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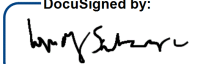
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Examining a Mentor Program from a Leadership Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Students, especially in the elementary setting, need support to help them improve academically and socially, which will help close the achievement gap. According to research, providing students with adult mentors has helped them improve overall in school. This study looks at the leadership perspectives of the adult mentors who participate in the program. Their views and input have given some insights into what makes the mentor program successful. The contributions of this study will add to previous research by providing alternative ways the mentor program can improve. The dedication of these adult mentors reveals that students gain positive attitudes towards themselves and school because of their participation in the mentor program. The purpose of this study is to examine additional ways the mentor program can improve from a leadership perspective.

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Chapter 1: Definition of Problem

Strong and positive student-adult relationships influence student success. These relationships can go beyond just teachers, and extend to the community. Building these relationships should be a priority for community members because according to research on the subject, mentoring can be beneficial for everyone (Coyne-Foresi, 2015). However, it is important to understand and distinguish what are the types of “best practices”, which eventually lead or contribute to a successful mentoring program.

According to Dappen & Isernhagen (2006), best practice is described as mentoring programs that include monitoring of program implementation, careful screening of mentors, matching mentors and mentees on at least one criteria, pre-match and ongoing training for mentors, program supervision, support for mentors, some structured activities, parent support and/or involvement, and expectations for frequency of contact and duration of the mentoring relationship (p. 152). These mentoring “best practices” need to be explored and investigated to determine which are most beneficial in improving academic and social success for the students involved. Studies suggest that students need to feel safe, welcomed and connected in order to experience increased academic performance and to establish healthy peer relationships (e.g., Knoell, & Crow, 2013). When these kinds of connections are fulfilled and maintained between students and peers or adults, trust is established and confidence is gained. This can contribute to student increased academic performance and as well as lessen behavioral issues.

In order to improve academic and social achievement, these connected relationships need to be fostered through a successful mentoring program. Bringing

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students and community together in a partnership, will bring forth a school climate that is more positive.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study focuses on Mentor for Success, a district wide, school based, one to one, adult to youth mentoring program from a leadership perspective. The research shows the positive effects of a mentoring program for youths. The following research questions were addressed: What are adult mentor and leadership perceptions of ways in which a school mentoring program serves to improve student academic and social achievement in an elementary school setting? What further practices and resources can be implemented to bring greater success to the mentor program?

Preview Literature

The research has shown the benefits of implementing a mentor program in urban schools. Students improve academically and socially in school because they are building a relationship with an adult mentor. It is important to review these literatures because they inform the research by providing “best practices” for improving mentor programs. The following research produced three themes throughout. These included: benefits of establishing relationships between adult mentors and youth, regularly evaluating the program and providing opportunities for adult mentor trainings. Mentor programs help lessen the achievement gap for many students and therefore it is important to investigate what makes them successful and effective.

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Preview Methodology

The study will consist of a focus group interview with five adult mentors from the Mentor for Success program. They will be interviewed together and asked questions as a group. Open conversation will be recorded auditory and transcribed. The findings from this interview will be analyzed with previous research to locate any common themes or new insight. Informal observation will be conducted as well. These will include 15 minutes interactions between adult mentors and their mentees. Notes will be taken and analyzed. Based on the data from both focus group interviews and observations, a follow up survey will be administered for the five adult mentors. The results of this follow up survey will be examined and displayed visually. The data will assist leaders in the implementation and maintenance of a successful mentor program in their schools.

Significance of Study

This study can improve education by providing more effective mentor programs. Mentoring has been a focus of public attention during the last decade (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2006). Many programs have been established in many K-12 public schools but how effective are they for students in urban schools? By interviewing adult mentors who have experience mentoring urban students, more information will be gathered on what strategies can help improve an existing mentor program. This study differs from other studies because it is examined through a leadership perspective.

Conclusion

Improving the practices of an established mentor program is vital for its prolonged success. From the methodology and data received from this study, leaders will

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be able to distinguish components of a successful mentor program as well as improvement that will increase effectiveness. Review of literature is essential for validating the data. Analyzing and synthesizing the literature is key to the success of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The research has shown the benefits of implementing a mentor program in urban schools. Students improve academically and socially in school because an adult is mentoring them. It is important to review these literatures because they inform the research by providing “best practices” for improving a mentor program. The following research produced three themes throughout. These included: benefits of establishing relationships between adult mentors and youth, regularly evaluating the program and providing opportunities for adult mentor trainings. Mentor programs help lessen the achievement gap for many students and therefore it is important to investigate what makes them successful and effective.

Themes in the Literature

The emergent themes of the research fall into three categories: *Relationship between mentors and mentees, regular evaluation of a successful mentor program and preparation and training for adults mentors*. Many fall into more than one theme.

Theme one: Relationship between mentors and mentees

The first theme was abundant throughout most of the literature. Many articles began with emphasizing the importance of having a connection between a mentor and a mentee. According to Coyne-Foresi (2015), “connectedness occurs when a person is actively involved with another person, object, group or environment, and that involvement promotes a sense of comfort, well-being, and anxiety reduction” (p. 68). This connection is crucial for at-risk students. Family dynamics have changed over the years. Social norms have shifted and many students receive less support, which sometimes discourages them from forming other bonds. Therefore, mentoring can

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provide the caring person that is often lacking, particularly in the lives of at-risk students (Dappen & Isernhagen, p. 22). They need to build strong relationships with people they can trust and confide in. Once this bond has been established, positive learning can take place. Learning is influenced by social interaction, interpersonal relationships, and communication with others (Knoell & Crow, p. 32). Therefore, partaking in a mentor program is beneficial for many at-risk students. They gain the support and encouragement they are lacking to help them become successful in school. Many students lack motivation. According to Maulana, Opdenakker & Bosker (2004), “Research has demonstrated that there is a clear link between students’ attitude and teachers’ encouragement” (p. 463). Like teachers, mentors who display more positive and encouraging attitudes will also give a positive effect to their mentees. This motivation will help these students’ progress well academically and socially.

In various programs, mentors include and are not limited to teachers, staff, supportive staff, outside programs and community. They range in ages and come from various backgrounds. Some programs choose partnerships, while others are random. Some of the research shows that the most successful mentor programs include the pairing of elementary students with secondary students (middle and high school). When matched with youth mentors, young mentees may experience a less intimidating introduction to mentoring relationships as opposed to matches with adults (Coyne-Foresi, 2015, p. 69). Also, according to Dessoff (2007), “It gives them [the older students] good self-esteem” to help struggling readers [elementary students]” (p. 56). It is imperative for well thought out matching of mentors and mentees. It is upon the coordinator of the program to make successful matches through identifying backgrounds,

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interests, strengths and weaknesses, as well as looking at variables such as age, race, and language. Pairing mentees with the appropriate mentors can really make a difference. A challenge to pairing according to Ryan, Whittaker & Pinckney (2002), is “pairing more than one mentee with a mentor may decrease the amount of individual attention each child receives, as well as increase the amount of time needed for a young person to become comfortable with a mentor” (p. 134). Another challenge is time. According to Barkun, “the greatest obstacles for the mentor in initiating or maintaining the relationship relate to issues of time allocation, role allocation, competing expectations and mentor support—including available time and resources” (p. S5). It can be difficult for mentors to set up time to meet or plans may change because of scheduling conflicts. This may be the case often with teachers and staff who are mentors. In order to develop a bond, time and effort must be spent to accomplish this. Mentors and mentees need opportunities to meet and participate in shared activities on a regular basis over an extended period of time (Ryan, Whittaker & Pinckney, 2002, p. 134)

The relationship between a mentor and mentee must be strong. These strong bonds are what make a mentor program successful. Mentoring leads to high morale, improved retention rates, and increased productivity (Barkun, 2006, p. S4). Some students lack the resources and support needed to become successful in school. By providing a solid connection with another person, it will open more positive opportunities for these students. It is best said by Coyne-Foresi (2015), “Engaging students through bonding opportunities within the school encourages pro-social behavior and commitment to academic achievement, protects from a loss in ambition and susceptible to misbehavior” (p. 68). The main goal of any mentor program is to improve the academic

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and social skills of these students. Next, we will analyze what makes a mentor program successful.

Theme two: Regular evaluation of a mentor program

The second theme found within the literature show various *regular evaluation of a mentor program*. There are multiple suggestions of what can make a mentor program successful. There are some similarities in the literature. The most common revelation from all the literature is the purpose of a mentor program. It is stated well by Calderella, Adams, Valentine & Young (2009), “Mentor programs are designed to facilitate appropriate, meaningful relationships between children and adults leading to positive outcomes such as increased social skills and self-esteem” (p. 2). Of course, we are looking for improved academics as well, which comes hand in hand with increased social skills and self-esteem. Mentor programs can be divided into two different categories: community based programs and school based programs.

Community-based mentor programs include long running established programs such as Big Brothers and Sisters of America. These programs have been around for a long time and have been successful in their own right. For this Literature review, we will take a closer look into school-based programs. School based programs are becoming more popular and abundant recently. According to Dessoff, “School-based mentoring is the most popular form of mentoring in America today” (p. 54). Coyne-Foresi (2007) adds on by stating, “School based mentoring enhances students’ connectedness to school and encourages positive attitudes towards school” (p. 69). Since the pressure is on for schools to improve test scores, many are turning towards mentoring programs to have

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someone “at a child’s side who is an advocate, a nurturer, a positive role model and also promises to come back and check on them next week” (Dessoff, p. 54).

An example of a successful school based program is Wiz-Kids. Melissa Coyne-Foresi conducted a study of the program in 2007. According to Coyne-Foresi (2007), “The Wiz-Kids in-school student mentoring program was created and facilitated by the school support counselor to address the social and emotional needs of some younger students while building on the leadership capacities of older students” (p. 70). This mentor program paired up middle school students with elementary (2nd & 3rd grade) socially at-risk students. Teachers, students and parents were surveyed with a number scaled questionnaire. The results showed, “an increase in students’ sense of community within the school through the provision of positive relationships, adding a perceived increase in students’ confidence, self worth, and attendance” (Coyne-Foresi , p. 76). One of the most successful aspects of this program was providing 2 hours of pre-match training to the mentors that included exploring themes, mentee engagement, challenges in mentor relationships and how to terminate the relationship after the program. Other successful factors of this program included organic matching of participants, supervision from the counselor throughout the sessions, lots of program engagement such as lunch groups and guided activities, and lastly, a year-end party was provided to celebrate the program as well as terminate the program in a positive way.

Other literature also suggested the importance of the development and proper implementation of a program. Developing the program includes identifying clear goals, designate a program coordinator and explore the community to determine other partners that may be involved. Implementing the program takes into account mentor and mentee

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recruitment and selection, matching them together well, provide training and education for mentors, providing space, time and resources, promoting communication and monitoring effectiveness (Ryan, Whittaker & Pinckney, 2002. p. 134-136). Based on the research, it seems like the two most significant aspects for a successful program include more time allocation and mentor training and education. According to Dappen & Isernhagen (2005), “Regularly scheduled mentoring sessions that have clear agendas and expectations are crucial to the success of any mentoring program” (p. 23). In the last theme we will dive deeper into the benefits of training and educating mentors to better facilitate and build relationships with their at-risk mentees.

Theme three: Preparation and Training of adult mentors

The last and essential theme in the literature is *preparation and training of adult mentors*. A mentor program cannot be successful unless the mentors are fully trained and educated on their roles, as well as gaining knowledge of where their students comes from and what they are dealing with. According to Pryce, Giovannetti, Spencer, Elledge, Gowdy, Whitley & Cavell (2015), “important gaps in our understanding remain, including a lack of information about the ways mentor approach or manage youths’ peer relationships” (p. 186). Mentors and mentees come from various backgrounds; therefore it is crucial to understand and be empathetic of these differences. Many of urban students come from trauma, neglect, single family homes, poverty, homelessness, abuse, etc. which some mentors may not be able to relate to directly. Mentors need the education and support to deal with such issues. As Dappen and Isernhagen (2005) stated, “mentors need guidance on how to respond to sensitive topics such as possible child abuse or neglect. Mentors need ongoing training opportunities” (p. 23). Also, in a school based

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mentor program, coordinators are provided to assist these mentors and help train them as well. In Ryan, Whittaker & Pinckney (2002) study of a school based program, the mentor meets with the coordinator to discuss roles in the program and reasons that the children are referred for the program, students' basic needs, interpersonal skills and how to address cultural and linguistic differences. The coordinator also shares specific ways to establish rapport, provides a helpful packet of activities and information about how to deal with the information that the children share as the relationship develops (Ryan, Whittaker & Pinckney, 2002, p. 135). Coordinators seem to be a lifeline for many mentors in school based programs.

Behavioral problems seem to be a big sub-theme within the literature. Mentors have difficulties dealing with these behavioral issues and sometimes they are not properly trained to deal with them. According to Lakind, Atkins & Eddy (2015) study, "mentors matched with youth at relatively high individual-level risk have indeed reported greater difficulty dealing with behavior and concerns related to youths' social and emotional issues" (p. 53). Mentors need to build a repertoire of strategies for dealing with various behavioral issues. They should be continuously trained for refinement of skills. Function based support (FBS) is mentioned by Christensen, Renshaw, Caldarella, & Young (2012) in their study for training educators to support at-risk students with behavioral disorders. It is a strategy for decreasing problem behaviors and increasing replacement behaviors through the use of functional behavioral assessment and behavior support planning. According to the study, it suggests that, "acquiring FBS knowledge and skills can enable teachers to intervene effectively with at-risk students without identified disabilities, who would typically be unlikely to receive this type of behavioral support in

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general education classrooms” (Christensen, Renshaw, Caldarella, & Young, 2012, p. 334). This shows that there is more knowledge of how to deal with behavioral problems and that mentors need to be informed. Some of the literature also focused on training for better classroom management skills. Alvarez (2007) states the “need to further develop and compare different methods of teacher training and technical assistance focused on non academic topics such as classroom management for aggressive students” (p. 1123). Some of the training teachers participate in should be provided for mentors as well. We are all working with the same students and it would be beneficial to be aligned and on the same page. Mentors should be provided training and education so they can be more effective when they are with their mentees.

Conclusion

The literature presented information that assisted in answering the research question. A successful mentor program can help improve academic and social achievement for urban students by providing them a trustworthy bond with a reliable mentor. The rationale for such programs is research indicates that children who have successfully negotiated an array of traumatic or persistent difficulties in their lives often have at least one significant and consistent adult in their life (Ryan, Whittaker & Pinckney, 2002, p. 134). Therefore, it is vital to build these strong relationships that will also help encourage these students to become successful at school. Both Mentors and mentees benefit from a successful mentoring program. According to Coyne-Foresi (2015), “mentors reported greater responsibility and leadership, an mentees exhibited greater social skills and confidence” (p. 76). Some effective strategies for a successful mentoring program include school-based programs, regularly scheduled mentoring

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sessions that have clear agendas, planned activities, continuous training and education for mentors. These strategies can be implemented to an already existing program to help improve it. Training mentors should be a top priority. Encouraging more commonality between mentors and mentee is crucial. They should be able to relate to each other in some ways. Therefore, trainings should include topics of cultural awareness and restorative practices. These specific topics would really help mentors understand their mentees better and how to deal with certain issues easily. Having someone they can count on is very valuable. Establishing this bond earlier in the elementary setting can be even more beneficial. According to Barkun (2006), “Mentors may have greater potential to be role models for mentoring if they enter mentees’ careers during the early period of the relationship characterized by excitement and growth rather than during the later period” (p. 5).

Chapter 3: Methodology

The methodology of this study will be presented in this chapter to support the research. The core research question guiding this study is: What are adult mentor and leadership perceptions of ways in which a school mentoring program serves to improve student academic and social achievement in an elementary school setting?

The design will include research that supports the benefits of implementing a mentor program in an elementary setting. The design will detail the participants, setting and instruments used in this study. The procedures are organized in a specific way for data to be collected. After data has been collected, it will be analyzed to find some common themes in what makes a mentor program successful for student's academic and social achievement.

Design

This study will use a qualitative focus group interview. According to Rabiee (2004), "a focus group is a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews...this group being 'focused' on a given topic" (p. 655). A focus group would be beneficial in this study because these participants were selected based on their experience. This focus group interview will be conducted with five adults. These adults have been mentors at the same school for at least two years. They have personal knowledge about the school mentor program and the students who participate in the program. One of the distinct features of a focus group interview is its group dynamics (Rabiee, 2004, p. 656). The interaction and discussion between the individuals in the group will provide a wide range of data. Such data will include personal experiences, ideas, and feelings about the mentor program and their involvement. The participants will be interviewed in a group setting

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and will be audio recorded. The interviewed will be transcribed. After the data is collected, a post survey will be conducted. This survey will be anonymous and completed online by the participants.

Participants

The participants include five adult mentors from the same elementary school. Each adult has mentored students from the same school for at least 2 years. Rabiee (2004) also mentions that the “members of the group should feel comfortable with each other and engage in discussion” (p.656). The group of participants selected was familiar with each other, work in the same setting and all have worked with students as educators and mentors. Personal experience indicates that when exploring very sensitive and personal issues the use of pre-existing groups might be an advantageous, as there is already an extent of trust amongst the members of the group, which will encourage the expression of views (Rabiee, F., 2004, p. 656). They share commonalities, which will engage more discussion and provide more data to this study. They have volunteered their time to participate and will be interviewed together.

Setting

The setting will take place in an empty classroom at an urban school located in Northern California. All the students from this school receive free breakfast and lunch. All the adult participants are educators working at the school. It is a convenient setting for all the participants involved. The classroom will be locked for privacy. This is a perfect location to conduct this focus group interview because it is familiar to all the

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participants. The comfort of the setting will produce good and engaging discussion about the benefits of the mentor program.

Instruments

The instruments being used in this study include a questionnaire, a post survey and informal observations. The participants in the focus group will be interviewed. There is a questionnaire of about 11 questions that the participants will be asked by the moderator. The whole interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. After the interview, an online post survey will be given to the participants. This post survey will be conducted through a Google document poll and answers will be anonymous. Informal observations will be gathered from the interactions between mentors and mentees. Notes will be taken on these observations. All the data will be analyzed together.

Procedures

Following the consent process for adult research participants, there will be five adult mentor participants who will participate in a focus group interview. This interview will take place in a classroom located in the school where the participants work. Participants will be asked specific questions about their participation in the current mentor program. The focus group discussion will be recorded and transcribed. The focus group recording will be transcribed using a long table approach. This data will be analyzed to find common themes and links in the participant's discussions. Based on the data gathered from the focus group, a follow up eleven-item survey will be developed for the five participants to complete. The survey will be administered about one week

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following the focus group interviews. This eleven-item survey will be developed and analyzed using Google Document poll as a research and data analysis tool. Participants will complete surveys individually and anonymously. Additionally, interactions between adult mentors and their youth mentees will be observed for 15 minutes. These observations will take place outside the classroom in the span of a week. Notes will be taken and analyzed alongside the literature reviewed and other data sources (e.g., focus group interviews, surveys) for common and emergent themes based on frequency of results.

Analysis

After the focus group interview has been conducted, the recorded interview will be listened to and transcribed. The transcripts from the interview will be examined and categorized into common and emergent themes. These themes should match the intention of the study and the guiding research question. It's important that these themes show how these adult leaders perceive the mentor program. Their input will be beneficial in finding ways a mentor program can improve social and academic student achievement in an elementary setting. Also, reflection about the interview, the settings and capturing the non-verbal communication expressed by the members of the groups would add a valuable dimension to the construction and analysis of data (Rabiee, F., 2014, p. 657). The follow up post survey will be added onto the data collected from the focus group interview. Survey research is a useful and legitimate approach to research that has clear benefits in helping to describe and explore variables and constructs of interest (Ponto, J., 2015, p. 171). To strengthen the previous data, notes will be examined from

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the formal observations gathered. These notes will also be analyzed to find some common and emergent themes. It's also a great way to bring a different approach in gathering data in showing how the mentor program directly works and how it affects both adults and students. Even if the main method of collecting information in your study is by interviewing or questionnaires, the addition of data gathered by observation can greatly enrich and enhance your database. (Simpson & Tuson, 2003, p. 17).

Conclusion

The methodology of this study is grounded on the research question: What are adult mentor and leadership perceptions of ways in which a school mentoring program serves to improve student academic and social achievement in an elementary school setting? In order to really dive into these adult perspectives, various approaches must be pursued. The focus group interview will provide data that includes the experiences, ideas and feelings of the participants. It will also include how they interact, discuss, bounce off and add on to each other. The group dynamics will produce imperative information. Their perspective from a leadership role will produce data that will bring insight on the benefits and challenges of a mentoring program. The follow up post survey and informal observations will help synthesize the data. In the next chapter, the data will be analyzed to locate common and emergent themes that support the leadership perspective of the mentor program. This data will assist in the understanding of how a mentor program can help improve student academic and social achievement.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

This chapter will analyze the data from this study. Students in urban schools are faced with various challenges that affect their academic and social achievement. The study examines a mentor program in an elementary school. The research question guiding this study is: What are adult mentor and leadership perceptions of ways in which a school mentoring program serves to improve student academic and social achievement in an elementary school setting? Data was collected from a focus group of adult mentors, observations from the interaction between mentors and mentees and results from a post follow up survey. Findings as a result of data analysis, including evidence of common themes from these instruments will be described in detail. The findings are organized to illustrate common themes. These themes are interpreted as they relate to the research question. Together, the data reveals the benefits of having a robust mentor program in an elementary setting from a leadership perspective.

Data Presentation

The findings from this study were derived from a focus group interview, observations and a follow up survey. First, the five adult mentors were interviewed in a focus group and asked questions pertaining to the mentor program. Next, the five mentors completed an anonymous follow up survey. Lastly, the mentor's interactions with their student mentees were observed. The data collected from all the instruments employed were analyzed to find common themes that as aligned with the literature review and research question.

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In analyzing the content of the focus group interview, post survey and observations, a few themes emerged from the data collected. The first theme that was evident throughout the focus group interview was the importance of building and maintaining positive relationships with the student mentees. This included setting clear boundaries, putting forth effort, planning ahead and maintaining open communications with all involved (e.g. parents, teachers, staff and student). Every adult mentor/participant in the study all agreed that a relationship takes time to grow as well as consistency on the part of the mentor. They all loved getting to know their mentees in a different way and being a positive influence for them. But as one of the mentors stated, “it also depends on the kid”. The students who participate in the mentor program come from various backgrounds and deal with different situations in their lives. They are given adult mentors for added support. Therefore, according to the adult mentors, these students’ personal lives may conflict with the building and maintaining of these relationships. Consequently, communication has been a central key theme in the data. These mentors have continuously maintained open communication with their mentee’s parents and teachers. One of the mentors added, “I plan ahead with my mentee’s teacher at the beginning of the year to find a consistent schedule to meet with them that does not interrupt their classroom instruction”. Effort and consistency seem to be main components in building better relationships. “If you are not consistent, then you’re really not helping”, one mentor chimed in. When these students see more effort in their mentors, they also give effort back. The students benefited from a consistent schedule because they have something to look forward to and rely on. According to the mentors, behaviors and attitudes have changed and improved because of these students

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participation in the mentor program. They felt their influence as mentors help lead these students in the right direction. It is crucial to build a good and positive relationship first. The data supports the literature review in which these students “need to build strong relationships with people they can trust and confide in, and once this bond has been established, positive learning can take place (Knoell & Crow, p. 32). The mentors featured in this study check in with their mentees often to see how they are doing both socially and academically. Many of the students have improved academically because of the consistent “checking in” from their mentors and the open communication between mentors, parents and teachers. This was evident in the observations conducted between the mentors and mentees. It was clear that a connection and comfortability had been established. The mentees were very enthusiastic and eager to meet with their mentors. Some of the mentors provide their student mentees with behavior charts for accountability and also help them academic and social goals to achieve. Progress charts measuring improvement were incorporated in the meetings and the mentor established open dialogue. According to one of the mentors, “holding students accountable for their behavior and academics shows that we also care about them”.

Another theme from the data that emerged was timing and scheduling conflicts. This theme was also evident in the literature review. According to Ryan, Whittaker and Pinckney (2002), “mentors and mentees need opportunities to meet and participate in shared activities on a regular basis over an extended period of time” (p. 134). Continuing to evaluate the mentor program is beneficial for it’s improvement. The adult mentors had positive thoughts about the program the school has established. They mentioned they appreciated the events that allowed them to meet with their mentees as

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well as other mentors and mentees. They all agreed that it could be difficult to schedule quality time with their mentees. Since many of these mentors are classroom teachers and staff, their days are full of meetings (expected and unexpected), Individualized Education Program meetings (IEPs), tutoring, and different lunch times. Again, as mentioned before, it is important to set up pre-planned meetings but sometimes the consistency is not possible. The mentors stated that they would like to see more planned events from the school mentor program to help alleviate this challenge. This would help these mentor continue to build relationships and connect better with their mentees.

The last theme that emerged from the focus group interviews was Mentors' ability to set clear boundaries and expectations with their mentees. Many of the mentors mentioned that they had to "learn as they went". They did not know what to expect, especially with the demographic of students they were mentoring. They were grateful for the handful of workshops provided and facilitated by the school social worker and mentor program coordinator. According to the literature review, the coordinator also shares specific ways to establish rapport. One of these included the provision of a helpful packet of activities and information about how to deal with the information that the children share as the relationship developed (Ryan, Whittaker & Pinckney, 2002, p. 135). These types of workshops helped the mentors deal with various issues that arose with their mentees. The workshops also helped the mentors define clear boundaries, set up reward and behaviors charts and how to better communicate with teachers and parents better. One mentor mentioned that she also used a "mentor book" resource that helped guide her on what activities to do with her mentee, which she found to be helpful. But even with all the workshops and books provided for these mentors, it still was important

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for them to get to know and connect with their mentees first. They needed to know more about their mentees lives and interests. From what the mentors mentioned, setting clear boundaries based on this information was helpful in eliminating future power struggles.

The post survey was very informative because the five mentors were able to convey their feelings about the program. All the mentors have been mentoring for 3 years or more. They meet with their mentees more than the required one-hour a week and bring their mentees to various places and activities they feel will benefit the students. They are very involved in their mentees lives both inside and outside the classroom.

Additional Findings Post Analysis

After analyzing the data presented, it was evident that the mentor program has made a positive impact in the lives of both the mentees and mentors. The mentor program has provided opportunities for mentors and mentees to build relationships. The shared perception among all participants is that these relationships have helped the students involved improve academically and socially at school. By all appearances corroborated by the data collected here, the mentoring program gives the students a consistent support system that they need in order to succeed.

It is apparent that the data shows the benefits of a mentor program through the leadership perspectives of the adult mentors. These mentor's leadership roles include classroom teachers, support staff and academic coaches. Students look up to these adults for support and encouragement. Many of these adult mentors volunteer their time to mentor a student from the elementary school where they are employed. They have dedicated their time and effort to help build strong relationships with these

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students. Connecting with these students has helped them improve in school because they have someone else, another adult in their lives, holding them accountable. According to a mentor, “Students need more leaders to confide in and hold them accountable. They do well when they know more people care about them”. Building good and positive relationships is the core base for a successful mentor program. These adult mentors have made great efforts to establish a connection with their mentees.

One of these main efforts includes timing. Making the time can be a challenge for these adult mentors. The frequency of the data focused on this aspect. Mentors are currently required to meet with their mentees one hour a week. These mentors have previously scheduled the time and communicate it with their mentees. According to these mentors, one hour a week is still not enough time to spend and build a relationship. Therefore, they all have made the extra effort to spend more time either by scheduling after-school or weekend activities with their mentees. This is just another way for these adult mentors to continue establishing better relationships with their mentees. The school mentor program also provides special events for mentors and mentees. These events include group lunches, activities, performances and parties. It’s a great way for the mentors and mentees to bond and connect more. With their busy schedules always changing, the mentors have mentioned that they wished they had more available time to spend with their mentees. Providing mentors with allocated or set times to spend with mentees can be a possible suggestion given to the leadership team at the school. But as one mentor stated, “you need to be flexible”. Flexibility and more available time is key to making the mentor program more successful.

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As mentors spend more time with their mentees, clear boundaries and expectations need to be established. In doing so, the mentors stated that they needed advice and guidance on how to do so. Provided workshops and the availability of the social worker and coordinator to speak with was helpful. Examples of behavior and reward charts, strategies for communicating with teachers and parents, defining and setting clear boundaries with the students, and activities to do with the students were provided for these mentors. Through the observations that were conducted, it did reveal these factors were implemented in the interactions between mentors and their mentees. Mentors held mentees accountable with the use of behavior charts and setting clear boundaries at the beginning of their sessions. By establishing these important factors, a fun, productive and bonding experience occurred. Although the mentors had to learn more about their mentees on their own, they appreciated the help they received from the workshops to strengthen the relationship they have established. In order to improve the mentor program, the adult mentors would like to continue receiving support and more if possible. Such support would assist in building and maintaining positive relationships between mentors and mentees.

Interpretations

All the data collected and analyzed relate back to the research question: What are adult mentor and leadership perceptions of ways in which a school mentoring program serves to improve student academic and social achievement in an elementary school setting? The perspectives of the adult mentors in this study have lead to some insights about the current mentor program established at the elementary school they work at. They agree that the program provides the students opportunities to build strong, healthy and

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consistent relationships with other adults. The bond that these students have with their mentors has helped them gain the trust, confidence, accountability and reliability they need. This eventually leads to an improvement in both academic and social achievement because they feel they have a purpose and that someone cares about them. The mentors have mentioned the improved attitudes of the students who participate in the mentor program. This positive attitude has trickled onto the student's own classrooms and overall school behavior. The school has benefitted from the mentor program because it has created a positive environment for students to thrive. It brings a sense of belonging for these students who come from various backgrounds and home lives. Administrators can take the insights from the mentors to help improve the program. Some suggestions include more time allocated and set for mentors to meet with mentees and more workshops provided to help guide mentors build better relationships. Also, based on their perspectives, the program has also helped the mentors as well. Being a mentor has been beneficial for the mentors because they feel like they are helping the students in their school. They feel like they are contributing to the improvement of the whole school. According to one of the mentors, "That's what the mentor program is all about, putting somebody else above yourself".

Conclusion

The key concepts of the findings show that the mentor program is beneficial for the students who participate in it. Interviews from the adult mentors show that the mentor program provides a connection for the students who lack support. Based on the findings, new insights were made. The main insight is to build strong relationships between mentors and mentees. This can be accomplished by spending more time with

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them in various ways. Mentors need to make the effort and be flexible when scheduling time to spend with mentors. The more time and effort spent will increase the bond formed and in turn improve student attitude and performance. During this time spent, clear boundaries and expectations need to be established to create healthy and productive interactions between mentors and mentees. Based on all the data collected and analyzed, we will now look into what recommendations can be made to improve the mentor program.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

Students in the elementary setting need support in order to improve both academically and socially. The leadership perspectives of the participants in this study show the benefits of providing a mentor program for the students. In this chapter, the finding will be summarized, and interpreted in context. An explanation of implications, recommendations and lessons learned will also be presented. The findings will be examined to see how the mentor program can be beneficial for the students for years to come.

Finding Summary and Interpretation

The purpose of this study was to show how a mentor program could improve student academic and social achievement through the leadership perspectives of the adult mentors who partake in the program. Based on the data from the focus group interview, observations and follow up survey, the success of the mentor program derives ultimately upon the efforts of the adult mentors who participate in the program. The main themes of the data included the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships with mentees, allocating and scheduling more time to meet and setting clear boundaries and expectations with mentees. The themes within the data did show correlations with the research question: What are adult mentor and leadership perceptions of ways in which a school mentoring program serves to improve student academic and social achievement in an elementary school setting? These themes revealed that spending more time with mentees, getting to know them better and setting boundaries were the key factors in helping students improve both academically and socially in school. The students have

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positive attitudes about themselves and school, which creates a better learning environment for everyone.

Findings in Context

The data collected and analyzed supports the literature review that was conducted for this study. The literature revealed that a successful mentor program must include good relationships between mentors and mentees, regular evaluations of the program and provide training for the adults mentors who participate in the program. The findings from this study do fall into one or more of these literature themes.

The most significant findings from the data were the importance of building and maintaining positive relationships between mentors and mentees. From the leadership perspective of these adult mentors, it was revealed that building connections with the students helped improved their attitudes and performance in school. According to the literature, “mentoring leads to high morale, improved retention rates, and increased productivity (Barkun, 2006, p. S4). Students feel more successful in school when they are supported and cared for. One of the adult mentors stated, “they know I am there to help and be there to talk to and listen to them”. The adult mentors in this study have given a lot of their time and effort to build these relationships with their mentees. The dedication from a mentor is what also makes the mentor program so successful.

Regular evaluation of the mentor program is another theme found in the literature research. In order for the mentor program to be successful it is imperative to reexamine its practices and protocol every year. The main issue amongst the adult mentors surveyed was the lack of time available to meet with mentees. According to an adult mentor, “I have a limited amount of time in my day so it can be hard to meet every week”. Many of

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these adult mentors are teachers and staff at the school, therefore their unpredictable schedules conflict with when to meet with their mentees. They would like to be given more opportunities to meet with their mentees in various ways that may include social events, lunches, field trips and activities. There needs to be an reevaluation of how this can be improved so that there is more time allocated in the week for mentors to meet with their mentees. According to the post survey, these mentors have been most successful with their mentees when they communicate well with their teachers. They believe this communication is what has helped these students improve academically and socially in school. When a mentor program can constantly reevaluate their practices to better improve, it will be beneficial for the students who participate.

For mentor programs to be successful, the adult mentors who participate, must be given opportunities to learn more about their students, grow more in their knowledge and practices, and supported throughout the process. Although many of the adult mentors agreed that, “you learn as you go”, they still would appreciate some support and guidance. The mentors have been assisted with how to deal with behavioral issues through workshops facilitated by the school social worker. They have been guided in learning how to set boundaries and employ behavioral charts with their mentees. This has been beneficial for these adult mentors. They would like to continue having workshops like this to help them better support their mentees and build stronger relationships with them.

Implications and Recommendations

The implications of this study will help improve the practices used by mentor programs in the elementary setting. Leaders of the school and coordinators of the

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program will benefit from the findings in this study. They will gain more knowledge about implementing practices that will improve the program as well improve the academic and social achievement of the students involved. The study revealed that the mentor program gives support to the students and builds connections that bring positive change for the students. Therefore, more time given to create such connections is crucial. Leaders need to make sure time allocated for mentors to meet with mentees as well as more social events provided by the program. These meetings need to be often and consistent to build strong relationships. These students need the stability in order to gain more the trust from their mentors. Mentors also need continual training and workshops to improve practices. Leaders should make sure opportunities for mentors to grow and learn are provided. Mentors already have the dedication it takes. All they need is the support and time it takes to be better in building stronger connections with their mentees. These strong bonds will help improve the attitude and school performances of the students. It would be beneficial for leaders to examine the findings of this study to help improve their mentor programs. The data comes from the perspective of the adult mentors. Their input is important because they have first hand experience mentoring students for more than three years. They know what dedication, effort and time is needed to build strong relationships that help students improve in all aspects of school.

Limitations

There were a few limitations in this study. They had little effect on the validity of this study. Some of these limitations included all participants were from the same school and all women. Although this was the case, their leadership perspectives were very

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insightful and they all contributed well to focus group discussions. Another limitation was the timeframe in which the study was conducted. The whole study was conducted in the span of two weeks. If the study was longer, the data could have been richer and even more insightful. The observations would have been more detailed. The post survey produced more helpful data that supported the insights from the focus group interviews. Overall, the data gathered was sufficient in finding ways to help improve the school mentor program.

Future Direction

The future direction of this study should lead to more understanding of what makes a mentor program successful. This should include conducting more focus groups from various elementary schools that have a mentor program. More focus groups and surveys can lead to more insights on what best practices will help improve a mentor program in an elementary setting. Longer time frames in this study will also bring forth more data. Not all participants completed the post survey which may have been beneficial if all participated.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to see how a mentor program could improve through the leadership perspective of the adult mentors who participate in it. All the data collected and analyzed aligned with the research question: What are adult mentor and leadership perceptions of ways in which a school mentoring program serves to improve student academic and social achievement in an elementary school setting? The data was gathered from focus group interviews, observations and post-surveys, which resulted in

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three emerging themes. These themes connected with the literature review and recommendations were made. The recommendations will help improve the mentor programs in the elementary setting. By improving the program, student performance will improve. The literature indicates that students improve in school when they have more connections. Adult mentors help build stronger relationships with their mentees. They give them the comfort and confidence they need to be better learners. According to Knoell & Crow (2013), “learning is influenced by social interaction, interpersonal relations, and communication with others” (p. 32). These interactions are what these students need to become more successful in school.

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