

The Impact of Peer Mentoring on the Mentors

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Description of the Problem

This presentation will highlight the various ways in which peer mentoring impacts peer mentors involved in a large-scale STEM education grant designed to enhance the involvement of underrepresented minorities in STEM majors and careers. During the past three years, mentors who have participated in the project have responded to a simple, anonymous survey that was sent to mentors when they left the program. Also, mentors were involved in an annual conference at Queens College in which their work as mentors was highlighted and in which they presented findings from their own mentoring experiences. This poster will highlight the results of the mentor exit survey. It will provide those involved with peer mentors a better understanding of the ways in which mentoring others also pays dividend for the mentors themselves.

Literature Review

Such bidirectional impacts are noted in the developmental literature for decades. For example, Bell (1968) explored how the child-rearing socialization process impacted not only children, but parents as well. Bell's seminal work highlighted the interactive or transactional nature of the parent-child relationship in which both actors participate and, as such, both influence and are influenced, in turn, by one another. Developmental research has continued to explore this bidirectional influence (Brinke, Dekovic, Stoltz, & Cillessen, 2016; Shaffer, Lindhiem, Kolko, & Trentacosta, 2013) and even expanded on the number and complexity of intersecting elements in transactional models of development highlighted in the work of Sroufe (2005) and Sameroff (2009). Then, too, recent work by Nava and her associates (2019) highlighted the impact of the mentoring process on the mentors.

Content Review

The current work was part of a large-scale Department of Education funded project designed to graduate more Hispanic and low-income students with Baccalaureate degrees by expanding access and providing support services to students at a two-year and a four-year college through course redesign, peer-led instruction and mentoring, and a strategic framework of cross-campus articulations. In this project peer mentors supported faculty in their labs and lectures in introductory STEM courses in Biology and Chemistry. In addition, mentors worked with students outside of class during "office hours" and/or at review sessions assisting them develop better study strategies, creating learning communities or collectives, and providing general assistance navigating students' academic needs.

We assessed the impact of our mentor program on mentors with an exit survey asking mentors about their experiences in the program and how it had impacted them and their future goals. The anonymous exit survey was administered to mentors when they graduated or left the mentor program for various personal reasons. We documented the demographic characteristics of mentors at a two-year and four-year institution along with a preliminary exploration of the impact of the mentoring experience on mentors' self-perspectives and occupational goals.

The ways mentors self-reported the mentoring experience had an impact on them and their future plans. Mentors' responses to the question, "Has your involvement in peer mentoring had an impact on you and/or your career goals?" provided the most consistent response by mentors. All twenty (20) mentors responded to this question in the affirmative and then went on to specify various individual impacts.

For example, 60% of former mentors indicated having been a mentor had increased their interest in teaching or mentoring others in the future. This was evident by implication in some mentors' responses such as the mentor who indicated that mentoring had offered her a "glimpse of how it is in academia...a field in which I would love to go..." or another who stated, "It has changed my end goal...Now I think that later on after I work in healthcare, I will try to transition into academia."

For others, there was a more direct link between their experience as mentors and their teaching goals. As one mentor indicated, "It has definitely increased my passion to teach one day and help students achieve their academic goals." Another who indicated, "Peer mentoring has helped me solidify my decision to go into education by giving experience aiding student learning," or "It made me think about what I want to do, and now I am planning to teach in the future..."

Conclusion

The findings support suggestive research from other developmental research indicating that the very experience of socializing others, or in this case, mentoring one's peers, bestows multiple benefits on those assigned the mentoring or socializing role. More importantly, the findings also suggest that these benefits accrue to URM students engaged in mentoring thus providing them with skills and personal motivations to continue working in STEM-related fields.

References

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