be structured and organized, as well as, how it must and can be built into the fabric of school (i.e. a teacher's time is limited, so he/she can't possibly cater to a new student, so they assign the new student to another student to show them the "ropes"). In my opinion these are some of the underlying principles and goals V.A.M.P. uses everyday.

The article by Holland (1986) speaks of a program whose focus is based on an early school preventative failure program called Project 2000. This program was started at Stanton Elementary in Washington D.C. and was sponsored, funded, and staffed by men from the D.C. chapter if Concerned Black Men, Inc. from 1988-1994. Each volunteer spent half a day a week being a teacher's assistant and provided one-on-one mentoring and tutoring. The purpose of the program was the prevent the steady increase of black males dropping out, performing violent acts, and committing crime (this was based on a theory that the lack of male figures, especially fathers, in the boys lives contributed to these situations), but sooner rather than later when the boy has already fallen into the downward spiral of crime. The other purpose of Program 2000 was to have the boys' mostly females teachers teach them the academic and social skills they need to compete successfully in the real world. This program's focus was with elementary school boys in grades 1-6 (also worked with girls, but the article focused on the boys) focusing on different skills each year: listening, self-control, responsibility, commitment and work (respectively). The authors reported for the 1995-1996 school

year, 33 of 38 boys earned 2.0 GPAs or better and when compared to a similar elementary school, which had afterschool tutors and academic enrichment programs, just not adult male role models like PROJECT 2000, PROJECT 2000 students had significantly higher GPAs and standardized test scores. Even though PROJECT 2000 focused on elementary students and V.A.M.P. focuses on middle school students, both programs are trying to prevent the same thing-students from dropping out.

The last article by Shaw & Stevenson (1993) talked about the MUCH (Morgan Undergraduate Chemist Help) Program. It was established at Morgan State University in 1989 and was collaboration between the college and Baltimore city schools. The purpose of the MUCH Program was to excite inner-city youth about science, apply scientific methods to the everyday environment, and open their eyes to career options within the science field. It also gave the mentors an opportunity to help kids in the community, expand speaking skills, and make a positive influence on the black students' lives. As it turned out, 1000 4th and 5th graders at four predominantly black elementary schools have participated, where the mentors with the mentees, performed experiments, watched videos, and held discussions on the contributions of blacks towards the sciences. Also in 1991, 128 4th and 87 5th graders were surveyed and it reportedly demonstrated the importance the mentors made on the students attitudes towards science. Just like V.A.M.P., this article showed mentors can positively influence mentees attitudes, which I believe could have only happened in a positive and worthwhile relationship.

Methods:

I focused on the second year of V.A.M.P. (2002-2003), since more information was available to me. At the end of the year, the mentors and mentees are given surveys

to fill out. Each survey asks the mentors and mentees how they felt about the program, how they felt about each other, what could be done to improve the program, and how they felt about themselves. The questions I focused on I believed were the most relevant to my project, since they asked the mentor and mentees what they thought they gained from their relationship. For the mentors' survey I focused on questions 32-55, which 33-53 were circle the response questions and 54-55 were open response questions asking the mentors what they thought their mentee(s) and themselves gained through their relationship (Appendix A). There were eight categories, which included 2-4 questions. The categories were: *support* (questions pertained to feel people care/people are willing to help the mentee), *empowerment* (is a better leader/has more future options), *boundaries and expectations* (higher expectations/more responsible), *constructive use of time* (more hobbies/involved in programs), *commitment to learning* (school attitudes/behavior), *positive values* (honesty/helpfulness), *social competencies* (get along with family and friends, and resist drugs), and *positive identity* (self esteem). Each mentor was asked to circle: *true*, *false*, *did not need changing (fine to begin with)*, or *don't know* for each question regarding their mentees(s). Using Excel, I took each question and listed what response the mentor circled under each category (Appendix B), including responses to the open response questions. I then tallied the answers and recorded the most frequent response of the mentors *note M 2 had two mentees; M2-1 and M2-2*. I used this method because the answers weren't on the same tangent where I could assign numbers to the answers and mathematically average them.

For the mentees' survey I used the questions in Section 5: *Pertains to your relationship with your mentor*, questions 2-35 (Appendix C). Also, questions 15-35 were

the exact same questions asked to the mentees in first person, which were asked to the

mentors about their mentee(s). For example, question 32 on the mentors' survey asked,

'I think my mentee feels like there are more adults, who care about her/him,' and

question 15 on the mentees' survey asked, 'Because of my relationship with my mentor I

feel like there are adults who care about me' and so on. In question 2, the mentees were

asked four questions pertaining to how they would describe their relationship with their

mentor and were asked to circle: *often, sometimes, rarely,* or *never*. With questions 3-14,

they were asked to circle: *very true, sort of true, not very true,* or *not at all true*; question

14 asked about how they felt when they were with their mentor (eight emotions were

given). For these two sections I assigned each answer a number and took the average

because they were on the same tangent: *often-*1*, sometimes-*2*, rarely-*3*,* or *never-*4 and

*very true-*1*, sort of true-*2*, not very true-*3*,* or *not at all true-*4. As for questions 15-35,

they were asked to circle: *true, false,* or *did not change*. I recorded the most frequent

response for each question, this way I would be able to compare their answers to the

mentors' answers. I also used Excel and listed each question (Appendix D and E). I also

used questions 23-26 to assess the mentees' perceptions of their academic achievement.

Analysis:

When comparing the questions 32-53 of the mentors' survey and questions 15-35

of the mentees' survey, when looking at the most frequent response, the answer *true*

matched 10 out of 21 times. They matched on both *support* questions (mentors' survey

questions 32-33/mentees' survey questions 15-16), the first *empowerment* question

(34/17), the first three *commitment to learning* questions (41-43/23-25), the second *social*

competencies question (48/30), and all three *positive identity* questions (51-53/33-35).

Overall, the mentors' most frequent response for their questions were *true* (10)*, false* (3)*,* and *don't know* (10) *note: some questions had two most frequent responses and is the reason why they don't add up to 21*, while the mentees' most frequent responses for their questions were all *true*. As for the questions in question 2 on the mentees' survey, the averages were: they *rarely* were asked by their mentors to talk about things important to them, *sometimes* did things they enjoyed with their mentors, *rarely* were excited about getting together with their mentor, and *rarely* wished they had a different mentor. For questions 3-14, the mentees' on the average thought: it was *sort of true* their mentor understood them, *sort of true* they respected their mentor, *not very true* they had a close relationship with their mentor, *not very true* wished they got together more often with their mentor, *not very true* would like their relationship to be closer, *not true at all* their mentor made fun of them in ways they didn't like, *not true at all* their mentor promised to do something and didn't, *not true at all* mentor gave them advice that made them feel stupid, *not true at all* can't trust their mentor with secrets because he/she would tell, *sort of true* wished their mentor asked them about what they thought, *not very true* knew their mentor better, and *sort of true* felt happy, *not very true* felt excited, *not very true* felt special, *sort of true* felt important, *not very true* felt mad, *not very true* felt bored, *not very true* felt disappointed, and *not very true* felt ignored when they were with their mentors. In regards to the mentees' perceived academic performance, the most frequent response was *true* their attitude toward school was better, their grades and test scores were better, came to school more prepared, and behavior in class was better. Lastly, a few of the mentors' responses to the open response questions were they believed their mentee(s) gained through their relationship the knowledge they can have a future, can

have relationships with older people, need to work hard, they are good people and loved, and they can receive help if they simply ask for it. The mentors were pretty much in agreement they realize how hard it is not only to mentor but also how hard it is to be a middle schooler and a teacher today through their relationship with their mentee(s).

Conclusion:

Overall, it seems as if through their relationship the mentors and mentees agreed the mentees felt like there were adults who cared about them, there are people who will help them, they have more future options, has a better attitude toward school, has better grades and test scores, comes to school more prepared, able to express their feelings better, has a more positive view of their future, feels more assure of themselves, and thinks they're better people. I don't think these agreements would've been made if there wasn't some sort of relationship formed. Granted the mentees' surveys did average out to be they *rarely* were excited to get together with their mentor and *not at all true* felt excited or special when they were with their mentor, but they *rarely* wished they had a different mentor and *sort of true* felt important and happy when they were with their mentor on average. Even though these averages could be skewed because certain answers could pull the average up or down, it still shows some mentees and mentors had formed a relationship. I did take into account for the skewing of answers to several important factors: 1) mentors went abroad and when they did return, they didn't necessarily return to V.A.M.P., 2) some mentees had different mentors between the fall '02 and spring '03 semester, which they could have not opened up to their new mentor and they could have applied the survey to both mentors instead of filling out two surveys, 3) some mentees dropped out of the program and didn't give a reason why, or 4) the

mentors didn't show up for the program each day, so this left a bad impression on the mentee and they reflected how they felt on the survey. Also, some of the mentees' surveys looked like they rushed through it. One of the mentees circled an entire row of answers with one circle. I can only assume the mentees and mentors took their times to answer the questions truthfully and carefully. As for the high *don't know* answers with the mentors, I think they might have had some trouble trying to start a relationship with their mentee, especially if they were new to the program and the mentee was used to someone else.

All in all, something "right" must have occurred for the mentees to perceive their academic performance as better and that this was a result of their relationship with their mentor. And this is a main goal for any mentoring program and not just V.A.M.P. alone to have their participants do better because if they were doing worse, then something is simply not working, whether it be the relationship between the mentee and mentor, the mentee's attitude about being in the program, or they don't apply the skills they learned in the program to the rest of their academic work. Something would need to be changed. But as for my research project, I believe the mentors and mentees perceive their relationship to be a positive and meaningful one, and the mentees' attitudes towards school, life, and themselves was raised, and their academic performance improved because of their relationship with their mentor.

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