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Rick Selander
Trinity College

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Do the Methods of After-School Mentoring Programs Match Their Goals?

Rick Selander
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Question and Significance

Once a child finishes a day at school, they have many options of what to do next. Some just go home and begin to work on homework or watch television. Some are members of athletic teams and take part in athletic games or practices. Others join an after-school mentoring program. The purpose of these programs, especially in urban neighborhoods like Hartford, is to keep children off the street, assist them with their homework, and further their understanding of their course-work. “Several researches have noted that not only are youths engaging in an increasing number of antisocial and self-defeating behaviors, but they are doing so at earlier ages. In reaction to both of these distressing trends, youth-serving professionals, and adolescents themselves, have begun to develop innovative programs that provide alternative choices for youths”¹. “The best after-school programs offer a wide variety of activities, and a choice for students, so that they can pursue their interests in a setting that also addresses their development and educational needs”². Thus these programs are very important in the realm of educational studies. There are many different existing studies on what makes mentoring programs work, but there are few if any that actually look at the specifics of different programs to determine whether or not the methods of after-school mentoring programs match the statement of their goals.

“After-school programs need to set and communicate clear goals from the beginning. Some programs are designed primarily as safe havens, some focus on recreations, and others have a strong

¹ Lerner, Richard M. and Francisco A. Villarruel, ed. Promoting Community-Based Programs for Socialization and Learning. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994. Page 1.

² “After-School Programs: A Video Journey.” *Thirteen/Ed Online*. Disney Learning Partnership. <http://www.thirteen.org/wnetschool/concept2class/month11/demonstration.html> (Retrieved 25 October 2001).

academic focus”³. Different programs have different goals in terms of what they want their mentees to leave with, and thus work in different ways to help achieve these goals. There are thousands of after-school mentoring programs across the country, especially college-sponsored programs. “Such programs were found in 29% of all two-year and four-year colleges and universities in 1990. Of 3,212 total institutions, 921 sponsored at least one program⁴”. For this particular research project I have took part in and compared two different after-school programs run in Hartford, CT that are sponsored by Trinity College. The first is the Vision Academic Mentoring Program, also known as VAMP, and the second is the ESF (Education, Sports, and Fun) Dream Camp. I have compared the goals of one program to the goals of the other, and the methods of one program to the methods of the other. This then left an interesting question to be answered: How do different after-school mentoring programs state their goals, and do their methods match their objectives?

Goals of Each Program

In order to determine the goals of each program, I used four different resources. First, I looked at the original proposals of each program that were used to create each program. I looked for statements of goals and intentions for each program. Then I looked at a brochure sent out to publicize the VAMP program and a letter sent to the parents of the mentees involved in the ESF Dream Camp program to get more insight into the stated goals of the respective programs. After this, I conducted two interviews with the program coordinators, Shanta Evans of the VAMP program, and Dale Phelps of the ESF Dream Camp program, both of whom are graduates of Trinity College. For both interviews I gained approval from the Institutional Review Board at Trinity College and then gave both Ms. Evans and Mr. Phelps an interview consent form. In this consent form they were told what I sought to obtain from the interviews, and they were informed in the consent form that they had the option to remain anonymous. Both parties declined anonymity, and thus I am using their names in this piece.

³ Chung, An-Me, Ed. Working for Children and Families: Safe and Smart After-School Programs. Department of Justice, Washington D.C; Department of Education, Washington, D.C., April 2000. Page 41.

⁴ Cahalan, Margaret, and Elizabeth Farris. College Sponsored Tutoring and Mentoring Programs for Disadvantaged Elementary and Secondary Students. Higher Education Surveys Report, Survey Number 12. Department of Education, Washington, D.C, May 1990.

The reason I chose to interview the two coordinators was because “successful leaders of inner-city youth organizations have a passionate commitment to young people, particularly to undeserved and disadvantaged youth,⁵” and thus, being the main people behind the scenes of their respective programs, they were extremely important sources to ask specific questions. I asked them explicitly what the specific goals of their programs were, what they wanted the mentees, mentors, and parents to bring to and leave the program with, and how they sought to achieve parent communication. From these four sources I sought to determine first what each source stated the goals of each program were, then to see if each source echoed the same goals, and finally if and how each program’s goals differed from one another.

VAMP

In the preliminary proposal written for what was then called the Trinity College and Hartford Middle Magnet School Academic Mentoring Program (now called VAMP), the goals of the program are explicitly stated: "The goals of this program are: 1) to promote the academic success and positive youth development of the middle school children and to foster in them a desire to learn and to explore college as a future option and 2) to engage Trinity students in ways through which they will learn about public education and how they can be a part of positive change". In order to accomplish these goals, the proposal states that the VAMP program, "Through academic tutoring and mentoring support, seeks to bring fifty (50) seventh grade children identified as academically at-risk or in need of special attention and support to a satisfactory level of academic performance in the areas of mathematics and writing...and to foster in them motivation for learning, greater self-esteem and enhanced creativity". Later on in the proposal there is discussion about close program communication with the parents. It mentions “family activities involving mentors, parents and the children through the Aetna Center for Families Schools for the 21st Century program...These activities will include dinners, awards ceremonies, games and cultural/artistic events. These after-school activities will reinforce family relationships and mentor-mentee connections”.

⁵ Irby, Merita A., Juliet Langman, and Milbrey W. McLaughlin. Urban Sanctuaries. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1994. Page 96.

A brochure sent home to the parents of the children involved in the program reflects the same goals, as it also points to “fostering the academic achievement of the students” through encouragement by the academic mentors, who seek to make their mentees more self-aware and self-confident. The brochure reads “Though we have the overall goal of encouraging these children to stay in school we also want to affect the way these children think about themselves and their academic lives...helping these children look forward to having a brighter future and a positive self-image”. As a result, these mentees will believe in themselves, and work harder to obtain their own personal goals.

In my interview with Shanta Evans, the coordinator of VAMP, she voiced the same concerns. “Our specific goal is to help raise math and reading scores of the children involved...that’s one of the goals. Also, to help increase their chances of graduating high school and continuing college. Helping them to set goals and helping them reach their goals, build their self-esteem...so there are a bunch of things that VAMP wants to accomplish with these children”. She also wanted her mentees to build a relationship with “A Trinity friend, someone that they can look up to, a role model. Someone that they see or at least have in their mind what they want to aspire to”. In terms of the mentors, Ms Evans hopes that “I provide them with some experience, answer their questions as far as whether or not they want to pursue education as a possible field. A feeling that they’ve accomplished something, and that they actually made a connection”. Finally, when asked how she planned on communicating each mentee’s progress with his or her parents, Ms. Evans stated, “Progress reports...the idea of at least having something to say ‘this is how your child is doing’. Also allowing them (the parents) to meet with the mentor once or twice during the semester. I’m in the process of also trying to create a chart, a charted progress, a point system if you will, so that we know how much time the child is spending on homework, how much they’ve progressed in reading and math, and that their parents will get a good sense. Also, charting the progress of the overall program. Also, hopefully by next semester having a newsletter I can send to them once a month featuring a mentee of the month or something along those lines. I’m still rethinking that, but I wanted to have some way of reaching out to them so they don’t say, ‘Oh, well my child goes to this program, but I don’t know what they do or where they go’. I want to have something like highlights or things we’ve done so that each and every month the parents get

these updates”.

The VAMP proposal, brochure, and my interview with Ms. Evans all voice the same basic goals. Overall, the program seeks to increase the academic performance of the mentees (particularly in math, reading, and writing), help them set and reach their own personal goals (including graduating high school and possibly going to college), and build their self-esteem. In addition, the proposal and the interview mention two goals that the brochure did not touch upon. The first is engaging Trinity College students in an education system where they as mentors can have a positive effect in a child’s life. The second is some form of close communication with the parents of the mentees in the program.

ESF Dream Camp

In the proposal written for the ESF Dream Camp Program, the program’s specific goal is stated: “Through education, sports, and fun we offer opportunities for children to achieve their full potential, to develop self esteem, to build confidence, and to believe in themselves”. The proposal goes on to mention that the program seeks to give the mentees multiple alternatives to keep them interested. It also discusses how the program intends to make the mentees of the program follow the lead of the mentors, working towards being leaders and role models in the classroom themselves, and “developing better social skills, people management skills, time management skills, and classroom skills, while simultaneously having an exceptionally fun experience”. Finally, in terms of the mentors, the proposal states: “We also strive to create a solid learning environment for each of our Trinity students. Our goal for the Trinity students is to create a strong foundation for the future of the Dream Camp/Neighborhood Posse Program’.

In a letter sent home to the parents of the mentees, more basic but similar goals for the mentees were stated: “Our program promises to provide each of our campers with an after school program loaded with educational tutors, reading and writing development, as well as fun activities”. Finally, in my interview with Dale Phelps, the coordinator of the ESF Dream Camp program, he voices the same goal as the brochure stated: “Our specific goals are to provide a fun after-school alternative that also provides academic tutoring and mentoring”. His desire is to have the mentors “bring help to the

students in any way they need it...Provide them with the academic help that they need, the emotional support that they need, and to provide them with good values...just be good role models”. Mr. Phelps wants the mentees to “leave the program with a better sense of the importance of education, the importance of doing your homework and studying for a test. I hope they understand the relationship between doing well in school and doing well in other aspects of their life, such as sports. I hope they understand before they get to high school that in order to play sports you have to do well in school, or else you’re not going to be able to play sports. I hope they leave understanding that they have set goals for themselves and high expectations, and that they try their hardest to reach those goals and expectations”.

Additionally, he also wants the mentors to “have a sense that they’ve really helped a child, and I’d like to see them reach all their goals and maintain their expectations as well”. Finally, when asked about parent communication, Mr. Phelps discussed the journals the mentees have. “The journals serve as a three-way communication between the parents, teachers, and the mentors. Any questions parents have, any questions the mentors have for the parents, or mentors for teachers, go into that journal, unless it is something that they don’t want the kids to see, then a phone call might be necessary.” These journals will track the progress of the students, and Dale hopes to “be able to obtain school records and be able to create some sort of progression...like some sort of graph or something to see how well the kids are doing over the next three quarters and hopefully in the future we can get an idea of if the mentees have progressed and how much”.

All three sources focus upon the program not only presenting their students with academic tutoring, but a good time as well. By fostering a fun environment, the mentees will enjoy their experience and thus be enticed to work harder on their academics. Only in my interview with Dale Phelps was the topic of parent communication brought up, yet the proposal was the most in-depth source in terms of overall goals. The proposal included a focus not just upon fun, but sports in particular. Additionally, it mentions building the mentee’s self-esteem and confidence in the hopes to improve certain skills of the mentees, such as working with people, working with time and working in the classroom. It also specifically mentions a goal for the mentors in terms of giving them a “solid

learning environment” for them to mentor to the students with success and hopefully keep the program itself running successfully. By accomplishing this task, the ESF Dream Camp program hopes to impress upon its mentees “what it takes to be a role model and a leader in the classroom...to apply the professionalism of our trained Trinity College students and program staff they observe” (from proposal).

Comparison

Both programs specifically mention assisting their mentees with their academics as one of their primary goals. To accomplish this tough task, both programs seek to use the mentors as positive reinforcers to help improve the self-image and confidence of the mentees. By doing so, hopefully the mentees will have higher academic aspirations for themselves. Additionally, both programs seek to give their mentors experience in an educational setting. Yet there are some major differences. First of all, two of the main components of the ESF Dream Camp program are fun and sports. These two objectives are not mentioned as primary goals of the VAMP program. VAMP is primarily concerned with “homework help, mentoring, and learning enrichment” (from brochure). However, in my interview with Ms. Evans, fun did appear at one juncture. When answering the question of “How will you seek to achieve your goals”, Ms. Evans stated, “the mentees are given enrichment activities in reading, math, trips, things to help incorporate **fun** to the learning and keep the children interested in the program”. Secondly, the ESF Dream Camp program is the only program that states it seeks to improve other skills of the students outside of the classroom, such as social skills and time management. “Community-based youth development programs that provide children and adolescents with opportunities for healthy development and safe environments in which to interact with and learn from their peers also offer opportunities for these youths to learn and practice social skills and to apply and consolidate academic abilities and interests”⁶. Additionally, the ESF Dream Camp program states that one of its goals is to create a good environment for it’s mentors so that they can impress upon the mentees what a role model is, something that is not mentioned as a goal of the VAMP program. On

⁶ Lerner and Villarruel. Pages 1-2.

the other hand, the VAMP program is the only program to mention giving their students a better hope for their own future as a specific goal. Finally, the VAMP program proposal focuses upon interaction with the parents of the mentees, something the ESF Dream Camp program proposal doesn't specifically mention. In my interviews with both coordinators, however, parent communication was discussed, yet only after I had introduced the topic. When asking what the specific goals of their programs were, it was not mentioned.

Methods of Each Program

As mentioned earlier, I am a mentor for each program, and thus have made first-hand observations of each program. The mentors are the most important factors in the methods of most mentoring programs. In order "to create the full-service organizations inner-city adolescents require, wizards (in this case coordinators) rely on committed professional and junior staff who can translate mission into practice, creating and sustaining places of hope consistently day after day, supporting organizational norms and values, constructing environments where youth feel cared for, included, and valued"⁷. The particular methods of mentoring I focused upon were how the mentees and mentors were selected, how the mentors and mentees were grouped together, and how the mentors interacted with the mentees. I observed how the mentors were trained, because "providing staff training and development is crucial to the success of many after-school programs"⁸. Finally, I also looked at the division of mentoring time, the curriculum covered, and how the program communicated the progress of the mentees with their parents or guardians.

VAMP

The VAMP program is run two days a week, Tuesday and Thursday, from 3:00PM to 5:00PM at the Hartford Middle Magnet School. There are about thirty-two mentees in the program, and

⁷Irby, Langman, and McLaughlin. Page 113.

⁸Thompson, Martina M. and Sandra Winn Tutwiler. "Coaching the After-School Instructional Staff." Educational Leadership April 2001: 56.

seventeen paid mentors (all Trinity College students). These numbers change week by week as either mentees or mentors are added to the program. The mentors were chosen via application and an interview, as the best candidates were selected from those that applied. The mentees were chosen through a lottery, and the students in that lottery were all students with reading and math scores below the sixth grade level that were chosen by a consulting team. All of the mentees from this program are sixth grade students of the Hartford Magnet Middle School, and thus walk to the program after their day of classes.

At the start the seventeen mentors were given four different training sessions. The first session was a reading and language training that lasted two hours. The second session was called “What is Mentoring”, and covered the roles, rules, and responsibilities of the mentors, as well as safety and the policies and missions of the program. The mentors introduced themselves to one another via icebreakers, and the mentors went on a tour of the Middle School. A one-hour Cultural Awareness session followed, giving the mentors an introduction to the cultural background of the mentees they are going to be working with. This is key, since many of the mentors have different social and cultural backgrounds than their mentees. Finally, there was a mathematics training session that lasted three hours. Along with this training the VAMP program also hosted a parent orientation dinner where the parents of the mentees and the mentees themselves were further introduced to the program, and also got to meet some of the mentors who were going to be involved with the program. Yet at this point the mentor/mentee groups had not been set, so neither the mentees nor their parents knew which mentors were going to be working with them. Since the first few weeks there has been one individual meeting between the coordinator and each mentee and two group meetings between the coordinator and the mentor staff.

Prior to the first actual mentoring session, the coordinator randomly placed the mentors and mentees with one another. Each mentor had no more than two students, with some having two mentees and some with only one. On the first day the mentees met their mentors at the Hartford Magnet Middle School and then walked over to Trinity College. At Trinity the mentors and mentees all got into a circle and told the rest of the group their names, and either the meaning behind their name

and/or what they enjoy doing in their free time. This icebreaker introduced everyone to one another, and set the stage for the rest of the session. The mentees were given equations to which the answer matched the number of the mentor they were placed with, and this was how they were initially introduced to their mentors. Then the mentors and their mentees split up and discussed who they were and found out more about each other. As Ms. Evans said in our interview, “For now most of the focus of the program is on the relationship (between mentors and their mentees) which I think is key, in building the trust with these children.

During the first six weeks of the program, there has been either one or two mentees for each mentor, and though the room in which the program is run in is quite large it is very crowded due to the large number of mentees. Yet there are just enough stations for each mentor/mentee group to work at separate stations. In the past two weeks, however, the heat has been restored to side laboratory that connects with the classroom, and now a few of the mentors take their mentees in the other room to work. This has opened up the classroom somewhat. There is a member of the Hartford Magnet Middle School faculty who is also present during the full two hours who acts as a supervisor and walks throughout the room checking on the progress of the mentees. Though the program officially starts at 3:00PM, the mentees begin showing up after their school day at 2:30PM. They are given snacks and are told to finish them by 3:00PM. At this time, for the first hour of the program, the mentees are given the option to work on homework, decorate a white three-ring binder they are given, or write in the journals they receive and keep for writing assignments. During this time the majority of the mentors sit at the same station as their mentees and first discuss social matters, such as “How was your day?”. Afterwards they then prompt their mentees to begin working on homework or their journals, and then assist their mentees when they have questions or problems. Occasionally some of the mentors will socialize with one another and not pay attention to their mentees, but this does not happen very often and only when the mentees are busy working and not in need of assistance.

During the fifth week, for the first time, the mentors took the mentees outside for a game for most of the first hour. Yet afterwards the same schedule from the first four weeks were followed. After a short bathroom break the mentees are then given the option to work on homework, decorate

their journals, write in their journals, or play a game some of the mentors coordinate and run. Afterwards the mentees help the mentors clean up and then go home by either bus or parent's car or walk with two mentors to the Boys and Girls Club. In terms of the homework help given to the mentees, the subjects that the mentors assist the mentees with aren't just focused to math and reading, but writing, grammar, science, and social studies as well. Both the mentees and mentors of both programs also have many options on what activities to take part in because of the multiple resources available to them to help them work together, such as worksheets and writing utensils. In terms of parent communication, the parent orientation was the first form of communication between parents and mentors, yet again it was before the mentors and mentees had been grouped together. During the fourth week of the program the coordinator gave the mentors access to the phone numbers of the mentees so they have the option to contact the parents or guardians of the mentees. Yet parent communication is not required of the mentors. As stated in the proposal, there was a hope for more communication between the program and the parents, but there was not enough funding to sponsor further dinners and other meeting activities between the parents and mentors of the program.

For the future, Ms. Evans stated that "The initial structure of it is to have each of the mentors and their assigned mentee meet for homework help and then come back together for a second hour to do the mentoring activities. However, in the spring semester, the ideal is that the mentors that are specializing in math will have a math group and the ones specializing in the language arts will have a language arts group, and then there will be a third group who is either doing a math or reading type of activity so all three group are doing activities. Then, on the second day that we meet the groups will rotate, so whoever was in math will go to reading and etc., so that the children all benefit from both subject areas, and then there's that optional third group which is just doing something totally different because children may not need either or just something strengthening their skills." Thus Ms. Evans is hoping for a more specialized tutoring session in the future, with the mentees receiving help in specific categories each day they come to the program.

ESF Dream Camp

The ESF Dream Camp program takes place four days a week, Monday through Thursday, from 4:00PM to 6:00PM at the Hartford Magnet Middle School. The program has a total of sixty mentees who come from at least twenty-five different schools in the Hartford area. Thus, though four of the mentees are students at the Hartford Magnet Middle School and walk to the program, the majority of the mentees are transported to the program via bus or car. There is a total of fifteen paid mentors (all current or former Trinity College students) involved that are not only mentors but some also ride with the mentees who take a bus to the program. Neither the mentors nor the mentees are required to show up every day. The mentees choose one day out of the four to show up, while the mentors can work the days they are available. Some of the mentors were also mentors during the summer ESF Dream Camp, and thus returned as mentors for the after-school ESF Dream Camp Program. The rest of the mentors were chosen via application, as the best candidates were selected from those that applied. By the same token a large majority of the mentees in the program were also mentees in the summer ESF Dream Camp. The summer ESF Dream Camp program hosted about 150 campers who had to be from the city of Hartford and was nominated by a teacher who thought they needed help with their academics and were in need of mentors. Additionally, the campers had to be on some sort of financial assistance. In advertising the after-school ESF Dream Camp program Mr. Phelps sent letters to the parents of the summer campers, and about fifty parents replied. As word-of-mouth spread, about ten students who weren't in the summer ESF Dream Camp program applied under the same criteria stated previously and were accepted. For the future, Mr. Phelps says, "I'm going to try not to turn a deaf ear to anyone," and will try to accommodate new students as well as long as they fit the criteria needed to become part of the program. The academic levels of the mentees range from third grade to seventh grade, so the mentees come from both elementary and middle schools.

As Dale Phelps stated in our interview, at the beginning of the program "the mentees were given a two hour training using ESF's standard operating procedures for the mentors which consists of a student handbook. The students are taught the important aspects of the handbook, including safety, policies, and missions which is to provide a fun experience for the kids if any way possible. The mentors are expected to know the whole component's handbook". Since different mentors and mentees

show up on different days of the week, each session on each day of the first week was an introductory period. Since the first week, there have been two meetings between the coordinator and the mentor staff, but no individual mentor/coordinator meetings.

During the first five weeks of the program, there has usually been one or two mentees for each mentor, with three mentees for one mentor on a couple occasions. Mr. Phelps randomly placed the mentors with their mentees during each day of the first week. These assignments change over time as some weeks different mentees don't show up or new mentees join the program, and mentors can accommodate either new mentees or another existing one. Each mentor/mentee group works in separate stations that are spread out in one large classroom, and sometimes one or two mentor/mentee groups will use the adjacent class (which is where the VAMP program is held) as well. During the first two weeks of the program there was not a faculty member from any of the schools present, but in the third week a faculty member from one of the schools (not the Hartford Magnet Middle School) joined the program for Mondays and Thursdays. He acts as a second supervisor to the program, and walks throughout the room checking on the progress of the mentees. He also helps run some of the activities.

Though the program officially starts at 4:00PM, two mentors get on buses at 2:00PM that pick up most of the mentees from their respective schools as early as 2:20PM and brings them to the Hartford Magnet Middle School at 4:00PM. Other students have their parents drop them off, and a few come from the Hartford Middle Magnet School and walk to the program site around 3:00PM. For the first fifteen minutes of the program the mentees are given snacks. Then, for the next five minutes, the mentees are given their journals and are asked to write an entry on the theme for the week. The themes for the first four weeks have been friendships, choices, thanks, and respect. In the next three weeks the themes to be discussed are community, teamwork, and peace. These themes seek not only to make the students better academic performers, but better members of their community as well. After the journal entries, the coordinator then plays the song "Hakuna Matata" from The Lion King, and that indicates that the mentors and mentees have three minutes to finish up what they are doing and meet for the class meeting, which lasts ten to fifteen minutes. The mentors and mentees bring their

chairs and sit in a circle, where they first properly introduce themselves to one another. Each proper introduction consists of shaking each other's hand and making direct eye contact while saying "Hi, my name is..." For the first two weeks the mentors led ice-breaking games so that everyone got to know everyone else's name, but after those first two weeks everyone knows each other. The mentors then lead a discussion on the theme for the week, where some of the mentees are asked to read or talk about their responses. The theme for the day is also introduced and discussed.

During the first two weeks of the program, after the class meeting the mentors and mentees went back to their stations where the mentees either worked on homework, read, or draw. Yet, starting with the third week, sports became a daily part of the program. After the "Hakuna Matata" meeting the mentees are taken outside (so far the weather has been permitting) where they are given the option to play a sport with some of the mentors or play on the jungle gym on the school playground. The mentors coordinate this activity. This runs until about 5:10PM and then the mentees are brought back inside. The mentors and mentees then go back to their stations where the mentees can either work on homework, read, draw, or play board games if they don't have homework. During this time all the mentors sit at the same station as their mentees and quickly ask them about their day and then focus on their homework. The mentors assist their mentees with their homework when they have any questions or problems. Rarely do the mentors socialize with one another and not pay attention to their mentees, but it happens on occasion while the mentees are working and don't need help. The subjects the mentors assist the mentees with cover six major disciplines: math, reading, writing, grammar, writing, science, and social studies. Both the mentees and mentors have multiple resources available to them to help them work together, such as worksheets and writing utensils, giving them many options of what activities to take part in. This work session runs until about 5:50PM, when the mentees help the mentors clean up and then they go home. Again, most of the students take the bus home with two mentors, and a few are picked up by their parents. The buses leave the school around 6:00PM and runs until 7:15PM.

Finally, in terms of communication between the program and the parents of the mentees the mentors fill out "Camper O'Grams", which are sent home to parents notifying them of the progress of

the students. In addition, the mentees are told to write down in their mentee's journals what activities they took part in and how they behaved. These reports are sent home with the mentee each day the student comes to the program.

Comparison

First of all, both programs are run at the Hartford Magnet Middle School. Both programs officially run for two hours each day of operation, yet the ESF Dream Camp program runs for four days, not two. In the initial proposal for the VAMP program, there was a request for the VAMP program to run four days a week as well, but due to lack of budgeting the number of days was cut to two. Another difference between VAMP and ESF is that ESF requires bus and or parent transportation to and from the program, while the VAMP program only requires bus and or parent transportation after the program. This is due to the fact that the ESF Dream Camp program accepts students from multiple schools, not just the Hartford Middle Magnet School. Also, students in the VAMP program can walk with two mentors to the Boys and Girls Club next door if they are enrolled in that program as well. In addition, ESF accepts students from grades three through seven, while VAMP only accepts students from the sixth grade. This results in a wider educational gap in the ESF Dream Camp program, as sometimes mentors are paired up with two mentees in different grades working on different material. In the VAMP program, the mentees are all from the same grade and are thus working on the same material appropriate for their grade level.

Though the ESF Dream Camp program has more mentees overall, it does not require all the mentees to show up each day of the program like the VAMP program does. Thus the number of mentees who show up to ESF each day varies, and the mentoring staff is not required to be present all four days the program is run each week. Instead the mentors show up on different days and thus the total number of mentors needed is less than that of VAMP, where all the mentees show up each Tuesday and Thursday and thus the entire mentor staff is expected to show up each day. This results in the VAMP program being much more crowded than the ESF program, which sometimes has more

room than the VAMP program does by using the classroom VAMP operates in when VAMP is not using it. Additionally, this distinct difference makes it possible for the ESF Dream Camp program to be more open about accepting new students to the program while the VAMP program cannot because it doesn't have the space to hold more mentees.

In both programs the coordinator is a Trinity College Alumni and the mentor staff is composed of either alumni or current students of Trinity College who have the option of being paid. Since the VAMP program is in its first year while ESF had a summer program, both the mentors and mentees in the ESF Dream Camp program had privilege to the first opening mentor and mentee spots. Yet the rest of the mentors and mentees are selected in a similar manner and with similar criteria as the VAMP program. Mentors must apply for the position and are accepted by the coordinators upon merit and experience, and mentees are selected according to their need for academic support. The ESF program also requires their mentees to be in need of financial assistance.

Mentor training for the VAMP program is much more extensive than that for the ESF Dream Camp program. It is six hours longer, and contained specific components of reading and language, mathematics, and cultural awareness. Both program's training sessions cover safety, policies, missions, rules, roles, and responsibilities. Yet the VAMP program lacks some form of rulebook as the ESF Dream Camp has in its component handbook. Since the initial trainings of both programs, each program has hosted two group meetings between the coordinator and mentor staff, while the VAMP program has been the only program that has held individual meetings between the coordinator and each mentor. When getting the mentors and mentees to know one another, VAMP first had a mentor training session where icebreakers were used to introduce the mentors to one another. Then, during the first official mentoring session, the mentees and mentors all got together and played an icebreaker game to get to know each other. Then the mentors and their mentees split up and told each other about themselves. ESF had a much different approach however. The true introductions to one another didn't begin until the first week of actual mentoring. Each day of that first week the mentors and mentees formally introduced themselves to one another during the "Hakuna Matata" meeting, where they practiced shaking hands with one another while keeping good eye contact and introducing themselves

by name. Then they played a couple ice-breaking games to further the introduction process. Though there are no long ice-breaking games, however, each week during the “Hakuna Matata” meeting the mentees introduce themselves and shake hands with one another and the mentees. After the first session the VAMP program has not reinvented the introduction process.

In terms of the on-site mentoring itself, both programs utilize group mentoring, with most mentors having two mentees per session. On occasion the VAMP program has had a few mentors with only one mentee, though never three, while in the ESF program a few mentors have had on different occasions either one or three mentees. In both programs each mentee/mentor group sits together and works at separate stations in order to create order and keep both the mentors and the mentees comfortable and focused. Both programs now utilize school-day faculty personal who act as supervisors and basically walk around the room assisting the mentors and mentees and checking their progress. The VAMP program faculty member shows up both days of the program, while the ESF faculty member shows up two of the four days, yet is more hands-on in his approach and takes part in many of the activities that are run. One of the big differences, however, is that the ESF program has specific themes for each day and week of the program, which VAMP does not. These themes presented by the ESF program seek to promote not only a better academic performance of the mentees, but better social skills in the community as well.

Both programs begin by giving their mentees snacks. Yet while the VAMP program does this before the program officially starts, ESF does this for the first fifteen minutes of the program since the majority of the mentees show up by bus right at the start of the program day. After the mentees finish eating their snacks both programs have similar mentoring processes but in different order. Both VAMP and ESF spend a large amount of time helping the mentees with homework and having them write in their journals. VAMP spends on average fifty minutes while ESF spends forty minutes. Additionally, both programs spend a large amount of time getting the mentees involved in a game, sport, or other activity coordinated and run by the mentors. VAMP spends on average 45 minutes on extracurricular activities while ESF spends about 40 minutes. Yet there are differences. While the VAMP program goes on for the first hour with fifty minutes of mentoring and then a ten minute

bathroom break, the ESF program begins the first hour of the mentoring process by having the mentors first write in their journals, then take part in the “Hakuna Matata” meeting, and then go outside for sports or recreation activities. For the second hour, the VAMP program then conducts their optional game portion while other students work on homework or their journals until clean up time and dismissal. On the other hand, the ESF program finishes its outdoor activity, then brings the mentees in for homework or journal activities or a game if they have completed their homework until clean up time and dismissal. Thus in the VAMP program the mentees have the option to decline playing games, while in the ESF program the mentees are required to do some sort of physical activity. On the other hand, the ESF program allows the students to play a board game if their work is done during the homework time, while the VAMP program expects them to do some sort of work during the first hour of mentoring.

In terms of how the mentors mentor the mentees in each program, for the majority both programs are the same. After asking their mentees about their days, the majority of the time the mentors in both programs assist their mentees with their homework when they have any questions or problems. Rarely do they socialize with one another instead of focusing on the mentees, but sometimes it happens while the mentees are working and not in need of assistance. The subjects the mentors assist the mentees with in both programs cover five major disciplines: math, reading, writing, science, and social studies. Both the mentees and mentors have multiple resources available to them to help them work together, giving them many options of what activities to take part in.

In terms of communication between the program and the parents, the ESF Dream Camp program is more devoted to keeping in contact with the parents regarding their mentees’ progress. The VAMP program had higher aspirations in terms of parent communication, but their ideas in this particular endeavor were cut due to a lack of sufficient funds to sponsor further activities and meetings between the mentors and the parents of the mentees past the initial Parent Orientation Dinner. While the VAMP program does give their mentors the option to call the parents or guardians of the mentees to discuss the child’s progress, in the ESF program the mentors are required to fill out a “Camper-O-Gram” which details the students progress and also make notes on what the students accomplished by

writing notes down in the mentee's journals. Both the journal and the "Camper-O-Gram are sent home with the mentees after each session.

Overall, the VAMP program seems more focused on academics, while the ESF program is more focused on providing not only an academic environment, but also a fun experience for the mentees, part of which includes sports. Yet the VAMP program has also provided fun alternative activities for the children as well, though not in the sports sector. This seems to match with the goals of these programs, which is what my paper focuses on next.

Comparison of Goals and Methods for Each Program: Do They Match?

In order to compare the goals and methods of each program, I took my first-hand observations of each program and I compared the stated goals of each program (from brochures, parents letters, and interviews) with the actual practices of their program. This is very compelling because it is a strong indicator as to whether each program's methods match its goals. What I did not do, however, is try to see if each program is successful. That is, I did not compare the results of the program in terms of effecting the student's scores, though both programs stated this as a goal, because this cannot truly be determined. Even if I could gain access to student scores, there would be no way to tell if a change in scores, whether positive or negative, is due to the success or lack thereof of a particular program or possible social implications inside or outside of school. As for goals that do not state improvements in student scores, I was able to look at the methods of each program and determine if their benefits satisfied the goals of the program. So far, from my research, I have discovered that though both programs differ in goals and methods, the methods of each program matches most, if not all of its goals.

VAMP

So far from being a part of and observing first-hand the operations of VAMP, it appears as if the methods are matching all but one of the goals. The program definitely seems to be fostering the academic achievement of the mentees, and the mentor's job is not only to help their mentees with their

homework, but to attempt to encourage them in other endeavors as well. By working closely with the students in a small group format and having multiple resources and activities available to them, the mentors are given the opportunity to focus on their mentees, and try to encourage them to work harder and set higher goals for themselves. Showing their mentees that they can do whatever they set their minds to, the mentors foster a higher self-esteem in the mentees, and a create new friendships in the process. The subjects the mentors assist the students with go beyond the goals of math, reading, and writing, but also cover social studies and science as well. In addition, the mentors of the VAMP program are given first-hand educational experience and by mentoring the mentees they are given the chance to leave the program with a feeling they have had a significant impact on someone else's life. It also helps them to determine if they want to pursue education as a possible career field.

The one goal I have not seen being accomplished as of yet is parent communication. As mentioned earlier, the proposal mentioned having meetings between mentors, their mentees, and the parents of the mentees to help foster better family relationships and friendship relationships between the mentors and their mentees. Additionally, Ms. Evans mentioned sending progress reports home to communicate each mentees progress to their parents, which would be tracked by charts depicting how much time the mentees spent working. She also discussed setting up meetings between the parents and mentors. Yet other then the parent orientation dinner, which was held before the mentors and mentees had been put together, parent communication has not been required of the mentors. The mentors have been given the phone numbers of the mentees, but are given the option to call if they so desire. As mentioned earlier, Ms. Evans hopes for closer communication with the parents in the form of a newsletter, but as of now the parent communication is lacking.

ESF Dream Camp

So far from being a part of and observing first-hand the operations of the ESF Dream Camp program, it seems that the methods are indeed matching all of its goals. As with the VAMP program, the program definitely seems to be fostering the academic achievement of the mentees. The mentors work closely with their mentees in small groups and have many resources and activities available to

them to keep the mentees interested. As a result of such a focus the mentees feel like someone cares about them, and this builds their self-esteem and helps them work harder and set higher goals for themselves as they realize the importance of education and how it impacts the rest of their lives. The themes for the week help enforce the idea to the mentees that doing well in academics isn't the only important thing they must concentrate upon. It also helps the students realize that they must be good citizens and role models in the community as well. They learn this by following the lead of their mentors, who act as role models for the mentees, and the mentees look up to them. In terms of the mentors themselves, they are given lots of space and resources to help make the program successful. This not only helps the program but the mentors as well, as they are able to leave each day with a feeling they've made an impact on someone else's life.

What makes the ESF Dream Camp program distinctly different from the VAMP program is its particular focus on sports and fun. During the third week of the program the sports segment of the program was introduced, and now each week (weather permitting) the students are taken outside to either play a sport or play on the swings or jungle gym. As a result, as the proposal stated as a goal, the students are given a chance "to achieve their full potential, to develop self esteem, to build confidence, and to believe in themselves". Additionally, if the mentees finish their homework, they are given the opportunity to play board games. These fun activities give the mentees a few alternatives and helps keep them motivated and interested in the program.

Finally, the journals and Camper-O-Grams act as forms of communication between the mentors and the parents. As a result, the parents of the mentees are informed of their child's progress, a major goal of the program.

Conclusion

My observations of these programs were during the first few weeks of each program's operations. Yet each program has done a good job using mentoring methods to help achieve their stated goals. Each program's setup and methods of mentoring closely match what they state as their objectives. The VAMP program has yet to achieve their goal of communicating with the parents of the

mentees their child's progress, but there is a plan to help achieve this goal during the second half of the program year.

After-school mentoring programs are a very important facet of education. "Linking the after-school program with children's learning experiences in the classroom improves children's academic achievement"⁹. Many students have problems comprehending some of the material they study, and are in need of assistance. After-school programs give them the chance to get help from tutors that they wouldn't normally have available to them. "Overall, after-school programs strive to be fun, challenging, and comforting. They are freer than schools to use innovative curricula and activities to promote children's learning. They can be flexible in tailoring children's time to their needs, have a better student/staff ratio, and benefit from multi-age groupings"¹⁰. Students who take part in after-school mentoring programs also have a chance to work with one another, and realize that they are not the only ones who may be struggling in certain subjects. In this way these programs help students identify with one another, and a lot of students have the chance to gain more confidence in themselves and their abilities. By being able to open up to another person, whether a fellow student or a tutor, they begin to lose the feeling of being ashamed whenever they need to ask for help.

"As an alternative to children spending large numbers of hours alone or with peers in inadequately supervised activities, well-planned and well-staffed programs provide safe havens where children can learn, take part in supervised recreation, and build strong, positive relationships with responsible, caring adults and peers"¹¹. Additionally, these programs keep the students involved with their academics even when they walk out of the formal classroom, and helps keep them focused upon what's important. It gives these students a chance to prioritize what is important to them, and what they have to do to get where they want to be. The study of after-school mentoring programs is significant because they create a forum for children to get the extra help that they need to comprehend certain materials they are struggling with, and it is interesting to see how different programs intend to approach such a difficult task, and whether they follow up on their intended goals.

⁹ Chung. Page 9.

¹⁰ Schwartz, Wendy. After-School Programs for Urban Youth. ERIC/CUE Digest No. 114. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Washington, D.C., October 1996.

¹¹ Chung. Page 7.

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